Being liked is more than having a good personality: The role of matching

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Is possession of desirable personality characteristics the only predictor that someone will be well-liked in a group of acquaintances, or does similarity to others in the group also matter? We tested participants ($n = 844$) who had been assigned to peer groups and had spent 6 weeks together. Participants assessed self and peer personalities. We found that after controlling for attributions of desirable and undesirable personality characteristics, individuals with similar personality patterns liked each other more than individuals with dissimilar patterns. Further analysis revealed similarity of basic demographic attributes (i.e., sex and race) predicted liking independent of personality similarity. Results provide a comprehensive analysis of relations between personality similarity and liking among acquaintances in a randomized, naturalistic design.

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1. Introduction

In every social network, individuals may find they connect with some colleagues and peers, but remain distant from others. Given opportunities to meet and interact with everyone, what determines who will be liked and who will not? At a fundamental level, people like others who they believe have desirable traits, and dislike others who they believe have undesirable traits (e.g., Thomas & Young, 1938). We refer to the commonsense relation between perception of positive and negative traits and liking or disliking others as the *fundamental principle of liking* (FPL): we like people who we think have positive traits, and dislike those who we think have negative traits.[1]

Over and above the FPL, there may be more subtle factors, such as similarity of personality, race, and sex, that contribute to liking and disliking among acquaintances. Researchers have investigated the role of personality similarity for over half a century, updating what was known about the magnitude of its influence (which appears to be small) as new theoretical frameworks (e.g., Social Relations Model) and research designs (e.g., longitudinal data) became available (Cooper & Sheldon, 2002; Kenny & Kashy, 1994). In addition, researchers have frequently observed preferences for same-race and same-sex friendships (e.g., Graham & Cohen, 1997; Kao & Joyner, 2004; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). The pres-

ent study is the first to investigate the role of similarity in liking while controlling for the FPL using a randomized, naturalistic design.

1.1. The fundamental principle of liking (FPL)

In previous studies, there was often no way to know if similarity between personality characteristics predicted liking independent of the positive and negative personality traits people attributed to each other (as noted by Clement and Krueger (1998); and see Horton (2003) who addresses a similar issue in studies of attractiveness), perhaps because peer attributions of personality are rarely collected (Vazire, 2006). For example, there might be two good-humored individuals who like each other simply because funny people are easy to like, not because of their similarity per se. Conversely, there might be two ill-humored individuals who dislike each other because of this undesirable quality; then any small benefits of similarity would be masked.

Confounding of matching with the FPL could explain some of the mixed results in studies of whether personality similarity influences liking (see Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007; Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1998; Lee et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2004; and Zentner, 2005 for evidence of mixed results). For example, in one study, undergraduate participants who scored particularly high or low on a depression inventory read about the personality of other classmates who had scored similarly or dissimilarly to them on the inventory. Results suggested that the positive effect of similarity on liking was significant for only nondepressed (i.e., low scoring) participants; depressed participants did not show a preference for other depressed participants (Rosenblatt & Greenberg, 1988). In later research, the actual interpersonal interactions between

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[1] A different but related idea is that of the halo effect, which says that liking someone can lead to believing the person possesses many desirable traits (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Note that the FPL refers to the reverse phenomenon—that thinking another person possesses desirable traits will lead to liking.

combinations of individuals with and without depression were explored. Researchers found that during a tape-recorded conversation about three suggested topics, individuals with depression did report less discomfort after interacting with other individuals with depression, but still there were no differences in ratings of general liking (Rosenblatt & Greenberg, 1991). We believe that exploring the similarity of personality characteristics after controlling for the FPL could explain the lack of significant results. The effect may have been masked by the tendency for raters, regardless of their own level of depression, to perceive nondepressed others as easier to like.

