Attraction and helping*

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While previous findings and literature reviews have suggested that liked persons receive more help than do disliked persons, clear-cut support for the liking-helping relationship is scarce. In the present study, clear evidence is presented which links attraction and helping behavior.

In recent literature reviews, Krebs (1970) and Berkowitz (1972) have suggested that interpersonal attraction has served as a mediating variable in many studies regarding the influence of recipient characteristics on helping. Very few studies, however, have specifically examined the attraction-helping relationship, and the available findings are difficult to interpret unambiguously. For example, in a study by Daniels & Berkowitz (1963), partial support for the facilitative role on helping was found. The Ss worked hardest for a highly liked supervisor only when he (supervisor) was dependent on them. When the supervisor's dependence on the Ss was low, the Ss' productivity was uniformly low. Similarly, Epstein & Hornstein (1969) reported an interaction between interpersonal attraction and threat of penalty for helping behavior. The Ss who liked the other helped more frequently in an anticipated punishment condition than in the condition where no punishment was anticipated. In this study, the findings that Ss in the group in which there was no manipulation of liking indicated as much liking for the recipient as did Ss in the "liking" condition made it difficult to interpret the effects of attraction on helping.

In the present study, attraction toward a potential recipient of help was manipulated in a relatively standard way (Byrne, 1971), and both verbal and behavioral measures of helping were obtained. A positive relationship between helping behavior and interpersonal attraction was predicted.

METHOD

Subjects and Design

In a 2 (sex of S) by 3 (attitude similarity) factorial analysis of variance design, 24 male and 24 female introductory psychology students at Kansas State University, who had been pretested on a 24-item attitude questionnaire, participated in the experiment.

Procedures

In the experimental groups, S's attraction toward a potential recipient of help was manipulated by varying the degree of attitudinal similarity between Ss and recipients in the manner suggested by Byrne (1971). Briefly, Ss were exposed to the attitudes of a same-sex person which agreed with their own attitudes on .25 or .75 of the issues, or they were given no information about the other person (control group). The Ss were specifically told that the 24-item attitude scale was administered to undergraduate students who were currently working on research projects in the psychology department in order to learn something about their opinions and attitudes. After Ss in the experimental groups completed the interpersonal judgment scale of attraction, E explained that their task was completed and awarded their experimental credit.

Thereupon, E explained to S that the particular person whose attitudes he (she) had studied was a same-sex undergraduate and working on a research project entirely unrelated to this experiment. It was also explained that the other person was in need of help in completing the collating and stapling of questionnaires to be used in his (her) research. The E made it clear that S would not meet the other person and that the other person would not see S's evaluations of him. Each S then indicated on a questionnaire his willingness to help, positive or negative feelings about helping, and the amount of time he was willing to volunteer. Behavioral measure of actual time spent helping and number of questionnaires assembled were recorded.

In the control condition, no information was provided about the person. Upon arrival of each S, E explained that the equipment which was being used in the experiment was broken. However, E gave credit to the S for participation in the experiment. Thereafter, each S in the control group was given the opportunity to help the other person in the same manner as described above.

At the end of the experiment, a postexperimental questionnaire was used in each condition to assess Ss' perceptions of the situational and instructional demands in the experimental setting.

RESULTS

The attitude similarity manipulation was effective in creating differential attraction toward the potential recipient of help. The mean attraction responses in the .25 and .75 similarity conditions, respectively, were 5.50 and 11.06 (F = 98.49, df = 1/28, p < .001), with high numbers reflecting greater degrees of liking. Attraction responses were not assessed in the control condition.

In Table 1, the means of the dependent measures of helping across attraction conditions are shown. Regarding each of the verbal measures, it may be seen that Ss expressed more willingness to help, more positiveness of feelings regarding helping, and volunteered more time with respect to a liked than a disliked person, and expressed intermediate degrees of willingness to help, positiveness of feelings regarding helping, and volunteered time to help persons about whom no information was provided. With respect to the behavioral measures, Ss actually spent more time helping and assembled more questionnaires for liked than for disliked persons, and helped least under the no-information (control) condition.

It was also found that in all conditions Ss spent less time actually helping than for which they had volunteered. The discrepancy between number of

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Table 1
Means of Helping Variables as a Function of Attraction to Recipients

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			Disliked (.25 Agreement)	Liked (.75 Agreement)	Control (No Information)
Verbal Measures					
	(a)	Willingness*	4.06a	5.06b	4.25a
	(b)	Positiveness of feelings regarding helping†	3.69a	4.88b	4.31b
	(c)	Number of minutes volunteered	29.69a	47.19b	34.38bc
Behavioral Measures					
	(a)	Number of minutes spent helping	13.13a	44.38b	6.25a
	(b)	Number of questionnaires assembled	13.94a	47.63b	5.69a

*High scores reflect greater willingness; †high scores reflect positive feelings about helping. Note—Row cells having a subscript in common are not significantly different at the .05 level using Newman-Keuls.

minutes volunteered and number of minutes spent helping was significantly greater in the control condition than in the .25 similarity condition and least in the .75 similarity condition, with means of 28.13, 17.19, and 2.81, respectively (F = 9.02, df = 2/42, p < .01). This finding was also supported by the correlational relationships between the number of minutes volunteered and the number of minutes spent actually helping. There was a highly significant positive relationship in the .75 similarity condition (r = .90, p < .001), but nonsignificant relationships in the .25 similarity (r = .20, n.s.) and control (r = −.38, n.s.) conditions. The verbal and behavioral commitments to help were more consistent in the high attraction than in the low attraction and control conditions.

Males and females did not differ significantly on verbal measures of helping, liking, willingness to help (Fs < 1.00), positiveness of feelings regarding helping (F = 3.79, df = 1/42, p > .05), or number of minutes volunteered to help (F < 1.00). However, males and females differed significantly regarding the number of minutes spent helping, with means of 17.7 and 25.79, respectively (F = 4.18, df = 1/42, p < .05). Significantly more questionnaires were assembled by females than by males, with 26.46 as the mean for females and 18.38 as the mean for males (F = 4.49, df = 1/42, p < .05). The females and males did differ on verbal willingness to help the other person as a function of experimental conditions. Females reported greater verbal willingness than males to help in both similarity conditions but less willingness than males in the control (no information) condition (F = 4.69, df = 2/42, p < .05).

Attraction responses in the similarity conditions were significantly positively correlated (ps < .01) with each of the helping measures. In addition, analysis of the postexperimental questionnaire revealed that in none of the conditions did Ss perceive the overall experimental situation or E's instructions as demanding to help or not help the other person.

The findings of the present study unambiguously implicate interpersonal attraction as a facilitator of helping behavior. A positive relationship between liking and helping was obtained for both verbal and behavioral measures of helping. As suggested by Krebs (1970), it is quite likely that attraction is an important mediator of many obtained recipient characteristic helping relationships.

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