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My Enemy's Enemy is My Friend: Why Holding the Same Negative Attitudes of Others Promotes Closeness

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My Enemy's Enemy is My Friend:

Why Holding the Same Negative Attitudes of Others Promotes Closeness

by

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ABSTRACT

Holding the same negative, as compared to positive, attitudes about a third party has been shown to predict increased liking for a future interaction partner (Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer, & Swann, 2006). The current work extended past research by examining two possible mediators of this effect: perceptions of "knowing" the future interaction party, and state self-esteem. Participants learned that they held the same positive or negative attitude of a professor with a future interaction partner, and then rated their feelings of "knowing" their partner, their own state self-esteem, and the closeness they felt to their future interaction partner. It was predicted that holding the same negative attitude about a third party, as compared to a positive attitude, would facilitate closeness to a future partner more effectively because it would (a) provide greater perceived insight into the partner's disposition, and (b) boost state self-esteem. Findings revealed an interaction in which a shared negative attitude toward a third party produced more closeness to a future partner than a shared positive attitude, but only when the attitude was strongly held. When the attitude was weakly held, attitude valence did not influence closeness to the future partner. Participants did not feel like they knew more about their partners if they shared a negative over a positive attitude, but they did feel like they knew their partners to a greater extent if they shared an attitude that was

strongly held. In addition, the manipulations had no effect on state self-esteem. Therefore, predictions regarding the possible mediators were not supported. The results are discussed in the context of past findings, and the discussion focuses on the ecological validity of the current study. In addition, the discussion considers the implications of this work for understanding social relationship formation, and offers suggestions for future research.

Introduction

"If you haven't got anything nice to say about anybody, come sit next to me."

-Alice Roosevelt Longworth (as cited by Cordery, 2007)

Alice Roosevelt Longworth, Theodore Roosevelt's oldest child, adopted the above quote as her personal motto after receiving a gift of a sofa pillow with this saying embroidered on it. Living by this motto, combined with her sometimes wild antics and acid-tongue, helped her become an influential figure in Washington. In fact, Alice's tendency to express negative and critical attitudes (usually publicly) about others helped her not only to gain stature in the Washington community, but to establish well-documented friendships with prominent Washington figures such as former Presidents Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy.

The above example illustrates the deliciousness of bonding over similarly held dislikes of others. By holding similar negative, as compared to positive, attitudes about another person, two people may even be more likely to form a bond. Indeed, this is precisely what Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer, and Swann (2006) expected when they manipulated the valence of similarly held attitudes toward an unfamiliar third party, and found that holding the same negative, as compared to positive, attitudes about the third party predicted increased liking and closeness for a stranger. This occurred in spite of the finding that folk beliefs about friendship formation suggest similarity of positive, not negative, attitudes should be more effective in promoting closeness.

In the current proposal, I will expand on Bosson et al.'s (2006) finding by looking at two possible mediators of the negativity and closeness effect. Specifically, I will look at whether perceived "knowing" of a partner and state self-esteem mediate the effects of similarly held negative attitudes about third parties on feelings of closeness to a future interaction partner.

Balance Theory

Like other cognitive consistency theories (e.g., Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Festinger, 1957), Heider's *balance theory* (1946, 1958) proposes that individuals' relationships are based on balanced attitudes held by both parties. The desire for consistency among one's thoughts, feelings, and social relationships contributes to an attraction toward a balanced state in which two individuals either like or dislike each other. When a third party is thrown into the mix, psychological balance is achieved if two members of the triad hold either a similar positive or negative attitude about this third party. Balance, in turn, promotes liking and friendship formation. For example, if you meet Alex and discover that you both hold a similar liking or disliking for Bob, you should like Alex. Conversely, systems in which a friend's friend is an enemy, or a friend's enemy is a friend, are what Heider (1946) called *unbalanced*. Using the above example, your attraction toward Alex will be weaker if you like Bob, but Alex does not.

However, which type of balanced system should more readily facilitate interpersonal bonding? Is it a system in which you and Alex hold a similar liking for Bob, or a system in which you and Alex hold a similar disliking for Bob?

The Attractiveness of Expressing Positive Attitudes

Theories of interpersonal attraction (Backman, 1990; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Jones, 1964; Rowatt, Cunningham, & Druen, 1998; Stevens & Kristof, 1995) stress the use of socially desirable behaviors during the onset of friendship formation. When encountering new possible friendship partners, people typically want to make a good first impression by putting their best foot forward. Following this logic, it would be optimal to express positive rather than negative attitudes about third parties during interactions with potential friends because, compared to people who express a disliking for a third party, people who express a liking for a third party should be perceived themselves as more likable. This is exactly what Folkes and Sears (1977) found. In their classic demonstration of the power of positivity, they found a general tendency for people to like positive evaluators more than negative evaluators, regardless of the third party being evaluated (e.g., politicians, cafeteria workers), or whether the participant ostensibly held the same opinions as the evaluator. This suggests that, in general, people should be more drawn to form friendships with others who express positive evaluations than others who express negative evaluations of third parties.

However, Folkes and Sears' (1977) methods did not pin down the exact role that similarity of likes versus dislikes plays in friendship development. As pointed out by Bosson et al. (2006), participants did not expect to meet the evaluator they rated, much less think they would form a friendship with the evaluator. In addition, Folkes and Sears operationalized attitudinal similarity by manipulating the (fictional) evaluator's political affiliation to match the participant's. As any election year would show, people might

have similar political party affiliation, but their specific attitudes towards particular politicians might differ dramatically.

