

## EFFECT OF EXPECTING TO BE LIKED ON CHOICE OF ASSOCIATES<sup>1</sup>

ELAINE WALSTER AND BILL WALSTER

*University of Minnesota*

This study investigated one of the factors which the authors felt influenced the strong tendency of people to choose to associate with others they perceive as similar to themselves, the fear of being disliked by dissimilar strangers. As predicted, it was found that if Ss felt it was important to talk with people who would like them, they more often chose to interact with similar than dissimilar people. A 2nd group of students, assured that all members of all groups would be told they were "not likable" and thus presumably concerned about making others like them, were also more anxious than control Ss to talk with similar people. If Ss were assured that all members of all groups would be told they were "likable" Ss were much more willing to associate with dissimilar groups of people than with similar ones.

Many psychological studies are available to support the contention that people tend to be similar in many ways to those with whom they associate. Two factors seem to cause the often demonstrated association of "birds of a feather": People are influenced by the attitudes of those around them, and so *become* like their associates, and people *choose* to associate with those who are similar to themselves. It is this second factor with which we are concerned.

Newcomb (1961) found in his Michigan housing study, that very high preacquaintance agreement on a number of attitude items was related to high postacquaintance attraction. Precker (1952) found a similar correlation between similarity of values and attraction. In "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes," Festinger (1955) proposes that interaction with very dissimilar persons "does not help one to accurately evaluate his own ability and opinions by comparison with the other." Thus, it follows that "a person will be less attracted to situations where others are very divergent from him, than to situations where others are close to him for both abilities and opinions."

Although people undoubtedly do have many very good reasons for avoiding dissimilar people, they also probably have some very strong inclinations to seek such people out: Dissimilar people can provide new information, they may be unpredictable and thus exciting, and on occasion, one could expect to get even *more* accurate information about his own abilities and

opinions from "experts" than from slightly superior peers.

Thus, it seemed to the authors that dissimilar others might be more often chosen for associates than studies commonly show them to be, if one additional factor was not further restraining the subjects from associating with dissimilar strangers: namely, fear that they will not like him. When people are very different from oneself, their social standards are unclear; one is more likely to be afraid that his behavior will be "unacceptable" if he is not quite sure how he is expected to behave. Proust (1928) expressed such a fear that "boors and bounders," unaware of society's rules, would underrate *his* social value. It is probably more usual for one to be afraid of being rejected by those superior to himself.

Thus, the authors propose that if subjects were confident that all strangers would certainly perceive that they were "likable," they would be much more willing to interact with dissimilar individuals than usual. When it is especially important to be liked, or when subjects are afraid others might not like them, we would expect them to "play it safe" and be more anxious to associate with similar individuals than usual.

### PROCEDURE

Subjects were 160 men and women enrolled in introductory psychology at Stanford. During the first meeting of the small recitation sections, the experimenter announced to the subjects that they had all been assigned to participate in a dream discussion group set up to get more information and ideas about why people dream. The experimenter said arrangements had already been made for members of several clubs and organizations in the area to meet

<sup>1</sup> This investigation was carried out during the tenure of a Predoctoral Fellowship from the National Institute of Mental Health, United States Public Health Service.

as a group, and to discuss what seemed to prompt their own dreams and the general functions dreaming might serve. The subject was told he would be the only outside member in one of these groups.

Booklets containing additional information were then handed out. Subjects were asked to read the instructions and fill out the questionnaires without consulting those sitting near them. The front page of the booklets was identical and merely restated the above information. Four different versions of page 2, each containing different instructions, had been prepared and alternately inserted in booklets, however. The information, or version of page 2 the subject received, randomly placed him in one of four conditions: control subjects, subjects instructed to participate in a discussion group whose members would like them, subjects assured that members of all discussion groups would *like* them, and subjects assured that members of all discussion groups would *dislike* them.

The instructions utilized in placing subjects in the four conditions are as follows: The version Control subjects received merely stated that five kinds of groups had been scheduled for discussion sessions: graduate students in psychology (A), a group of students who finished Psychology 1 last quarter—strangers to the subjects—(B), married students from the night school classes of Cass Technical High School (C), researchers from the Veterans Administration, connected in various ways with dream research (D), and a group of factory workers (E). (We obviously expect Psychology 1 students to perceive Group B as most similar to themselves in interests, attitudes, and abilities.)

In the remaining experimental groups, an additional paragraph was inserted *before* the control information: In that version designed to increase subjects' desire to participate in a group they felt could be made to like them (Concerned condition), the paragraph stated that it was especially important for students to consider how the members of each of the five groups would feel about them personally, since it was best to choose a group that would respond to them in a friendly way.

The purpose of this condition was merely to see if subjects would overchoose similar people when in effect asked to guess which group would like them best. This Concerned group obviously cannot provide direct evidence as to whether or not the fear of being disliked causes subjects spontaneously to avoid dissimilar individuals.

In the version intended to assure subjects that they would be *liked*, subjects were told in the introductory paragraph, that they would be introduced to any group in which they participated in the following manner:

For various reasons [insert your name] is undoubtedly the kind of person you will like *extremely* much, even on such a brief acquaintance.

