
When similars do not attract: Tests of a prediction from the self-expansion model

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Abstract

This study tested the hypothesis from the self-expansion model that the usual effect of greater attraction to a similar (vs. dissimilar) stranger will be reduced or reversed when a person is given information that a relationship would be likely to develop (i.e., that they would be very likely to get along) with the other person. The study employed the “bogus stranger” paradigm and focused on similarity/dissimilarity of interests in the context of attraction to a same-gender other. The effect for similarity under conditions in which no information is given about relationship likelihood replicated the usual pattern of greater attraction to similars. However, as predicted, a significant similarity by information interaction demonstrated that this effect was significantly reduced (and slightly reversed) when participants had been given information that the partner will like self. In analyses for each gender separately, both of these effects were significant only for men, suggesting that the focus on interest similarity may have been less relevant for women.

The idea that “birds of a feather flock together” has been well documented in relationship research. Support for the principle that similars attract goes back at least to the pioneering field study of Newcomb (1961) and the extensive experiments of Byrne (1971) and his colleagues. For example, in Byrne’s elegant “bogus stranger” paradigm, participants complete an attitude questionnaire, are later presented with the supposed responses of someone else that are systematically constructed to be of various degrees of similarity to the participant’s, and then indicate liking for this person. Over many studies, Byrne found a strong linear relation between degree of similarity and liking. Indeed, tests of the idea that “opposites attract” have generally been unsuccessful, and the similarity-attraction effect is now well established (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Byrne, 1997).

Further, there are strong, plausible theoretical explanations for the effect. One line of thinking, championed by Byrne (1971), focuses on reinforcement principles—it is rewarding in a variety of ways to be with someone who agrees with you and punishing to be with someone who disagrees with you. Another line of thinking, originally put forth by Newcomb (1961), focuses on cognitive balance among the person, the attitude object, and the other person, with later related work emphasizing cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), such that it is dissonant to dislike someone who agrees with you. There have been some qualifications to the similarity-attraction effect. For example, in some contexts it may be more of a dissimilarity-repulsion effect (Rosenbaum, 1986) and similarity may be of only modest importance in real-life friendship formation when other variables are free to vary (e.g., Aron, Dutton, Aron, & Iverson, 1989; Sprecher, 1998). Still, the overall consensus is that the similarity effect is one of the most well-established findings in the study of interpersonal attraction (Berscheid & Reis, 1998).

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At the same time, over the past decade a body of support has developed for a theoretical perspective that seems to suggest conditions in which similarity may be less relevant or even undermine attraction. This perspective is the self-expansion model of motivation and cognition in close relationships (e.g., Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron, & Norman, 2001). The self-expansion model posits a fundamental motivation to expand potential efficacy (the resources, perspectives, and identities available to help achieve one's goals). The model further posits that one way people seek such expansion is by forming and maintaining close relationships, because in a close relationship the other's resources, perspectives, and identities become to some extent one's own. For example, studies have shown that after "falling in love" there is a literal expansion in the domains included in spontaneous self-descriptions (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995), and looking at images of one's beloved elicits activation in central reward systems of the brain (Aron et al., 2005); other studies show that experiencing self-expansion in an ongoing relationship causes increased relationship quality (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000; Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993). There are also several cognitive and neuroimaging studies directly supporting the claim that in close relationships the other is "included in the self" in the sense that there are substantial shared elements in representations of self and close others (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Aron & Fraley, 1999; Aron, Whitfield, & Lichty, in press; Lichty et al., 2003; Mashek, Aron, & Boncimino, 2003; Smith, Coats, & Walling, 1999).

One implication of the self-expansion model is that people should be attracted to those perceived to offer maximum possibilities for expanding the self. On the face of it, this would seem to suggest that people would be most attracted to others who are most *dissimilar*. This is because including a similar other in the self would seem to add much less to the self than including a dissimilar other (providing the differences were not disadvantages such as sickness or weakness of some kind).

However, the situation is not so simple. In particular, Aron and Aron (1986) argue that

the self-expansion model also proposes a positive effect of similarity on attraction under the typical conditions of friendship formation in Western cultures (and particularly in the North American college student situation that has been so widely studied). This is because when faced with uncertainty about the possibility of forming a new relationship with a particular person, perceived similarity serves as an indicator of the perceived potential for such a relationship to develop in the first place and to be successful over time. (That is, it seems easier to form and maintain a relationship with someone who is similar for exactly the kinds of reasons Byrne and others have proposed regarding expected rewards and balance.) Every individual is at least slightly different, at the very least having a different body with its own perceptual and motor apparatus for interacting with the world, so that an alliance with almost anyone can substantially expand the self. And, just doubling one's existing resources is beneficial. Thus, under the usual conditions of uncertainty about whether a relationship will develop, the self-expansion model predicts an attraction to similars because the perceived possibility of developing a relationship, and thus expanding the self, is greater with similars than with dissimilars.