In the current study, we circumvent this complication by assessing personality similarity after controlling for desirable and undesirable traits peers attribute to each other (that is, by controlling for the FPL). We can thus ask the question: conditional on whether other people think individuals have desirable and undesirable traits, does similarity between raters and targets predict more liking? And if so, what kinds of similarity are important? We assess whether similarity in basic demographic characteristics and pattern of self-reported personality traits contribute to liking over and above the tendency for raters to like others to whom they attribute positive traits.

1.2. Defining personality similarity

When researchers investigate whether people with similar personalities like each other more, what exactly do they mean by similar personality? Researchers have typically defined similarity as either a difference between mean scores on self-reports of each personality dimension or, less commonly, as a high positive correlation between the personality patterns of two persons across many traits (Cronbach & Gleser, 1953; Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Recent research has found that personality similarity measured via correlations across traits plays a much stronger role in determining the relationship satisfaction of newlyweds than personality similarity measured via absolute mean differences (Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Thus, prior research that failed to find an effect of personality similarity (see Klohnen & Mendelsohn (1998) for a review) may have done so in part because it used a less consequential operationalization of similarity. Although Luo and Klohnen's study of romantic relationships suggests that similarity of personality profiles does in fact predict relationship satisfaction (and see Rammstedt & Schupp, 2008), romantic relationships are qualitatively different from other types of relationships; it is important to determine if findings with romantic couples will generalize to liking among acquaintances (Eastwick, Finkel, Mochon, & Ariely, 2007). To measure personality similarity in the current study, we compute correlations between the profiles of pairs of individuals, so that the magnitude of the correspondence between pairs of participants' personality traits is independent of the mean levels of either member of the pair (Furr, 2008; Luo & Klohnen, 2005).[2]

1.3. Random assignment and naturalistic design

Due to the nature of close relationships, many prior studies of personality similarity did not randomly assign participants to peer groups; instead, they assessed the similarity of already-established couples or friends and investigated whether their similarity predicted relationship satisfaction. In these naturalistic studies, it was always a possibility that people liked similar others merely because they were more likely to meet and spend time with them and not because of an active preference (Carli, Ganley, & Pierce-Otay, 1991). Other studies have attempted to address this issue by statistically controlling for background variables like age and education, but this method does not completely rule out the potential confounds (Feng & Baker, 1994; Watson et al., 2004). When random assignment was implemented, it was usually at the expense of external validity; participants often rated the qualities and likeability of hypothetical or fictional characters (e.g., Ajzen, 1974; Byrne, Griffitt, & Stefaniak, 1967; Stapel & Van der Zee, 2006). Thus, most studies were limited in that they had either random assignment with a contrived paradigm—using information about personality that people might not rely on in natural interactions—or a naturalistic design without random assignment.

The current study is one of only a few to use data from well-acquainted, randomly assigned individuals in a naturalistic setting to assess personality similarity and liking (see also Carli et al., 1991; Kurtz & Sherker, 2003; Selfhout, Denissen, Branje, & Meeus, in press) but the only one to use participants who were not college students. In one previous study (Carli et al., 1991), same-sex pairs of first-year college roommates rated their own personalities, using the California Personality Inventory, and reported satisfaction with the roommate relationship after living together for 6 months. Similarity of two personality dimensions predicted relationship satisfaction and whether the pair would live together the following year: *interpersonal adequacy* (e.g., leadership, poise, and general social skills) and, to a lesser extent, *character* (e.g., maturity, responsibility, and general reliability). Similarity of *achievement potential* (e.g., competitiveness) and *intellectual and interest modes* (e.g., flexibility and general interests) were less important.

In another study (Kurtz & Sherker, 2003), pairs of female college roommates rated their own personalities and reported how satisfied they were with their roommate relationships. Results suggested that similarity of conscientiousness, but no other big five personality trait, significantly predicted relationship quality after 15 weeks. Together, these studies suggest that the effect of matching on different traits likely depends on the context and the type of relationship. In late-adolescent relationships in a college setting, similarity of contentiousness and social skills might be particularly important because students are primarily concerned with studying and with expanding their social networks (Carli et al., 1991). We believe controlling for the FPL would be important here because it is possible these results were driven by pairs of conscientious or socially adept roommates liking each other more simply because those traits are desirable—and not necessarily because of similarity. In addition, exploration of associations between personality similarity and liking in relationships across different contexts would be beneficial.