Subjects were told that the reason for this introduction was to make the other group members relaxed and confident about talking to them. It was explained that when people know that a stranger is

someone they would especially like and trust, they often say things they would be hesitant to reveal to someone they did not like so well.

In the version assuring subjects they would be *disliked*, subjects were told they would be introduced by:

For various reasons ——— is probably *not* the kind of a person you will like on such a brief acquaintance; even so, this is a good chance to gain an understanding of the kind of person you wouldn't usually choose for a friend.

Once again, subjects were told that the purpose of this introduction was to make other group members relaxed and confident about talking to them. It was explained that when people are very concerned about impressing a stranger that they like, they are afraid to say things that might make the person disapprove of them. As long as the subject was a stranger that they disliked, they would feel freer about expressing their true feelings.

The final pages of all booklets were identical. All subjects were informed that the experimenters would try to assign them to whichever of the discussion groups they preferred, and were asked to indicate the group in which they would most like to participate.

A final question asked subjects to indicate which group they thought would be made up of people most like themselves.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A check was made on the validity of our assumption that Psychology 1 students would perceive last quarters' Psychology 1 students (Group B) as very similar to themselves. Eighty-seven percent of the subjects indicated that Group B was "made up of people most like themselves." (Only 7% identified more closely with another group; 6% did not answer that question.)

Our main interest was naturally in discovering how many people in each condition preferred to interact with people dissimilar to themselves. As was predicted, those students who were especially anxious to be in a group they felt would like them, chose to interact with last year's Psychology 1 students more often than did control subjects (see Table 1). Also as predicted, those subjects who were assured that everyone else would be told they were "extremely likable" more often were willing to interact with people *unlike* themselves, than were control subjects. The number of subjects preferring to interact with people similar to themselves diminishes significantly from the Concerned About Being Liked to the Control, and from the Control to the Assured of Being Liked condition ( $\chi^2 = 10.04$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

It will be recalled that one-quarter of our subjects were assured that all groups would

TABLE 1  
NUMBER OF SUBJECTS CHOOSING TO PARTICIPATE  
IN SIMILAR OR DISSIMILAR GROUPS

Condition	Prefer similar group	Prefer dissimilar group
Concerned About Being Liked	22	18
Assured of Being Disliked	17	23
Control	15	26
Assured of Being Liked	8	31

dislike them. Two possible reactions by subjects in this condition had seemed plausible to the authors:

1. Subjects could in fact accept the instructions and assume that regardless of their behavior, members of all groups should and probably would dislike them. If this were the most common expectation of subjects, we would expect Assured of Being Disliked subjects to be more willing to associate with dissimilar groups than Control subjects. The fact that similar people can be more easily made to like one should be a less important determinant of choice if one is prohibited from making others like him.

2. It seemed much more plausible, however, that subjects would be unable to accept the idea that

their associates would dislike them—even if this dislike was desired by “science.” The authors expected that subjects would have hopes of overcoming their bad “first impression,” and we thus expected them to be much less willing to interact with dissimilar groups than either Control or Assured of Being Liked subjects. This second reaction is closest to what we secured (see Table 1). In frequency of their preferences for being with similar people, subjects in the Assured of Being Disliked condition are intermediate between the Concerned and the Control subjects, and certainly choose to be with similar people significantly more often than do those subjects who were Assured of Being Liked ( $\chi^2 = 4.4$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

#### REFERENCES

- FESTINGER, L. A theory of social comparison processes. In A. P. Hare, E. F. Borgatta, & R. F. Bales (Eds.), *Small groups*. New York: Knopf, 1955. Pp. 163–187.
- NEWCOMB, T. M. *The acquaintance process*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1961.
- PRECKER, J. A. Similarity of valuations as a factor in selection of peers and near-authority figures. *J. abnorm. soc. Psychol.*, 1952, 47, 406–414.
- PROUST, M. *Swann's way*. New York: Modern Library, 1928.

(Received June 25, 1962)

*Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*  
1963, Vol. 67, No. 4, 404–408

### PERSONALITY PROFILE SIMILARITY AS A FUNCTION OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP<sup>1</sup>

CARROLL E. IZARD

*Vanderbilt University*

Students in 3 universities were compared in an investigation of the question as to whether personality similarity between Ss paired at random would increase as the homogeneity of the group from which they were drawn increased. Homogeneity was defined in terms of race, sex, social class, and field of study. The results failed to confirm the expectation but they furnished convincing evidence of the existence of a low, positive, and significant average profile similarity among Ss paired at random. Regardless of its source, this phenomenon of interperson profile similarity should be taken into account in future studies utilizing personality similarity as a variable.

Two recent studies (Izard, 1960a, 1960b) have shown that actual personality similarity is a

<sup>1</sup> This study was supported by Vanderbilt-ONR Contract Nonr 2149(03), C. E. Izard, principal investigator. The opinions and conclusions do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of the Navy. The computing on this project was partially supported by a National Science Foundation grant, NSF-G1008.

significant factor in interpersonal attraction. The work of Newcomb (1956), Fiedler (1958), and Morton (1959) emphasized the importance of perceived or actual similarity as a meaningful behavioral variable. However, these studies have contributed little to our knowledge of the determinants of personality similarity. The aim of the present study was to investigate what might