Nevertheless, the self-expansion model also predicts that quite different processes are able also to come into play when people are relatively confident that a relationship could develop. Under these conditions, dissimilarity can also be attractive. This is because when a relationship is likely, the individual is freed up to some extent to consider how much expansion a relationship with the person would offer. Of course, in any real-life situation, there is likely to remain some uncertainty about the probability of a relationship forming (and uncertainty about its potential for long-term success). Thus, even when a relationship is likely, the benefits of similarity would still be relevant. Relationship likelihood should reduce the similarity effect but might not always be sufficient to reverse it.

There is some preliminary evidence that when people believe that a relationship is likely, similarity becomes less important in predicting attraction. In one classic study,

Aronson and Worchel (1966) found that the usual similarity effect in the Byrne-type situation was eliminated when participants were led to believe that the other liked them. That is, we are suggesting that the effect was eliminated because believing they were liked increased the chances of forming a relationship so that similarity provided little, if any, additional reason to expect that a relationship would be possible. Consistent with this view, Jones, Bell, and Aronson (1972) interpreted their complicated results as showing that participants like an attitudinally *dissimilar* other who likes the self over a similar other who likes the self, though these results held only for participants who were highly involved in the study and only when the measure was an emotional one. There is also some evidence in nonattitudinal similarity domains for the self-expansion hypothesis that expectation of a relationship moderates the similarity-attraction effect. Izard (1963) found that personality similarity was more important as a condition for friendship among first-year college students than among college seniors. Izard proposed that the reason for this result was the seniors' increased maturity—which presumably includes greater confidence in their ability to form and maintain relationships. Likewise, Goldstein and Rosenfeld (1969) found similarity to be less important for individuals who were assessed as low on “fear of rejection” or who scored low on “need for approval” on a standard personality test. Finally, Nahemow and Lawton (1975) studied friendship patterns among 270 mainly elderly residents of a New York City housing project. They found that the more the opportunity for forming a relationship via more frequent interactions (due to close proximity in the housing project), the more likely that a person's closest friends in the housing project were of a different age and race.

Similarity and Dissimilarity of Interests

In examining the extent to which the similarity-attraction effect may be moderated by expectation of reciprocal liking, we focused on similarity of interests. Most previous research has emphasized attitudinal similarity. However, it seems likely that the hypothesized

model would be especially difficult to observe in the attitude context. First, there may be particularly strong effects of attitude similarity because it confers confidence in one's view of the world, and dissimilarity raises the possibility of conflict with the potential partner. Moreover, differences in attitudes would seem to offer minimal expansion opportunities. (Such differences do offer the opportunity to see the world differently, but for many salient attitudes, people may already feel they have considered the alternatives and rejected them.) Nor does personality similarity/dissimilarity seem an optimal context to test the present notions since basic similarity-attraction effects in personality have not been strong or consistent to begin with (Klohn & Mendelsohn, 1998).

In contrast to attitudes or personality, interests are a domain in which including a potential partner who is different from the self might be experienced as especially valuable for expanding the self. A person with different interests offers the potential for the self to explore new possibilities and to be a guide to the other's new exploration of one's own interests; such a person might also create opportunities for shared novelty and challenge in the process. We should emphasize, however, that our current focus is on *different* interests, and not *conflicting* interests. If one believed that a potential partner actively disliked or was clearly disinterested in one's own interests, the implications would be for a potential obstacle to self-expansion through the relationship, thus undermining attraction. (See also Surra & Longstreth, 1990, for a discussion and supporting findings regarding the similar implications of interdependence theory for differences in activity preference in ongoing relationships.)

