



Similarity-attraction effects in friendship formation: Honest platoon-mates prefer each other but dishonest do not



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ABSTRACT

Friends tend to be similar on many characteristics, including personality traits. Yet, a real-world similarity-attraction effect based on actual personality traits is not supported by current research. One reason for this apparent contradiction could be that dark personality traits have been absent from this literature. In a sample ($N = 181$) of military cadet freshmen, we investigated homophily (“love of the same”) based on the traits identified by the Five-Factor Model (FFM) and two dark personality traits, Manipulativeness and Egotism. We did not find homophily based on the FFM traits. However, platoon-mate dyads with similar levels of trait Manipulativeness or Egotism were more likely to mutually like each other. Furthermore, response surface analyses revealed that homophily for these two traits occurred only at the low, or bright, end of these traits. Our results support arguments derived from evolutionary theory that argue for the importance of trait honesty in friendship formation.

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1. Introduction

Homophily can be defined as an attraction people feel for each other caused by similarity in their personal characteristics. The process can be observed when two people who are similar on some personality traits are drawn to each other and begin a relationship. Although this similarity-attraction effect based on attitudes and personality was celebrated as an important finding several decades ago (e.g. Byrne, 1961; Newcomb, 1956), the current state of research does not completely support the claim that such similarities serve as a major basis for real-life interpersonal attraction. A meta-analysis (Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner, 2008) that aggregated 460 similarity-attraction effects from 313 studies showed that *perceived similarity* was indeed associated with attraction in both experimental and real-world settings. However, the link between *actual similarity* and attraction was pronounced only in experimental conditions, especially in studies wherein the partners were previously unacquainted, and not in studies of real-life relationships. Nonetheless, several recent studies on real-life friendships have, contrary to the results of the meta-analysis by Montoya et al. (2008), suggested that friends are, in fact, similar at least regarding some of their personality characteristics (e.g. Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, & Kim, 2013; Lee et al., 2009;

Paunonen & Hong, 2013) and that friendship formation depends on initial personality similarity (Selfhout et al., 2010). But the particular personality traits to reveal homophily have tended to vary from study to study – in terms of the Five-Factor Model (FFM; John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008) of personality structure, the results have been inconclusive: statistically significant homophily effects in friendship dyads have been reported for Openness, Extraversion and Agreeableness (Selfhout et al., 2010), Openness (Lee et al., 2009), and no FFM traits (van Zalk & Denissen, 2015), with effect sizes ranging from near zero for all traits (van Zalk & Denissen, 2015) to around $r = .25$ for Openness (Lee et al., 2009).

Because friends tend to be similar in many other characteristics like age, race, sex and social status (e.g., Bahns, Pickett, & Crandall, 2011) it is hard to accept the complete absence of personality based similarity. One reason that the empirical evidence for similarity-attraction effects based on personality traits is lacking could be that the relevant research has almost exclusively focused on the FFM traits. We suggest that dark traits; that is, interpersonally antagonist, selfish and exploitive personality traits in the subclinical range (Paulhus, 2014) that are not well embodied by the FFM could add to the understanding of the real-life consequences of personality similarity. Giving preliminary support to this view, friends tend to be similar in terms of Honesty–Humility (HH), a trait included in the six-factor HEXACO model (e.g., Lee et al., 2009) of personality structure (Cohen et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2009). Low scores on HH reflect a dark personality (Ashton & Lee, 2007).

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We investigated homophily based on both FFM and dark personality traits. The dark traits were selected from the Supernumerary Personality Inventory (SPI; Paunonen, 2002). The SPI consists of ten personality traits – Conventionalness, Seductiveness, Manipulativeness, Thriftiness, Humorousness, Integrity, Femininity, Religiosity, Risk-taking and Egotism – argued to capture personality space beyond the FFM (Paunonen & Jackson, 2000). These traits have in other domains been shown to have incremental predictive power over FFM traits (see for example, Hong, Koh, & Paunonen, 2012; Paunonen, Lönnqvist, Verkasalo, Leikas, & Nissinen, 2006). Traits included in the SPI comprise three higher order factors (Machiavellian, Traditional, and Masculine-Feminine: Paunonen, Haddock, Forsterling, & Keinonen, 2003). The Machiavellian factor represents the dark personality and comprises of Manipulativeness, Egotism, Seductiveness, and low Thriftiness. These Machiavellian traits overlap with other conceptualizations of the dark personality – e.g., with the Dark Triad and the HH factor (de Vries, de Vries, de Hoogh, & Feij, 2009; Lee, Ogunfowora, & Ashton, 2005; Veselka, Schermer, & Vernon, 2012). In the present research setting, in which the participants were prospective military officers in a military environment, Seductiveness and Thriftiness were considered irrelevant (all-male sample with identical uniforms and equipment) and our focus was thus on the five FFM traits and two dark personality traits – Manipulativeness and Egotism.