Negativity's Pull

Folkes and Sears' (1977) findings notwithstanding, a growing body of research suggests that people may be inclined to attend more to negative, than positive, social information (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). For example, in a study of impression formation, Anderson (1965) had participants read a set of personality-trait adjectives that described a person (a stranger) and then rate how much they would like the stranger described. Anderson found that when confronted with negative information about the stranger, participants weighted it to a greater degree than they did positive information. More specifically, when presented with two highly and two moderately unfavorable adjectives, participants rated the stranger as closely resembling a stranger described with four highly unfavorable adjectives (rather than the average between strangers rated with four highly or four moderately unfavorable adjectives). Conversely, participants rated strangers with two highly and two moderately favorable adjectives somewhere in the middle between strangers rated with four highly or four moderately favorable adjectives (an averaging of each positive trait adjective). In other words, negative information tends to weigh more on one's perceptions of another person than positive information does. Others have found this same result when participants were forming a first impression of another person (e.g., DeBruin & Van Lange, 2000; Hamilton & Zanna, 1972; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). In addition, when participants viewed photographs that depicted either positive or negative behaviors, Fiske (1980) found that the negative behaviors had a greater impact on ratings of the targets'

likeability than did the positive behaviors. Another study found that people process negative words more accurately and quickly than positive words at the subliminal level (Dijksterhuis & Aarts, 2003).

Based on this and other research, Baumeister et al. (2001) concluded that "Bad emotions, bad parents, and bad feedback have more impact than good ones, and bad information is processed more thoroughly than good" (p. 323). Thus, a broad finding that ties together many different literatures is that bad (negative) information tends to carry more psychological "weight" than comparable good (positive) information.

Similarly held negative attitudes. An additional area in which bad may be stronger than good is that of similarly held attitudes. Dunbar (2004) theorizes that negatively valenced gossip is an important evolved mechanism for bonding among social groups. This bonding occurs because talking negatively about others can help solidify a relationship (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977) by revealing personal information about the speaker, and communicating to the listener that he or she is trusted and valued (Hannerz, 1967). Thus, similarly held negative attitudes should increase feelings of closeness and solidarity in the initial stages of friendships (Leaper & Holliday, 1995) and "help cement and maintain social bonds" (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004, p. 112).

To go along with this idea that similarly held negative, compared to positive, attitudes increase feelings of closeness, Bosson et al. (2006) found that people recalled discovering more shared dislikes of others than liking for others when first getting to know the people who eventually became their closest friends. In addition, Bosson et al. manipulated whether participants held the same positive or negative attitude about an unfamiliar third party with a future interaction partner who was ostensibly seated in an

adjacent lab room. They then had participants rate how much they liked and felt close to the future interaction partner. Their findings were the first to show that holding similar negative attitudes about others is especially effective in promoting closeness between people. More specifically, a similarly held negative attitude about a third party effectively promoted closeness whether the attitude was strong or weak, but only when the attitude was strong did holding the same positive attitude promote closeness as effectively as holding the same negative one.

While Bosson et al. (2006) set the foundation for the current proposal, they did not establish the underlying mechanisms that explain why similarly held negative attitudes about others promote closeness so effectively. Here, I ask what are the underlying psychological processes that cause increases in bonding/closeness for two people who hold the same dislike of a third party? Does expressing a negative attitude about a third party reveal more information about the speaker than expressing a positive attitude? Or, do similarly held negative attitudes increase state self-esteem due to the formation of in-groups? Below, I explore each of these possible mechanisms, and explain how each one could increase closeness to a stranger.

Knowing Another Through Similarly Held Negative Attitudes

A possible mediator of the association between similarly held negative attitudes and closeness to a future interaction partner is perceptions of "knowing" the other after the discovery of the similar dislike. When someone expresses a negative as compared to a positive attitude, they run the risk of being disliked, viewed unfavorably, and punished (Folkes & Sears, 1977). However, according to Kelley's (1971) augmentation principle, when there are known risks or costs involved in taking a certain action (the danger of

being viewed unfavorably when expressing a dislike), the action (expressing the dislike) is attributed particularly strongly to the actor's disposition. Therefore, the expression of a dislike, as compared to the expression of a like, about a third party should reveal greater insight into the underlying disposition of the attitude holder (Kelley, 1973). For example, if Alex states that "I despise Bob," you (as the observer) should make the assumption that Alex legitimately does dislike Bob. This is because Alex has expressed the negative attitude despite the known risks involved in this type of behavior (i.e., Alex being disliked or being viewed unfavorably by others).

Similarly, according to Jones and Davis' (1965) social desirability hypothesis, a behavior that is low in social desirability (going against social norms) is attributed more strongly to an actor than is a behavior high in social desirability (going with social norms), because the former behavior occurs in the face of social norms that should discourage it. As discussed above, "people are motivated to create an attractive self-presentation" (Folkes & Sears, 1977, p. 517). Given this motivation, along with the social pressure to only reveal "pleasant" attitudes, listeners may assume that the expression of a dislike reveals the speaker's *true* underlying feelings. As a result, the listener gains (or at least perceives that s/he gains) more insight into the character of the speaker when the speaker reveals negative, as compared to positive, attitudes about a third party. The expression of a positive attitude, on the other hand, leaves the listener with less information to use when forming an impression of the speaker. Thus, expressing a negative attitude about a third party should help the listener feel they "know" more about the source of the attitude and, to the extent that the listener holds the same negative attitude, intimacy between the two is more likely to take place (Byrne,

1971; Byrne, Clore, & Smeaton, 1986; Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Vittengl & Holt, 2000).

State Self-Esteem and Similarly Held Negative Attitudes

Another possible mediator of the link between similarly held negative attitudes and closeness is that holding similar negative attitudes may boost self-esteem. There are at least two possible reasons why this might occur. First, self-esteem may increase if discovering similar attitudes creates – at least momentarily – an in-group consisting of the speaker and listener. Gossip theorists make this point by noting that negative gossip can help in the "formation and maintenance of in-groups and out-groups" (Wert & Salovey, 2004, p. 122). To the extent that belongingness in social groups meets a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), people might experience temporary increases in state self-esteem whenever they perceive in-group connectedness with others (e.g., Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Of course, a similarly held *positive* attitude toward a third party might also boost self-esteem by establishing an in-group that includes the speaker, the listener, and the third party.