The focus on interests in the context of attraction is also of importance in its own right because perceived similarity or dissimilarity in this domain would seem to bear very directly on one's projections for the quality of relational life with the potential partner. (The effects of similarity of attitudes or personality would seem less obviously relevant to projected day-to-day interactions.) Yet, we are aware of no previous research that has focused explicitly on similarity of interests in initial

attraction. A few studies have examined similarity of activity or pastime preferences in initial attraction (Jamieson, Lydon, & Zanna, 1987; Lydon, Jamieson, & Zanna, 1988; Werner & Parmelee, 1979), which would seem highly related. These studies, all of which were done using the normal conditions of uncertainty of whether a relationship would develop, reported robust effects of similarity on attraction. As noted, it seems quite plausible that similarity/dissimilarity of interests may play a different (and possibly greater) role as a relationship develops because similarity/dissimilarity of interests would directly impact relationship life.

The Present Experiment

The present experiment was designed to provide an initial, direct experimental test of the hypothesis, based on the self-expansion model, that the effect of similarity on initial attraction is moderated by the expectation that a relationship is likely. Specifically, we tested whether when there is no special expectation that a relationship is likely, attraction will be greater to a person who is similar to the self (as has been found in most studies to date), but that when people believe that a relationship with the other is likely, the effect of similarity will be reduced or reversed. Although some previous work, summarized briefly above, provides preliminary support to this hypothesis, there are no studies to date, of which we are aware, that tested it directly.

The basic design employed a modified version of the Byrne's bogus stranger paradigm in which we manipulated both expectation that a relationship is likely and similarity of interests regarding a same-gender other, and then measured liking for this other.

Method

Participants

Seventy-seven undergraduate psychology students at the State University of New York at Stony Brook who volunteered (for extra course credit) to take part in the study at the end of regular class sessions completed both phases

of the experiment (i.e., both phases were completed at the end of a regular class session). There were 57 women and 20 men; ages ranged from 18 to 35 years ($M = 21.8$).¹

Procedure

In the first phase of the experiment, participants completed a 43-item personality test and then were asked to "list at least five of your main interests." In the second phase, a week later, the same participants were each given an individually prepared questionnaire packet supposedly about "someone (of your sex) from another class."

A randomly assigned half of the participants (relationship likelihood—high condition) were told that we used a "computer program" that "has been tested repeatedly and has proven to rate highly in both reliability and validity." It was then explained that "After entering the data from your questionnaire and from your classmates' questionnaires, the computer program generated a list of students (of your sex) with whom you would be most likely to get along." Next, they were told that the "person whose interests are described below is the person who was in position on your list," and we filled in "1" by hand in the blank. Finally, we added that "This means that"—followed by three options to be checked. For all the participants in this condition, what was checked (by hand) was the phrase, "you are most likely to get along with this person."

1. A total of 86 participants actually completed the experiment. However, prior to analysis we omitted five participants who were over 35 years (ages from 37 to 46 years) because we felt that their ratings of an anonymous student in another psychology class might be affected by such a student being likely to be too young to be an appropriate friend. We also eliminated four individuals whose scores were outliers on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS) (mean of 3 or below on the 9-point scale), so that this key variable was then approximately normally distributed in our sample. As would be expected from the nonnormal distributions, analyses including the outliers yielded effects only slightly weaker than those reported here. Most important, the key significant Relationship Likelihood \times Similarity interaction for men was completely unaffected by dropping the outliers because all outliers happened to be women.

In contrast, the other half of the participants (relationship likelihood uncertain condition) were told, regarding the same-gender person from another class, that “We did not use any of the personal information about you gathered from last week’s questionnaire to match you up with a partner. You have been paired with this particular person by a completely random process ...”.

For half the participants in each relationship likelihood condition, the interests listed were all similar to their own; for the other half, the interests listed were all dissimilar. The interests listed were ones that were similar or dissimilar based on two preliminary studies with samples of psychology students from the same university. (These samples did not overlap with each other and did not include any of the participants in the present study.) In the first preliminary study, 49 participants were asked to simply list five or more of their interests. Following procedures used by Fehr (1988) for prototype analyses, we reduced the approximately 300 interest terms listed to 30 interest terms that were mentioned by at least three participants. In the second pretest study, a new sample of 32 participants completed similarity matrices constructed from the 30 interest terms, which were then analyzed to produce an overall average matrix. Thus, the interests of the target other in the similar inter-

est condition were not identical to the participant’s own but consisted of interests each of which were normatively highly similar to their own (e.g., if the participant listed “art,” the corresponding interest for the supposed other was “music”). Those in the dissimilar condition consisted of interests that were normatively highly dissimilar (e.g., “art” and “sports”).