We use data from a large sample of individuals enlisted in the United States Air Force, whom the military had randomly assigned to groups called "flights" (median flight size = 36.5) to complete 6 weeks of basic military training. Within each flight, members lived together, did challenging physical exercises together, and worked with each other on a variety of tasks and activities. Importantly, participants had relatively equal opportunity to meet and spend time with each group member, so associations between personality similarity and liking would not be due to mere proximity, but would suggest an active preference for similar others.

1.4. Hierarchical linear models

In addition to controlling for the FPL, this study assesses the relationship between personality similarity and liking using infor-

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[2] In addition to Pearson correlations, we conducted our analyses with two other types of profile personality similarity: covariances (see Furr (2008) for a discussion of covariance and correlation similarity) and r_{PA} (McCrae, 1993; McCrae, 2008). The r_{PA} coefficient accounts for similarity at the mean level in addition to similarity in the shapes of personality profiles. Correlations were moderately correlated with covariances, $r = .37$, $p < .0001$ and with r_{PA}, $r = .54$, $p < .0001$. All of our results remained significant and in the same directions regardless of which similarity index was used, so we just report results using correlations.

mation about how participants perceive themselves and each other (Kenny, 1994). Using hierarchical linear regression models, we account for non-independence in responses arising from raters and targets. Each rater and each target contributes multiple observations to the design, introducing dependence among errors arising from the same rater or target. We accounted for this dependence by estimating crossed random effects for rater and target (crossed as opposed to nested because each participant was both a target and a rater within each flight). Both target and rater were nested within flight (targets and raters only appeared in a single flight).

2. Overview of study

The current study extends previous literature on personality similarity and relationships in several ways. (1) we use random assignment and a naturalistic design with groups of acquaintances who were not college students; (2) we control for the FPL (i.e., the tendency to like people who are seen as having desirable personality traits); and (3) we explore personality similarity in conjunction with similarity of race and sex.

The major goal of the study is to determine whether similarity in personality patterns predicts peer liking after controlling for peer attributions of personality traits. Based on the findings from the college roommate and romantic couples literature, we predict that similarity of personality patterns and demographic characteristics will be positively related to liking.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Participants were Air Force recruits (median age 19) who were several days from completion of 6 weeks of basic military training. The sample was part of a larger study of self- and peer-report of personality and personality pathology (see Oltmanns & Turkheimer, 2006). Only the participants whose data were collected during the last year of the larger study could be included in this study because ratings of liking were collected only during the final year. Also, participants who missed more than 20 self-report items (1/5 of the total number of items), due to computer malfunction or extenuating circumstances, were excluded from analyses (3 women and 22 men). The final sample included 844 participants (292 women; 552 men).

The participants were enlisted personnel (i.e., not pilots), who were being trained for a wide variety of jobs (e.g., positions in security, cooking, or electronics). On the first day of basic training, the Air Force assigned participants to groups, known as "flights." For 6 weeks, members of a flight worked, lived, and ate meals together, and they had the opportunity to observe each other's behavior during many challenging situations. The median number of participants in each group, or "flight," was 36.5 (range = 27–54). There were 22 flights included in this study; 16 of the flights were mixed-sex (mean number of women per flight = 18.2 (47.2%), range = 36.4–66.6%) and six were all male. Participants were predominantly White (64.5%), followed by Black (16.1%), Other (11.4%), Biracial (4.2%), Asian (3.2%), and Native American (.7%). Because few participants reported being a race other than White or Black, for the purposes of analysis we combined participants who reported being Other, Biracial, Asian, and Native American into one category (henceforth referred to as "Other and Biracial"). The mean number of participants per flight split by race was 24.7 White, 6.2 Black, and 7.5 Other and Biracial.