However, a similarly held negative attitude should provide an especially powerful boost to self-esteem because it offers not only acceptance, but also an opportunity for downward social comparison with a target person (the third party) who is viewed as inferior to the in-group (Taylor, Buunk, & Aspinwall, 1990; Wills, 1981; Wood, Taylor, & Lichtman, 1985). This is the second possible reason why holding similar negative attitudes might boost state self-esteem. According to social identity theory (SIT), an individual's self consists of a personal identity and a social identity, the latter of which refers to those aspects of the self-concept that result from one's in-groups (Tajfel, 1981;

Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Moreover, people derive self-esteem from assessing their in-groups favorably in contrast to out-groups. From the SIT perspective then, high self-esteem is achieved by having a distinct and positive in-group identity. Therefore, communicating a dislike about a third party to a potential friend expresses to them that they are considered an in-group member, and also casts the third party in a negative light. Thus, similarly held negative attitudes can boost one's self-esteem through the association with a valued in-group that is superior to the out-group (Gagnon & Bourhis, 1996; Tajfel & Forgas, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

To summarize, the discovery of a similarly held negative attitude should increase state self-esteem more than the discovery of a similarly held positive attitude, through the establishment of an in-group boundary and subsequent downward social comparisons. In turn, if one associates an interaction partner with positive feelings such as increases in self-esteem, this should serve as a reward that makes one feel closer to the interaction partner (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Therefore, if discovering a similarly held negative attitude temporarily increases self-esteem, then it should increase feelings of closeness to the other person (e.g., the interaction partner) who holds the similar attitude.

Overview of Proposal and Hypotheses

Based on the reasoning outlined above, as well as the findings of Bosson et al. (2006), I hypothesize that holding similar negative attitudes about a third party (e.g., a college professor) will promote interpersonal closeness toward a future interaction partner more effectively than holding similar positive attitudes. I also predict, based on research on attitudinal similarity and liking (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Byrne et al., 1986), that

the more strongly the attitude is held, the more closeness will result, whether it is a negative or positive attitude. Finally, I predict an interaction of attitude valence and strength such that the bonding power of holding similar negative attitudes will be heightened when the attitude is one that participants feel strongly about. In sum, I am predicting that strongly held, similar, negative attitudes will promote the strongest feelings of closeness toward a future interaction partner, compared to weakly held negative attitudes and both weakly and strongly held positive attitudes.

To test these predictions, I will use a college professor as the evaluated third party. Note that Bosson et al. (2006) used a fictitious third party in their tests of the bonding power of similar negative attitudes. The use of the fictitious third party is quite different from a third party person someone has encountered in person (e.g., a college professor). Using a college professor as the third party is a closer approximation of how people experience the start of friendships, by talking about situations or people they have experienced directly. Therefore, I will use a more ecologically valid operationalization of the disliked third party.

In addition, I predict that holding similar negative attitudes, more than holding similar positive attitudes, will promote intimacy because of its effects on two mediating variables. First, holding similar negative attitudes unveils more perceived "information" about the person expressing the attitude than holding similar positive attitudes. Second, holding similar negative attitudes boosts state self-esteem by creating an in-group that does not include the disliked other. Therefore, felt "knowing" of a partner and state self-esteem will both mediate the association between similar negative attitudes about a third

party and closeness to a future interaction partner. To summarize, I will test the following five hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There will be a main effect of attitude valence, such that holding similar negative attitudes about a college professor will increase closeness toward a future interaction partner relative to holding similar positive attitudes.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a main effect of attitude strength, such that the more strongly the attitude is held, the more closeness will occur, whether the attitude is negative or positive.

Hypothesis 3: Attitude strength will moderate the effect of attitude valence on closeness. In other words, there will be an interaction of attitude valence and strength on closeness such that the effect of valence of attitude on closeness will be strongest when the similar attitude is one that participants feel strongly about.

Hypothesis 4: Participant's felt "knowing" of their partner will mediate the moderated effect of attitude valence on strength. In other words, I predict a pattern of mediated moderation in which felt "knowing" mediates the association between the attitude valence-by-strength interaction and closeness to the interaction partner.

Hypothesis 5: Participant's state self-esteem will mediate the moderated effect of attitude valence on strength. That is, I predict a pattern of mediated moderation in which state self-esteem mediates the association between the attitude valence-by-strength interaction and closeness to the interaction partner.

To test these hypotheses, I will conduct a study in which participants will learn that they and a future interaction partner hold the same like or dislike of a professor (e.g., the third party) from whom they both take (or have taken) a class. Participants will then

rate the strength of their attitude toward the professor, their "knowing" of the future partner, their state self-esteem, and their feelings of closeness to the partner.

Methods

Power Analysis

A power analysis was conducted (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) to determine the total number of participants needed to detect a moderate interaction effect size of $f^2 = .20$ (Cohen, 1988). With an alpha of 0.05, setting power at 0.95, and assuming five predictors in the full model (strength, valence, the strength-by-valence interaction, felt knowing, and state self-esteem), a sample size of 105 would be needed. I therefore planned to recruit a total of 106 participants (53 in each experimental condition, to allow for detection of moderation by the continuous strength variable). However, I ended up recruiting more participants than planned, because an unexpectedly large number of participants were excluded for failing a crucial manipulation check. This is explained in more detail later.