Paunonen and Hong (2015) recently suggested that some of the effects of personality traits may not be uniform across the entire trait continuums. We expected particularly those individuals who scored low on dark personality traits to be attracted to similar others. These individuals are non-exploitative even in situations in which exploitation would not be punished (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Ashton, Lee, & de Vries, 2014; Hilbig, Zettler, Leist, & Heydasch, 2013; Zhao & Smillie, 2015). This would presumably be beneficial in long-term relationships, such as friendships, because of the reduced need to monitor the exchange of favors and the ensuing development of mutual trust (Cole & Teboul, 2004; Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2008). However, manipulative and exploitative individuals, who covertly seek and take advantage of situations in which exploiting is not punished (Ashton et al., 2014) are unlikely to form long lasting interpersonal relationships that would be beneficial to both partners. Thus, if friendships are formed based on similarities in dark personality traits, as some studies suggest (Cohen et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2009), this should primarily or exclusively occur at the bright end of such traits – that is, in dyads of individuals scoring low on Manipulativeness or Egotism.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 185 male cadets (mean age 21.9 years) registered in the officer training program at the National Defence College in Helsinki, Finland, for six months. The cadets were members of 12 different platoons. Platoon mates live, work, and study in the same facilities for the duration of their training. Each platoon consisted of 14 to 21 cadets (mean = 16.8).

2.2. Procedure

Participants were seated on every-other chair in large lecture hall in one session lasting less than 2 h. Each cadet was given a self-report questionnaire booklet and a sealed envelope. After completion of the self-reports, the cadet was instructed to open the sealed envelope. Inside the envelope was a list of the cadet's platoon mates and another questionnaire. The cadets were instructed to rate each of their platoon mates (13 to 20 peers per rater) on the list using the second questionnaire's items. Thus, the cadets did not, when completing the self-reports, know that they would be rated by their peers.

2.3. Personality measures

The FFM personality traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience) were measured by the Finnish translation (Paunonen et al., 2003) of the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Each trait-measure contains 12 items, and each item is responded to on a 5-point rating scale.

Our measures of dark personality traits, Manipulativeness and Egotism, were taken from the Finnish translation of the Supernumerary Personality Inventory (SPI; Paunonen, 2002). Each SPI scale contains 15 items, and each item is responded to on a 5-point rating scale. For all analyses, personality trait-scores were standardized to enhance interpretability.

2.4. Likeability measure

Each participant received a questionnaire that instructed him to rate each of his platoon members on the following item: "He is a person with whom you would like to spend time". Cadets were asked to indicate their likeability ratings using visual analogue scales (see Paunonen et al., 2006). The likeability scale consisted of a line with the numbers 0, 10, 20, ..., 100 evenly spaced beneath. The midpoint of the scale (50) was labeled with the verbal anchor "Average for the group," the left side of the scale was labeled "Below the group average," and the right side of the scale was labeled "Above the group average." The cadets were instructed to put a slash through the line indicating his preference about spending time with the peer. All platoon mates were to be rated on the same line and no ties were allowed. Each likeability score was derived as the distance from the origin of the scale to the rating slash (range 0 to 231 mm; $M = 129.4$ mm, $SD = 55.9$ mm).

2.5. Statistical analyses

Only dyads that had reciprocated likeability ratings (both members rated each other) and had provided self-reports on all personality trait measures could be included. As a result, four participants were dropped from the dataset. (These four scored lower in Conscientiousness, $p < .01$, but otherwise showed no difference from participants for whom all data were available.) In total, there were 1368 sets of dyad ratings (perceiver cadet rating target cadet).

The statistical analysis of similarity-effects was conducted within a social relations model (SRM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) to account for the nestedness of the data. Preliminary variance component analysis indicated that there was little or no between-platoon variance in the likeability ratings (intra-class correlation = .00); thus, the platoon variance component was dropped from subsequent analyses.

Polynomial regression and response surface analysis (RSA) have been argued to be the current state-of-the-art for studying dyadic combinations of personality traits and social outcomes (Nestler, Grimm, & Schönbrodt, 2015; for a review of the problems associated with difference scores, see Edwards, 2001). RSA utilizes the parameter estimates from polynomial regression by constructing, testing and depicting linear combinations that summarize the associations between the personality traits of persons A and B, and the social outcome in question (Edwards & Parry, 1993; Shanock, Baran, Gentry, Pattison, & Heggstad, 2010). In the present SRMs, the likeability rating Z of target i by perceiver j , who both are members of the dyad ij , was constructed as a full quadratic regression:

$$z_{ij} = b_0 + b_1x + b_2y + b_3x^2 + b_4xy + b_5y^2 + t + u + v + e \quad (1)$$

where x and y are trait scores of target i and perceiver j , t is target variance, u is perceiver variance, v is dyad variance and e is residual. From the hereby obtained b -parameters, four a -parameters were constructed as linear combinations: Two for the slope ($a_1 = b_1 + b_2$) and curvature ($a_2 = b_3 + b_4 + b_5$) along the line of similarity (LOS; $y = x$), and two for the slope ($a_3 = b_1 - b_2$) and curvature ($a_4 = b_3 - b_4 + b_5$) along

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