3.2. Materials

3.2.1. Liking

Participants rated each member of the flight for how much they liked them on a scale of (0) *do not like at all* to (3) *like extremely well*.

3.2.2. Multi-source assessment of personality pathology (MAPP)

Oltmanns and Turkheimer (2006) developed the Multi-source Assessment of Personality Pathology (MAPP) which is composed of 103 items, including 79 items based on the features of 10 personality disorders listed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV, American Psychiatric Association., 1994) as well as 24 supplementary items based on additional personality traits (mostly positive characteristics, such as "trustworthy and reliable," "agreeable and cooperative," and "articulate and persuasive"). All of the 79 *DSM-IV* personality disorder features on the MAPP were rewritten into words that avoided the use of technical psychopathological terms and psychiatric jargon. The MAPP instrument was written in the third person for peer-report and translated into the second person for self-report. The MAPP has been shown to be reliable and to have validity with respect to measures of similar constructs (Oltmanns, Gleason, Klonsky, & Turkheimer, 2005; South, Oltmanns, & Turkheimer, 2003; Thomas, Turkheimer, & Oltmanns, 2003).

3.2.3. Overview of procedure

Participants signed informed consent statements and participated on a voluntary basis. All measures were presented on a computer monitor, one participant to a computer. Members of each flight were tested simultaneously, in a single 2-h session. The MAPP items were presented in a quasi-random order and were listed one at a time on the top of the computer screen. Participants rated how much they liked members of their group before completing the self- and peer-report MAPP.

3.2.4. Self-report procedure

Participants rated their own personality using the second-person translation of the MAPP on scales with the following numbers: (0) *never like this*, (1) *sometimes like this*, (2) *usually like this*, and (3) *always like this*.

3.2.5. Peer-nomination procedure

To obtain peer-reports of personality, the names of all members of the flight (excluding the name of the participant completing the MAPP) appeared below each MAPP item. The scale containing the numbers (0) *never like this*, (1) *sometimes like this*, (2) *usually like this*, and (3) *always like this* was listed to the right of each person's name, with the default selection being (0). Participants nominated from one to as many people in their group as they saw fit for each particular item by using the scale from 0 to 3 to indicate the extent to which those people exhibited the characteristic in question.

4. Results

4.1. Ratings of liking

There were 32,554 pair-wise ratings of liking ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 1.01$). 18.47% of the ratings were (0), 35.40% were (1), 26.31% were (2), and 19.83% were (3).

4.2. Classification of positive and negative traits in the operationalization of the FPL

To quantify the FPL, we identified items from the peer-report version of the MAPP that were positively and negatively related to liking. The 79 items corresponding to *DSM-IV* criteria for person-

ality disorder were initially classified as negative traits, and the 24 additional items were initially classified as positive traits. We then examined the relation between each item and liking using a mixed model in which liking was predicted from an individual item on the MAPP as a fixed effect, with random variability attributable to flights and to targets and raters within flights. Twenty of the 24 non-*DSM-IV* items were significantly positively associated with liking and were considered positive traits in subsequent analyses. Forty-six of the 79 *DSM-IV* items were significantly negatively associated with liking and were considered negative traits in subsequent analyses. Scores on the 86 positive and negative traits were calculated for each individual across all raters and constituted the FPL in the mixed model regressions.