Participants and Design

A total of 113 undergraduates participated in exchange for credit toward a course requirement. To be eligible participants had to indicate during pre-screening that they had taken at least three large (100 people or more) introductory level classes at USF. This was done to increase the likelihood that participants had taken a class from at least one of the listed professors. Participants were run one or two at a time, seated alone in individual lab rooms. I excluded data from four participants (two pairs) because they knew each other beforehand, and from two who did not follow instructions (i.e., decided to select a professor they liked instead of disliked, wrote in a professor not from USF). In

addition, I excluded data from 17 participants for failing the manipulation check (i.e., did not recall learning that their partner shared the same liked or disliked professor with them). In total, 90 participants (14 men and 76 women) were in the final sample. Participants ranged from 18 to 30 years in age (*Mdn* = 19), and 47.8% identified themselves as White, 23.3% as Hispanic/Latino(a), 20% as Black, 4.4% as Asian, 3.3% as Arabic/Middle Eastern, and 1.1% as other.

Participants were randomly assigned to condition in a 2-cell (valence of similar attitude: negative vs. positive) between subjects design. The strength of participants' attitude was included as a continuous moderator variable. The dependent measures included: participants' rating of "knowing" their ostensible partner, their state self-esteem, and their feelings of closeness to their partner.

Procedure and Materials

Upon arriving at the lab, participants gave their informed consent to participate and then learned that they would be partaking in two brief, unrelated studies. An experimenter explained that the first study involved students' impressions of their instructors, and the second study was about how people get to know someone they've never met before (i.e., the ostensible future interaction partner).

For the first task, participants received a *Professor Selection Sheet* that listed 44 professors who teach introductory level courses at the University of South Florida (USF), and the experimenter explained that "The first study involves collecting information on student's impressions of their USF instructors. USF is in the process of creating a large database of faculty evaluations, kind of like Rate My Professor or one of those online evaluation websites. So your first task today will involve making ratings of some of the

professors you've had in large survey classes here at USF." The participants were then asked to circle the names of every professor they had taken or were currently taking a course with. Then, based on random assignment, participants were be asked to place an 'X' next to the one professor they either liked (*positive attitude* condition) or disliked (*negative attitude* condition) the most. In addition, an option to write the name of a non-listed professor was provided.

After the selection of the professor they liked or disliked the most, participants answered three questions about the strength of their positive or negative attitude toward the professor: "How much do you like (dislike) the professor you selected?"; "How strongly do you like (dislike) the professor you selected?"; "How confident are you about your attitude toward the professor you selected?" Each was rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*) (see Appendix A). To compute strength scores, I averaged across these items ($\alpha = .79$).

The 44 USF professors were selected by scanning class listings and selecting those who taught introductory level courses with at least 100 students. The courses from which the professors were selected covered a wide range of departments (e.g., Geography, Biology, Business, Accounting, Psychology, Religion) in hopes of capturing professors with whom the participants had or were currently taking classes.

After collecting the participant's completed evaluations of the liked or disliked professor the (supposedly) unrelated second study begin and the experimenter said "For this study, the researchers are interested in how people interact with someone they don't know well." The experimenter then explained that the interaction with the partner would begin once the participant completed a short getting to know you questionnaire. To

obscure the true purpose of the experiment, and provide the participants with additional (mundane) information from which to extract an impression of their future interaction partner, the experimenter explained that: "You are going to fill out a short form where you share some information about yourself. Once you are done I will take your form to the other room and I'll bring back your partner's form to look over. Then you will fill out a quick questionnaire right before you two meet." The experimenter then had the participants fill out the Personal Information Exchange (see Appendix B) sheet and once they were done took the participant's filled out form with them to the ostensible partner's room.

Manipulating attitude valence. Approximately two minutes later, the experimenter returned to convey information about attitudinal similarity between the participant and future interaction partner. Specifically, all participants learned that their future partner identified the same (liked or disliked) professor as them, thus holding in common with them either a positive or negative attitude toward the same third party. Following Bosson et al.'s (2006) manipulation procedures, the experimenter said, "Seems that you and your partner both identified the same professor (Dr._____) that you took a large class with and liked/disliked. You both gave him/her similar ratings too." Note that the participants selected only one individual (either a liked or disliked professor). This is a critical difference from Bosson et al.'s procedure, in which participants generated two attitudes about a third party, but learned that they only held one of these attitudes in common with their future interaction partners. While the other attitude was not mentioned, participants might have assumed that their future interaction partner disagreed with them about the unmentioned attitude, causing weakened bonding effects.

The experimenter then handed the participants the Personal Information Exchange sheet ostensibly "filled" out by the partner (all participants received the same information from the ostensible partner, see Appendix B). After letting the participant look over their partner's sheet the experimenter had the participants fill out the final questionnaire on the computer consisting of the dependent measures (see Appendix C).

Dependent measures. In counterbalanced order, participants responded to two sets of questions that measured the mediator variables (perceptions of knowing the partner and state self-esteem). Four questions, rated on scales of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*), assessed how much the participant felt like she or he "knew" her/his partner (e.g., "To what extent do you feel like you know what kind of person your future partner is?," "How much do you feel like you know about your future partner?," "How much do you feel like you learned about your future partner?," and "To what extent do you feel like you know what kinds of attitudes your future partner holds?"). The use of these questions addressed if holding a similar negative attitude revealed something more about the *source* of the attitude than a positive attitude would. An average "knowing" score was computed to yield an indicator of how much a participant "knows" about their unmet partner ($\alpha = .87$).

Five items, modified from Rosenberg's (1965) Self-esteem Scale, were used to indicate how participants currently feel about themselves. These items were: "Right now, I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others"; "Right now, I feel that I have a number of good qualities"; "Right now, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure"; "Right now, I am satisfied with myself"; "Right now, I feel I do not have much to be proud of." Participants used a scale from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Extremely*). These

items clarify if holding a similar negative attitude, relative to a positive attitude, increases state self-esteem. The two negatively worded items were reverse coded and I computed a mean of all five items ($\alpha = .76$).