Finally, participants were asked, “Try to think about what this person is probably like. Then answer the following questions in regards to this person.” The questions were from Byrne’s (1971) Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS), the two key items of which are “How much do you think you would like this person?” and “How much do you think you would like to work together in an experiment with this person?” The IJS is rated on a 9-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*). (The other questions in the IJS are fillers designed to make it seem that the scale is a person assessment and not a measure of attraction.) Alpha for the 2-item scale in this study is equal to .77.

Results

Means and standard deviations by gender and condition are shown in Table 1. We tested our hypotheses in the context of an overall 2 (relationship likelihood) \times 2 (similarity/dissimilarity) \times 2

Table 1. Average Interpersonal Judgment Scale (*liking measure*) by conditions and gender

	Relationship likelihood uncertain		Relationship likely	
	Similar other	Dissimilar other	Similar other	Dissimilar other
All participants				
<i>M</i>	6.50	5.68	6.23	6.29
<i>SD</i>	1.32	1.35	1.28	0.87
<i>N</i>	17.00	19.00	20.00	21.00
Women				
<i>M</i>	6.25	5.86	6.43	6.24
<i>SD</i>	1.29	1.38	1.38	0.85
<i>N</i>	12.00	14.00	14.00	17.00
Men				
<i>M</i>	7.10	5.20	5.75	6.50
<i>SD</i>	1.34	1.25	0.94	1.08
<i>N</i>	5.00	5.00	6.00	4.00

Note. Possible scores on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale range from 1 to 9, with high scores indicating greater liking.

(gender) between-subject analysis of variance. Consistent with previous results, and supporting the overall validity of the study methods, in the relationship likelihood uncertain condition there was greater attraction to similars ($M = 7.10$) than dissimilars ($M = 5.20$; planned contrast $t = 1.84, p < .05$). However, as predicted, this effect was significantly reduced (and slightly reversed) in the relationship likely condition. That is, there was an overall two-way interaction between relationship likelihood and similarity/dissimilarity, $F(1, 69) = 5.04, p = .03$, effect size = 0.26. Specifically, when participants were told a relationship was likely, mean liking was 5.76 for similars but 6.50 for dissimilars.

At the same time, the basic findings were marginally qualified by a near-significant three-way interaction with gender, $F(1, 69) = 3.73, p = .06$, effect size = .23. (No other effects were significant or near significant in the overall $2 \times 2 \times 2$ analysis.) Follow-up simple effects analyses for each gender separately showed that the Relationship Likelihood \times Similarity/Dissimilarity interaction effect was clearly significant for men, $F(1, 16) = 6.44, p = .02$, effect size = 0.48. For women, the effect was not significant, $F < 1$. Similarly, in the within-gender simple effect analyses for each information condition separately, the result for men replicated the overall pattern. That is, in the relationship likelihood uncertain condition, there was a significant effect for similarity ($M_{\text{Similar}} = 7.10$; $M_{\text{Dissimilar}} = 5.20$; $t = 2.60, p < .05$), but when the men were told the relationship was likely, this effect was reduced (and nonsignificantly reversed); $M_{\text{Similar}} = 5.75$; $M_{\text{Dissimilar}} = 6.50$; $t = 1.01$, ns). For women, none of the effects approached significance. A small-sample pilot study ($N = 20$) with less rigorous procedures also found significant effects for men in the expected direction, lending additional support for the effect for them, but that study found significant opposite effects for women, further suggesting that at the least the effect is weak or inconsistent for women.²

Discussion

Men who were led to believe that a relationship with a same-gender fellow student was likely if they chose to form one, as compared to men who did not expect a relationship was likely, no longer preferred a target person who had similar interests to their own. Under these conditions, there was even some suggestion of a complete reversal in which a dissimilar other was preferred. This result provides the first direct support for this pattern predicted by the self-expansion model of motivation and cognition in close relationships (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron et al., 2001). This result is also one of the first direct demonstrations of a situation in which differentness does not undermine attraction.

At the same time, consistent with the well-established similarity-attraction effect (e.g., Byrne, 1971), when participants had no special information about the likelihood of being able to develop a relationship with the target person, they showed greater attraction when the target person had similar versus dissimilar interests to their own. This latter finding is important in showing that our adaptation of the basic Byrne paradigm does produce the usual similarity effect under standard conditions of no information about likelihood of a relationship. This in turn supports the interpretation of the important *new* pattern found in the relationship likely condition as not being due to some unusual aspect of our procedures.