4.3. Mixed model regressions

All of the regression analyses in the study were conducted with mixed model regression, using PROC MIXED in SAS. Mixed model regression controls for clustering of observations within samples. In the peer-nomination design of the current study, in which each target was rated by multiple raters and each rater rated multiple targets, observations arising from the same rater or pertaining to the same target were correlated with each other. For a rating of liking y_{ijk}, in which target i is rated by rater j, with both i and j in flight k, we estimated the equation:

$$y_{ijk} = \beta + \lambda_1 \mathrm{FPL}_{ij} + \lambda_2 \mathrm{S}_{ij} + \tau_i + \tau_j + \tau_k + \sigma_{ij}$$

in which λ_1 is the fixed effect of the FPL (i.e., the tendency for raters to like targets to whom they attribute positive traits and dislike targets to whom they attribute negative traits) of target i by rater j (or in other words, rather j_s impression of target i_s personality), and λ_2 is the fixed effect of the personality similarity between target i and rater j. The crossed random variances τ_i and τ_j are the effects of ratings by the same target and rater, respectively, nested within the effect of flights, τ_k. σ_{ij} is the residual error variance of liking ratings after the other effects have been accounted for.

For descriptive analyses (e.g., for means of liking for male and female targets) group means were calculated using the LSMEANS option in PROC MIXED. Standard errors estimated using this procedure correct for the correlated errors induced by the random effects in the model.

4.4. Personality similarity

We computed coefficients of similarity based on self-reports for each pair of rater and target using the MAPP. The personality similarity coefficient was computed as the correlation between the self-reports of the pair, computed across the items. We then estimated a series of random effects models, with liking as the dependent variable, predicted by peer attributions of positive and negative traits (representing the FPL) and the personality similarity coefficient. Random variances were estimated for the effects of raters, targets and flights (Kenny, 1994).

The personality similarity coefficients ranged from −.31 to .93, with a mean of .48 and standard deviation of .18. The positive mean of personality similarity shows that on average people are similar to each other because they share normative traits. Without controlling for the FPL, personality similarity between rater and target significantly predicted increased liking ($b = .55$, $se = .05$, $t = 12.03$, $p < .0001$). The b coefficients we report are unstandardized, so they can be interpreted to mean that for every one unit increase in personality similarity, liking increased by .55 units. When the FPL was estimated by including attributions of positive and negative traits in the model, both were strong predictors of liking (Positive: $b = 1.20$, $se = .01$, $t = 125.00$, $p < .0001$; Negative: $b = −.54$, $se = .02$, $t = −25.88$, $p < .0001$), as one would expect since
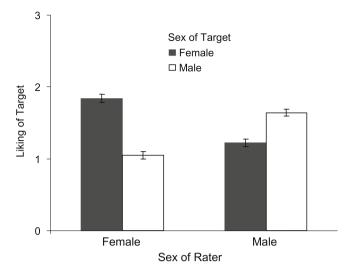

Fig. 1. Liking of targets as a function of sex of target and sex of rater. Error bars represent standard errors of the least squares means.

items were selected for inclusion in the positive and negative traits based on their correlations with liking. After controlling for the FPL, personality similarity continued to have a significant effect ($b = .14$, $se = .03$, $t = 4.16$, $p < .0001$). The significance of personality similarity over and above the FPL demonstrates that personality similarity contributes to liking even when overall positive and negative attributions are held constant.[3]

4.5. Sex

To determine whether participants liked peers of the same sex more than peers of a different sex, we used similarly constructed random effects models to examine whether the effect of the targets' sex on liking depended on the sex of the rater. Thus, we predicted liking from target sex, rater sex, and the interaction of target and rater sex, with random variances for target, rater and flight.

The effects of sex on liking were characterized by a strong crossed interaction between sex of target and sex of rater (without FPL: $b = 1.22$, $se = .02$, $t = 57.69$, $p < .0001$; with FPL: $b = .74$, $se = .02$, $t = 38.62$, $p < .0001$). See Fig. 1. The effect of targets' sex on liking depended on the sex of the raters. Women raters tended to like other women ($M = 1.84$, $se = .06$) more than they liked men ($M = 1.05$, $se = .05$), and men raters tended to like other men