Seven questions borrowed from Bosson et al. (2006) measured participants' feelings of closeness to their partners. On scales of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) participants indicated "To what degree do you think you and your future partner will 'click'?," "To what extent is your future partner someone with whom you could establish a friendship?," "To what extent do you feel close to your future partner?," "Do you think that the interaction with your future partner will go smoothly?," "To what extent are you looking forward to the interaction task with your future partner?," "To what degree are you likely to discuss personal information with your future partner during the interaction task?," and "How comfortable do you think the interaction task with your future partner will be?" I averaged across these items ($\alpha = .80$) to produce a closeness score.

Manipulation check. The last section of the questionnaire asked participants to "jot down any details that you recall the experimenter having told you about your future partner." These open-ended responses were coded for accurate recall of the specific similarly held attitude. Out of all participants, 84 % ($N = 90$) correctly recalled that their partner selected the same liked/disliked professor as they did; the remaining 16 % ($N = 17$) did not mention this detail. Including versus excluding the data of participants who did not mention the shared attitude toward the professor does not change any of the patterns reported below, but it does cause several significant effects to drop to non-significance. These different significance levels are indicated where relevant below.

Closer inspection of the data revealed that the rates of manipulation check failure differed by experimenter. A chi-square analysis revealed significant differences among the three experimenters, $\chi^2(2, N = 107) = 13.58, p < .01$. Of Experimenter 1's participants, 12.72% failed the manipulation check; of Experimenter 2's participants, 4.55% failed; and of Experimenter 3's participants, 69.23% failed. Therefore, it appears that the high rate of manipulation failure can perhaps be attributed to an idiosyncrasy of Experimenter 3, rather than a weakness in the manipulation itself. This issue is discussed in more detail in the Discussion.

Participants were then asked a few demographic questions, thoroughly probed for suspicion, debriefed, and given the assigned credit. Most participants did not indicate any suspicion and if they did it was only mild.

Results

Closeness

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for and correlations among all variables. Hypotheses 1 through 3 state that there will be main effects for both attitude valence and strength on closeness, and a valence-by-strength interaction. I hypothesized that strongly held, similar, negative attitudes of a third party (e.g., the professor) would promote the strongest feelings of closeness toward the future interaction partner, compared to weakly held negative attitudes and both weakly and strongly held positive attitudes. To test these hypotheses, I conducted a simultaneous multiple regression analysis in which I predicted participants' feelings of closeness from attitude valence condition (coded as negative attitude = 0, positive attitude = 1), strength of similarly held attitude (zero centered; see Aiken & West, 1991), and the two-way interaction term.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among all Variables

	I.	II.	III.	IV.	V.	VI.
Primary Variables						
I. Felt Closeness						
II. Felt Knowing	.36**					
III. State Self-Esteem	.13	.01				
IV. Strength	.29**	.28**	.02			
Covariates						
V. Professors Circled	.28**	.25*	-.05	.28**		
VI. Gender	-.04	.02	.17	-.13	-.11	
Mean/Total	3.77	2.58	4.31	6.34	3.40	76 W 14 M
Standard Deviation	0.85	1.07	0.53	1.86	1.23	

Note. $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$. M = Men; W = Women

In contrast to my predictions, the main effect of attitude valence was not significant. Participants who believed they shared a negative attitude about a professor did not anticipate greater closeness with their partners relative to participants who

believed they shared a positive attitude about a professor, β = -.23, $t(86) = -1.03$, $p = .31$. However, participants with stronger attitudes toward the professor felt closer to their future partners, β = .29, $t(86) = 3.62$, $p < .01$, and a significant interaction emerged between attitude valence and attitude strength, β = -.25, $t(86) = -2.04$, $p = .04$.[1]

Figure 1 displays the predicted values of closeness for participants who shared a positive or negative attitude that they held either very strongly or very weakly (calculated at 1 *SD* above and below the mean).