Nevertheless, we did not find the predicted results for women when considered separately (and in a small-sample pilot experiment, the results for women were actually reversed). At the same time, women also did not show the standard pattern of results of greater attraction to similars in the no-information about relationship likelihood condition. This suggests that our adaptation of the basic Byrne paradigm was probably not effective for women. The main difference between our methods and the standard paradigm is that our focus was on similarity of interests (as opposed to similarity of attitudes or personality).

In general, North American women's friendships are more personal and focus more on self-disclosure than do men's, and men's

2. Additional details of this pilot study are available from the authors.

friendships are more activity oriented than women's (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Fehr, 1996; Reis, 1998). (Surra and Longstreth [1990] also found a complex pattern of gender differences in the context of the role of similarity of activity preferences in predicting relationship quality variables in dating couples, with those closer to what we are calling interests seemingly more relevant for men. Sprecher [1998] found that in the context of retrospective ratings of importance of various factors in initial liking for same-gender friends, similarity of interests and leisure activities were rated higher by men than by women.) Thus, it may be that the manipulation of similarity of interests was much less relevant for women's attraction than it was for men. For example, perhaps women's friendship attractions are based more on similarity or dissimilarity of experiences than that of interests. In any case, the failure to find the usual similarity-attraction effect for women under standard conditions suggests that the failure to support the overall self-expansion hypothesis for women probably does not bear one way or the other on the validity of the hypothesis. That is, it seems most likely that the best explanation for the lack of consistent effects for women is that the procedure was not effective for them, so that the hypothesis simply was not adequately tested for women.

Returning to the effect for men, is it possible that the apparent support for the hypothesis is due to some artifact of the procedures? Perhaps, there was some kind of demand characteristics due to participants in the relationship likely condition in effect being told that they and the other person should like them. We think this is unlikely because there is no reason to expect such an effect to be different between similarity and dissimilarity conditions. If anything, expecting the other to like the self would seem to create a generally greater attraction in both similarity conditions (given the general findings in this area; Mettee & Aronson, 1974). (The possibility that there was a ceiling effect in the relationship likely condition also seems unlikely given that the means in that condition were both lower than those for the similarity/relationship uncertain condition.) Another potential artifact is that since the

interests listed for participants were not identical to their own, they may not have been perceived as similar. However, the similar interests would certainly have been more similar than those in the dissimilar condition. Further, if both conditions are considered to be simply dissimilarity, how can the interaction effect be explained?

Yet another potential concern about the results for men is the possibility that our expected liking manipulation was interpreted by our participants as indicating similarity. That is, perhaps participants assumed that the basis for our concluding that a relationship was likely with the target other was because we knew that the target other was similar to the self. However, if this interpretation was correct, and similarity increases liking, then men in the target-similar condition should have shown greater liking for the target other when a relationship was likely. Inspection of Figure 1 shows that there was no hint of such a pattern. (In fact, the raw means show the reverse of such a pattern, also undermining a concern that there may be a ceiling effect for similarity.) Yet another possibility is that men experienced greater reactance to being told a relationship was likely, and this undermined the overall similarity effect so that one might expect less difference between conditions. This possibility cannot be ruled out, but the tendency for a reversal is also hard to explain from this perspective. Also, if the men were experiencing reactance in the relationship likely condition, there should have been an overall main effect for men for relationship likelihood, but there was no indication whatsoever of such an effect (the F was near zero; $p = .96$).

Finally, there may be some concern about the small sample size for men ($n = 20$, approximately equally distributed across conditions). However, the small sample size should have worked *against* finding significant effects. The finding of significant effects with such a small sample suggests that the true population effect size for the hypothesized interaction effect is in fact quite substantial (as suggested by the large observed effect size). And of course, significance levels have the same meaning with small samples as with large: It

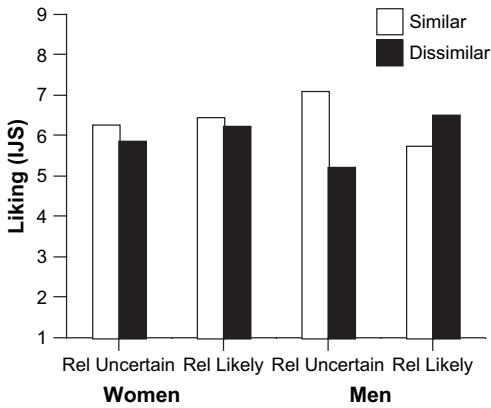


Figure 1. Liking for supposed student in another class measured on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS) for women and men who were either led to believe that a relationship with the target person was likely if they chose to form one or given no information about the likelihood of a relationship with this person. Participants in each relationship likelihood condition were also led to believe that the target person had interests that were either similar or different from their own. The overall three-way interaction approached statistical significance ($p = .06$); the two-way Relationship Likelihood \times Similarity/Dissimilarity interaction was in the predicted direction and significant overall and for males separately (both $p \leq .05$).

is highly improbable one would have obtained a difference as large as that observed if there were no true effect in the population. Moreover, the possibility that the results for men are due to some idiosyncrasy that was allowed to operate due to the relatively small sample size seems unlikely given that the same result for men was also found in a pilot study.