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[3] Some researchers have pointed out that on any personality inventory, some items will be more frequently endorsed than others; e.g., more people may report being friendly than unfriendly (Kenny & Winquist, 2001). As a result, similarity between two people's responses on a personality test might occur because both people subscribe to the same normative cultural standards, and not necessarily because they have similar personalities in ways that deviate from the norm. This type of normative similarity based on cultural standards has been called stereotype agreement or stereotype similarity (e.g., Cronbach, 1955; Kenny & Acitelli, 1994; Kenrick & Funder, 1988). To determine if stereotype similarity was producing our effects, we subtracted the mean response for each item (calculated across the entire sample of participants) from each participant's responses. Thus, we created a separate, mean-deviated similarity index to include in our models predicting liking. Using this approach, any similarity in two participants' reports reflected personality similarity exclusive of how closely participants adhered to cultural expectations (Kenny and Winquist, 2001).Using the mean-deviated similarity index, the personality similarity coefficients ranged from −.62 to .78, with a mean and median of 0.0 and a standard deviation of .18. Without controlling for the FPL, personality similarity between rater and target significantly predicted increased liking ($b = .24$, $se = .03$, $t = 8.60$, $p < .0001$). After controlling for the FPL, personality similarity continued to have a significant effect ($b = .09$, $se = .02$, $t = 3.98$, $p < .0001$). Thus, personality similarity (centered on the mean) contributes to liking even when overall positive and negative attributions are held constant; and this effect is not a reflection of people liking those who are similar simply because they give the normative response.

(*M* = 1.64, *se* = .05) more than they liked women (*M* = 1.22, *se* = .05). The difference in ratings of liking for same-sex versus cross-sex peers was stronger for women than for men (Cohen's *d* = .58 and .36 for women and men raters, respectively).

4.6. Race

To determine whether participants liked peers of the same race more than peers of a different race, we predicted liking from target race, rater race, and the interaction of target and rater race. Similar results were obtained for race as for sex, with a significant interaction between target race and rater race that qualified the main effects (without FPL: $F(4, 31,000) = 114.33$, $p < .0001$; with FPL: $F(4, 31,000) = 68.28$, $p < .0001$). See Fig. 2. The effect of targets' race on liking depended on the race of the raters. Black raters liked Black targets the most (*M* = 1.99, *se* = .06), followed by Other and Biracial targets (*M* = 1.55, *se* = .06), followed by White targets (*M* = 1.40, *se* = .04). White raters liked White targets the most (*M* = 1.50, *se* = .03), followed by Other and Biracial targets (*M* = 1.44, *se* = .05), followed by Black targets (*M* = 1.35, *se* = .05). Other and Biracial raters liked targets of the same category (*M* = 1.62, *se* = .05) about the same as (or slightly less than) Black targets (*M* = 1.63, *se* = .06), followed by White targets (*M* = 1.49, *se* = .04).

4.7. Independence of effects

We conducted several follow-up analyses to examine whether the effects of the demographic variables and personality similarity were independent. First, we determined whether same-sex pairs of participants were more similar in their self-reports of personality than cross-sex pairs. We estimated a mixed model regression in which we predicted the personality similarity coefficient for each pair of participants, nested within flights, from the sex of each member of the pair and the interaction between the two sexes. Results suggested a small significant interaction between the sexes of the pair members ($b = .01$, $se < .01$, $t = 4.73$, $p < .0001$). Examination

of the least squares means showed that same-sex pairs (female: *M* = .50, *se* = .01; male: *M* = .47, *se* = .01) were slightly more similar on average (driven by females) than cross-sex pairs (*M* = .48, *se* = .01). A similar analysis predicting personality similarity coefficients based on the races of the pair members also showed a small significant interaction, $F(4, 29,000) = 7.62$, $p < .0001$. Same-race pairs of Black and White participants were slightly more similar (Black: *M* = .50, *se* = .02; White: *M* = .49, *se* = .01) than different-race pairs of Black and White participants (*M* = .48, *se* = .02) and pairs of two Other and Biracial participants (*M* = .46, *se* = .02).[4]