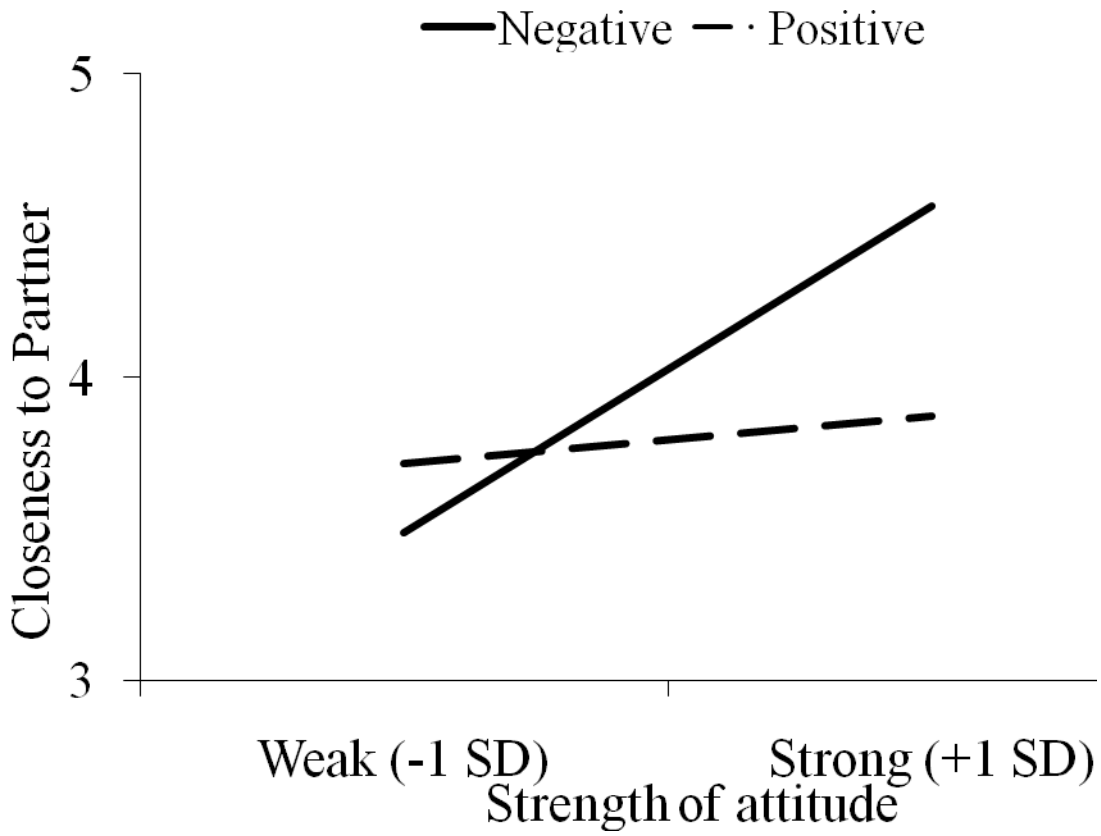

Figure 1. Predicted closeness to a future interaction partner as a function of similarly held attitude valence and attitude strength.

Among participants with weak attitudes toward the professor, the valence of the shared attitude did not affect their closeness to their partner, β = .23, $t(86) = .69$, $p = .49$.

In contrast, among participants with strong attitudes toward the professor, those who learned that they shared a negative attitude expected greater closeness to their partners than did those who learned that they shared a positive attitude, β = -.69, $t(86) = -2.30$, $p = .02$.[2] Put another way, learning of a shared negative vs. positive attitude about a third party promoted greater closeness toward the future partner when the attitude was strongly held; when the attitude was weakly held, valence of the attitude did not affect closeness toward the future partner.

In a follow-up analysis, I entered gender of participant, number of professors the participant circled, and experimenter as covariates (gender: β = .06, $t[82] = .26$, $p = .80$; number of professors: β = .17, $t[82] = 2.16$, $p = .03$; experimenter: β = -.06, $t[82] = -.46$, $p = .65$). Controlling for these variables allowed me to rule out the possibility that the significant effects found here were caused by factors other than the independent variables. However, the main effect of attitude strength and the interaction between attitude valence and attitude strength remained significant when the covariates were added into the model (all $ps < .03$).

Felt Knowing and State Self-esteem

Hypotheses 4 and 5 state my prediction of mediated moderation; that is, that felt knowing and state self-esteem will both mediate the link between the moderated effect of attitude valence on stength and closeness to the partner. In other words, felt knowing of partner and state self-esteem will mediate the association between the attitude valence-by-strength interaction and felt closeness to the future interaction partner. To test this, I next conducted two simultaneous multiple regression analyses in which I predicted participants' felt knowing of their future partner and state self-esteem from attitude

valence condition (coded as negative attitude = 0, positive attitude = 1), strength of attitude (zero centered; see Aiken & West, 1991), and the two-way interaction term.

Participants who believed they shared a negative attitude about a professor did not feel like they knew significantly more about their partners than did participants who believed they shared a positive attitude about a professor, $\beta = .01$, $t(86) = .05$, $p = .96$. However, participants with stronger attitudes toward the professor felt like they knew their future partner better than participants with weaker attitudes, $\beta = .24$, $t(86) = 2.31$, $p = .02$,[3] but the two-way interaction between attitude valence and attitude strength was not significant, $\beta = -.17$, $t(86) = -1.08$, $p = .28$. Figure 2 displays the predicted values of felt "knowing" of future partner for participants who shared a positive or negative attitude of a professor about which they felt either very strongly or very weakly (calculated at 1 *SD* above and below the mean).

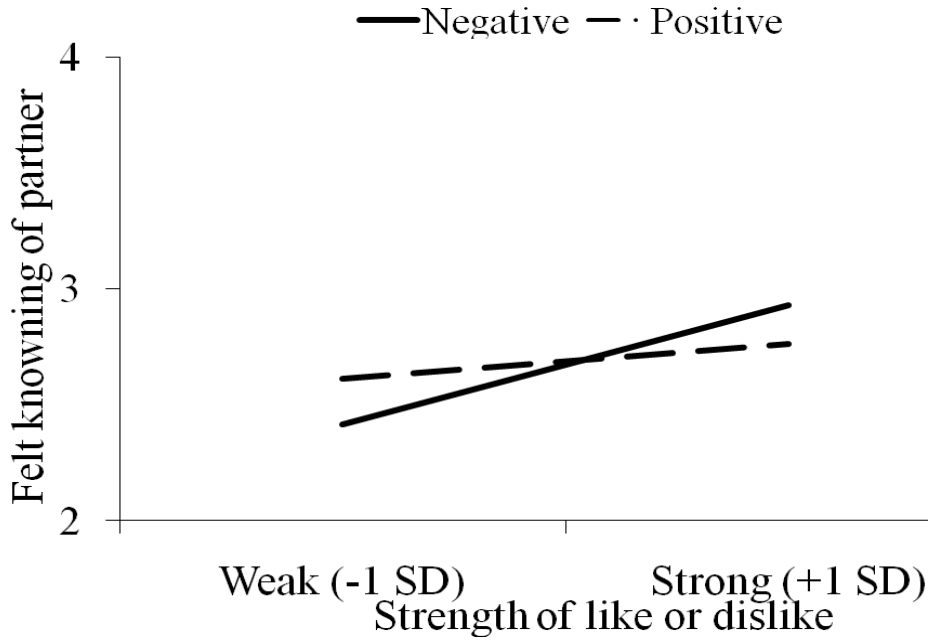

Figure 2. Predicted felt "knowing" of a future interaction partner as a function of similarly held attitude valence and attitude strength.