Presuming that the results for men cannot be explained away as due to artifacts or small sample size, they are directly consistent with the self-expansion model notion that people are most attracted to similars when the likelihood of developing a relationship is ambiguous but are able to also take into account more strongly an advantage for dissimilars when the likelihood of developing a relationship is high. This self-expansion model principle is that people want to expand their potential efficacy

and that one way they seek to do so is by forming relationships in which, to some extent, one includes in oneself (treats as one's own) the other's resources, perspectives, and identities. Because everyone, even the most similar person, has some resources, perspectives, or identities that the self does not have, and because even more of the same resources are beneficial, a relationship with almost anyone expands the self. Thus, under standard conditions in which relationships are not easy to come by, similarity should lead to attraction. (This is in addition to other factors that may promote similarity-attraction effects, such as it being more reinforcing to be with and more balanced and less dissonant to like a similar other.) However, according to the self-expansion model, when one is reasonably confident that a relationship is possible with a particular other, then dissimilarity can actually be a virtue. This is because a dissimilar other has more to offer the self in terms of self-expansion. In the present context in particular, where the focus is on similarity and dissimilarity of interests, a relationship with a person with different interests from one's own would seem to provide significant new opportunities for expanding the self.

We should emphasize that in the present study there were no measures of the self-expansion mechanism as a mediator of the observed effects. Thus, it is possible that some other mechanism actually accounts for these findings. One possibility might be that this is an example of gain-loss of self-esteem theory of Aronson and Linder (1965), in which people are more attracted to someone who initially dislikes them and then comes to like them. However, this interpretation seems unlikely because participants are first given the information about relationship likelihood and then told about interest similarity. Consider participants in the relationship likely and dissimilarity condition. If participants are interpreting relationship likelihood as the other liking the self and interest dissimilarity as a sign of other not liking the self, then gain-loss theory would predict the opposite results to what was found. It would predict that participants would be *less* attracted to the other in this condition (because they were initially liked and then disliked). Yet

another possibility is that dissimilarity of interests is beneficial because it undermines expectations of competition so that partners can expect to “reflect” each other’s successes (Tesser, 1988). Indeed, we think this is a plausible mechanism, but one that Aron and Aron (1986) have argued may be subsumed under self-expansion by conceptualizing reflection as a special case of including other in the self.

There may of course be other explanations for the findings besides the self-expansion model and, as noted, future research should include direct measures of the hypothesized mediating mechanisms. At the same time, we would emphasize that the interaction pattern found for men follows directly from the model, is not obviously predicted by other known attraction mechanisms, is rather complex (and thus not likely to be a chance pattern), and would seem to have been not very obvious a priori. Further, the self-expansion model has been successful in a variety of other contexts. Thus, we think that the most parsimonious initial interpretation of the present findings is that they provide support for the self-expansion model. Finally, even if future research identifies alternative mechanisms for this effect, this research will be the first to demonstrate this striking exception to what has seemed to be an almost universal similarity-attraction effect.

Some strengths of the present study are the experimental design directly testing theory and the basing of the design on a standard paradigm with a standard dependent variable. However, like any study, and particularly one that is the first test of a novel hypothesis, the study has several limitations that suggest that the present results be treated as preliminary pending future research. Foremost among these limitations, as noted earlier, are the ambiguity regarding the effects for women and the lack of direct measures of the hypothesized mechanisms. In addition, like most attraction research to date, generalizations should be done very cautiously outside the context of meetings between same-gender strangers among North American college students. There is also the usual issue of generalization from the abstract laboratory context to more real-life settings. These generalizability

limitations are of somewhat less concern from the point of view of testing the theoretical issues at stake, but they do apply strongly to any attempt to apply these findings directly in a real-life context.

Nevertheless, we believe that the present study represents a significant advance in our understanding of attraction processes, demonstrates support in a novel context for the self-expansion model, and, more generally, demonstrates for one of the first times a set of conditions in which there may even be an advantage to being dissimilar.

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