Finally, we determined if FPL, sex, race, and personality similarity results were independent by including them all in the same model. We tested the following model: liking predicted by sex of target, sex of rater, the interaction between the two; race of target, race of rater, the interaction between the two; personality similarity; and the FPL. Random variances were estimated for the effects of raters, targets, and flights (Kenny, 1994). The data continued to yield significant results in the expected directions (e.g., personality similarity: $b = .13$, $se = .03$, $t = 4.09$, $p < .0001$). Thus, it is not the case that people with the same sex or race tend to be similar in personality and therefore like each other more. There appear to be independent benefits of having the same sex, race, and personality as one's acquaintances.

5. Discussion

The crucial test for any hypothesis about predictors of liking is whether it predicts liking over and above the established tendency to have greater liking for others to whom we attribute positive characteristics. The results of the current study suggest that, even after controlling the tendency for people to like others who have desirable traits and dislike others who have undesirable traits (i.e., the FPL), greater similarity between pairs of peers was associated with mutual increased liking. Unlike other research, we can claim that the effects of personality similarity on liking were not due to proximity of individuals, artifacts of individual rating strategies, similarity in demographic characteristics, or attributions peers make about the desirability of each others' personality.

Previous research has found that people (and especially women) tend to report that their same-sex friendships are higher quality and more intimate than their cross-sex friendships (Monsour, 1997; Sapadin, 1988). Consistent with this research, we found that participants reported more liking for same-sex peers than cross-sex peers, and that this effect was stronger for women than for men. In addition, research suggests that on average, same-race relationships are closer than different-race relationships (Kao & Joyner, 2004; Shook & Fazio, 2008), and people tend to anticipate (often incorrectly) that interracial interactions will be more uncomfortable than same-race interactions (e.g., Mallett, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008; Plant, 2004). Consistent with this research as well, we found that participants reported more liking for peers of the same race than peers of a different race. In addition, we explored whether participants who were the same sex or the same race tended to be more similar in personality than participants who
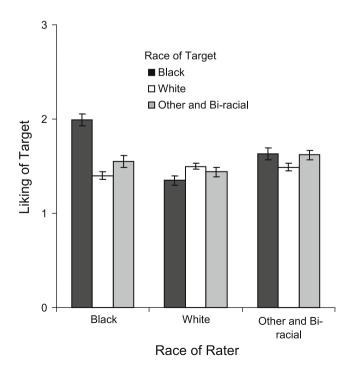

Fig. 2. Liking of targets as a function of race of target and race of rater. Error bars represent standard errors of the least squares means.

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[4] We also conducted these analyses with the mean-deviated personality similarity coefficients. The results were consistent. There was a small significant interaction between the sexes of the pair members ($b = .02$, $se < .01$, $t = 3.46$, $p = .0005$). Examination of the least squares means showed that same-sex pairs (female: *M* = .007, *se* = <.01; male: *M* = .002, *se* < .01) were slightly more similar than cross-sex pairs (*M* = −.004, *se* < .01). Analysis predicting personality similarity coefficients from the races of the pair members also showed a small significant interaction, $F(4, 29,000) = 9.15$, $p < .0001$. Same-race pairs of Black and White participants were slightly more similar than average (Black: *M* = .04, *se* < .01; White: *M* = .002, *se* < .01). Different-race pairs of Black and White participants (*M* = −.0022, *se* < .01) and pairs of two Other and Biracial participants (*M* = −.011, *se* < .01) were slightly less similar than average.

were different sexes or races. Although there was some tendency for participants of the same sex or race to be more similar in personality, the combined model suggested that personality similarity predicts increased liking among peers independently of sex or race.