Participants who believed they shared a negative attitude about a professor did not experience a significant increase in state self-esteem relative to participants who believed they shared a positive attitude about a professor, $\beta = .11$, $t(86) = .717$, $p = .48$. Neither did participants with stronger attitudes toward the professor, $\beta = -.04$, $t(86) = -.81$, $p = .42$. In addition, the two-way interaction was not significant, $\beta = .06$, $t(86) = .78$, $p = .44$.

Mediational Model

To test Hypotheses 4 and 5, I planned to use the multiple mediation analysis (i.e., bootstrapping) procedure recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2004). However, since neither mediator was significantly associated with the attitude valence-by-strength interaction, I could not proceed as planned.

General Discussion

Heider (1958) demonstrated that both our friend's friend and our enemy's enemy are potential friends. An abundant amount of research has shown that we are attracted to and like others who are similar to us (Byrne, 1971; Byrne & Nelson, 1965; Newcomb, 1961; Pinel, Long, Landau, & Pyszczynski, 2004) and prefer others who share our attitudes or beliefs (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994; Swann & Pelham, 2002). However, not until recently did researchers ask if the valence of a shared attitude about a third party makes a difference in the amount of bonding or interpersonal attraction that will take place. Bosson et al. (2006) found that similarly held negative attitudes about third party others facilitated closeness more powerfully than shared positive attitudes did. Here, taking into account Bosson et al.'s findings, I proposed two possible mediators (perceived felt "knowing" of a partner and state self-esteem) that might give us a better understanding of the underlying psychological mechanisms involved in the negativity and

closeness effect. More specifically, I hypothesized that holding a similar dislike of a familiar other increases closeness because it boosts self-esteem and provides people with greater insight into one another's dispositions.

The findings from the study reported here show that a strongly held, shared, negative attitude toward a third party produced greater closeness to a stranger than a strongly held, shared, positive attitude. When the attitude was weakly held, positive and negative attitudes did not produce differences in closeness. Neither of the proposed mediators was significantly associated with the independent variables. However, there was a main effect of attitude strength in predicating felt knowing. In particular, participants with stronger attitudes toward the chosen professor felt like they knew more about their future partner than participants with weaker attitudes.

In what follows, I identify several limitations of this study, and discuss some directions for future research.

Limitations

Although my findings are promising, there are several limitations that merit attention. The first limitation is that an unexpectedly large number of people failed the manipulation check that assessed their memory for the attitude valence manipulation. To inform participants about the shared attitude, the experimenter said, "Seems that you and your partner both identified the same professor (Dr._____) that you took a large class with and liked/disliked. You both gave him/her similar ratings too." While more than 80% of the participants wrote that they remembered the experimenter noting that they shared a similar liked or disliked professor, the remaining did not mention any details that the experimenter told them about their future interaction partner. This is both a good and

bad thing. On the one hand, it suggests that the manipulation was subtle enough that it escaped the attention of some participants, which is consistent with my intentions (I wanted the comment to come across as an offhand comment). On the other hand, it is problematic that this many participants failed the manipulation check. However, as mentioned above, one experimenter seemed to be responsible for over half of the failed manipulation checks. His softspoken manner might have been the reason so many people failed the manipulation check – that is, he might have been *too* subtle when making the offhand comment to participants. Thus, rather than conclude that the manipulation itself was too subtle to be noticed, it appears that one particular experimenter was ineffective at conveying the crucial information.

In addition, the current results differ from what Bosson et al. (2006) obtained. In their study, a shared negative attitude about a third party promoted closeness whether the attitude was strong or weak, but only when the attitude was strong did a shared positive attitude promote closeness as effectively as a shared negative attitude. Here, I found that a negative, shared attitude toward a third party promoted closeness to a stranger the most, but only when it was strongly held. The differing results might have been caused by the different targets (i.e., the third parties) that were used in each study. In the current study a real professor was used as the third party target, which is quite different from the fictitious third party target used by Bosson et al. The use of a college professor that participants had encountered in person is a closer approximation of how people experience the beginning of friendships. That is, real-world friendships most likely begin when people share information about situations or people they have experienced directly. Therefore, the use of a college professor increases the ecological validity of the shared

attitude manipulation in the current study. Nonetheless, replicating the present findings using other third party others (i.e., classmates, neighbors, etc.) would increase my confidence in the negativity and closeness effect found here.

Another limitation of the current study concerns the null effects with the proposed mediators (i.e., state self-esteem, felt "knowing" of future partner). However, it might be that the efforts to look at increases in state self-esteem were misguided. Participants in the current study were told from the experimenter, not the ostensible partner, about the shared negative or positive attitude about the college professor. Therefore, participants received the information about the shared attitude by way of a third party, rather than from the source of the comment. Consequently, participants did not hear "straight from the horse's mouth" (i.e., the future interaction partner) that they were trusted enough to learn this negative gossip, which might have increased state self-esteem. Thus, perhaps it makes sense that increases in state self-esteem were not found.

While felt knowing was not a significant mediator, the results were in the predicted direction and the main effect of strength was significant. Participants felt like they knew their partner more when their attitude was strongly held, compared to weakly held. In addition, while not significant, participants in the strongly held, negative attitude condition felt like they knew more about their future interaction partner than did participants in the strongly held, positive attitude condition. Thus, it is possible that a different measure of felt knowing might produce findings that support my hypotheses.

Directions for Future Research

Future research should follow up on if someone has had the opportunity to form their own attitude of someone they have personally observed. For example, would

similarly held negative attitudes promote closeness more effectively than similarly held negative attitudes about a third party neither has encountered? Manipulating how much social impact the third party has on the raters' lives (e.g., a professor's impact vs. a celebrity's impact; see Latané, 1981) would help clarify when a strongly held, negative attitude will promote closeness the most.