The findings of the present research lead to the question of *why* people with similar personality patterns tend to like each other more than people with dissimilar personality patterns. Implicit egotism (Pelham, Mirenberg, & Jones, 2002) offers one explanation. People generally see themselves in a positive manner, and as a result, anything reminiscent of the self could prompt automatic positive associations. Researchers have found support for this hypothesis in person perception and in important life decisions. For example, as implicit egotism predicted, participants reported being more attracted to others whose experimenter-given code name contained the numbers of their own birthday than those whose code name did not contain those numbers. Also, according to archival data, people were disproportionately likely to marry someone else who had a similar sounding name (Jones, Pelham, Carvallo, & Mirenberg, 2004). Perhaps people are drawn to others who exhibit the same pattern of personality traits because they automatically like whatever reminds them of themselves.

Another hypothesis that could explain why people with similar personality patterns are especially inclined to like each other extends from the "mere exposure" effect. The mere exposure effect is the finding that all else being equal, familiar stimuli (e.g., Chinese characters presented often to non-Chinese speakers) are liked more than novel stimuli (e.g., Chinese characters presented infrequently) (Zajonc, 1968). Familiar stimuli are easier to perceive and interpret than novel because information about the familiar has already been processed at least once before. In general, processing stimuli with ease (called perceptual fluency or processing fluency) is experienced as pleasurable; and when people encounter a familiar stimulus, they might attribute the pleasure they feel from perceptual fluency to the stimulus itself (Reber, Schwarz, & Winkielman, 2004). The mere exposure effect has been extended to person perception previously. Research has shown that people judge familiar people (encountered often) to be more attractive than less familiar people (Moreland & Beach, 1992), and familiar faces to be happier and less angry than unfamiliar faces (Claypool, Hugenberg, Housley, & Mackie, 2007). Thus, perhaps for the same reason that people like designs and faces more the second time they encounter them, people who have familiar personality traits might be easier to understand and therefore easier to like.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the complementarity hypothesis as a third potential explanation for our results. When two people interact, every behavior one person enacts invites a certain type of reciprocal behavior that the other person may or may not perform (e.g., Tracey, 1994). For example, when one person acts in a friendly manner, the complementary response is for the second person to act friendly as well. When a person acts in a hostile manner, the complementary response is for the second person to act hostile right back. According to the complementarity hypothesis, it would feel disconcerting and offbeat in an interaction for someone to act friendly when confronted with hostility, or vice versa. Thus, people will tend to like and get along better with others who naturally respond to their behaviors in a complementary fashion (e.g., Dryer & Horowitz, 1997). However, behaviors that are complementary are sometimes different from each other rather than similar. For example, the successful complement to someone being dominant or controlling is to be submissive (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997). It is possible that in our study, similarity of certain personality traits (e.g., those having to do with affiliation or hostility) increased liking, while similarity of other traits (e.g., control or submissiveness) did not. Preliminary exploration of our data, however, did not yield conclusive support for this division.

5.1. Future directions

Currently, both implicit egotism and the mere exposure effect are plausible but competing explanations for why similarity of personality predicts increased peer liking. We believe future research should pit these explanations against each another to better determine the mechanism of people's preference for others with similar personalities. Prior research has shown that the theories can be differentiated in terms of their differential predictions about unusual characteristics of the self. According to implicit egotism theory, people with uncommon names will be especially prone to prefer others with similar names because the distinctiveness of the name imparts greater relevance to self-identity, whereas mere exposure theory predicts that people with uncommon names would be less prone to prefer others with similar names, because they are exposed more frequently to common names (Jones, Pelham, Mirenberg, & Hetts, 2002).

Quantifying exactly what is meant by an "unusual personality configuration," however, will not be a simple task. The dynamics underlying human preferences for other humans in uncontrolled environments are certain to be more complex than those determining preferences for somewhat artificial, albeit better controlled, stimuli in the laboratory. Nevertheless, the ability to be liked by others and to choose felicitous others to like is crucial to well-being. We expect that the importance of human liking will warrant the methodological difficulties inherent in studying it.

Acknowledgments

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