Reexamining felt knowing as a potential mediator to the negativity and closeness effect would be beneficial for future research. As mentioned above, a different measure of felt knowing might get at the mediator more effectively. One suggestion is to have a list of social groups that participants select from as potential groups the future interaction partner belongs to. This would be an unobtrusive measure of how much the participant feels they know about their partner. The more groups the participant selects, the more they feel they know about the other person. I would predict participants would circle the most social groups for their future partner when attitudes are strongly held and negative.

In addition to asking which groups they believe their partner belongs to, having participants indicate the groups that they themselves are in would allow one to look at another possible mediator, in-groupness. From an SIT standpoint an expressed negative attitude should make someone feel like they are part of an in-group, thus one should feel like they have more social groups in common (increased in-groupness) with another person with whom they share a strong negative attitude. In addition, members of the same social group are assumed to share similar perspectives (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005; Voci, 2006). In other words, a shared, strongly held, negative attitude should make people feel like they are in an in-group with the partner, and being in an in-group should make people think they have more in common with the partner. Thus, more shared social

groups with the partner (or amplified in-groupness) should follow from the discovery of a shared, strong, negative attitude toward a third party.

Another direction for future research involves manipulating both attitude valence and whether or not attitudes are similarly held. As Folkes and Sears' (1977) findings suggest, when attitudes are not similarly held people should feel closer to a stranger who divulges positive, not negative attitudes. Thus, it is a gamble revealing negative attitudes about others because if they are shared by one's listeners, closeness is enhanced; if they are not, the speaker might make an unfavorable impression on potential friends. While not directly testing this idea, adding in a control group (where participants will not receive any information about a shared attitude) would help to determine if shared attitudes, positive or negative, increase bonding over non-sharing. It would be assumed that participants that do not learn of a shared attitude should feel the least closeness to their partner, regardless of attitude strength and valence. This would show that any sort of shared attitude, whether it is positive or negative, promotes closeness more than a non-shared attitude.

Another fruitful direction would be to do a lab study where participants sit and talk with another person (possibly a confederate) during a structured interview. By controlling the valence of the attitude that is revealed by the confederate, one could reevaluate the state self-esteem mediator. As mentioned above, a possible reason state self-esteem was not a significant mediator in the current study might have been due to the fact that the attitude was not revealed from the participants' future interaction partner, but from the experimenter. Communicating face-to-face a dislike about a third party to the participants should express to them that the speaker clearly chooses to convey the

negative attitude to them. In the current study and Bosson et al.'s (2006) it was the experimenter that chose to divulge the partner's attitude. Being told directly should signal to the participant that they are considered a potential friend that can be trusted, thus boosting the participant's state self-esteem.

Additionally, future work would benefit by investigating if there is an important distinction between feeling like you "know" someone because they reveal a negative attitude that *you* also hold, and feeling "known" by someone because you reveal a negative attitude that *they* also hold. This raises the issue of whether the effects on closeness of similarly held negative attitudes are the same for both the speaker and the listener. I focused in the current proposal on the former type of shared attitude (the listener role), but future work should explore the latter type of shared attitude (the speaker role) to see if it relates to closeness to the partner. It might be that the communication of a negative attitude does not make the speaker feel closer to the listener, until the attitude is reciprocated from the listener. In fact, it would be interesting to investigate when and how much bonding occurs by both speaker and listener throughout an exchange of attitudes (both positive and negative).

Finally, as in all experimental studies, it would be ideal for future work to use a naturalistic, longitudinal design to look at friendship formations and similarly held dislikes of others across time. This could help determine how much and when holding similar negative attitudes about others is needed to form a true friendship, and when positive attitudes might be more useful.

Conclusion

The current study showed that a shared negative attitude, when strongly held, promotes closeness to a future interaction partner more effectively than both strongly and weakly held positive attitudes and weakly held negative attitudes. While neither proposed mediator (i.e., felt "knowing" of partner and state self-esteem) predicted the attitude strength-by-valence interaction, both may still be viable underlying psychological mechanisms to the negativity and closeness effect. Future research should explore how a third party's social impact promotes closeness, other possible mediators (i.e., in-groupness), and the distinction between feeling like you "know" someone or are "known" by them.

To close, just as Ms. Roosevelt Longworth gained status in Washington by sharing negative attitudes about others, it seems that most people can use shared negative attitudes as tools for bonding with potential friends. In fact, one researcher believes that gossip may be "the core of the human social relationship" (Dunbar, 2004, p. 100). By discovering the underlying mechanisms of the negativity and closeness effect we will be better able to understand friendship formation.

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Endnotes

[1] When the 17 participants who failed the manipulation check are included in analyses, the attitude valence-by-strength interaction drops to non-significance, $\beta = -.14$, $t(103) = -1.23$, $p = .22$. However, the main effect of strength of attitude remains significant, $\beta = .18$, $t(103) = 2.59$, $p = .01$.

[2] Including the data of the participants who failed the manipulation check makes this effect non-significant, $\beta = -.42$, $t(103) = -1.51$, $p = .13$.

[3] This effect becomes non-significant when the 17 participants who failed the manipulation check are included, $\beta = .13$, $t(103) = 1.44$, $p = .15$.

Appendices

Appendix A: Liked and Disliked Professors

Below is a list of 44 professors at the USF-Tampa campus. All teach introductory level courses like Geography, Biology, Business, Accounting, Psychology, Religion, etc. Please look over the list of the professors and recall if you have ever taken, or are currently taking, a course from each. Then do two things. FIRST, circle the names of every professor from the list with whom you have ever taken a class, including this semester. SECOND, of all of the professors you circled, place an 'X' next to the one you DISLIKE(D) the MOST. Even if you do not dislike this professor very strongly, please indicate the one you dislike(d) the most. If you have NEVER taken a class with any of these professors, please write in the name of a non-listed professor whom you dislike, in the line provided below. **This information will not be shared with the professors and all identifying information will be removed from your ratings.**

Dr. Kevin Archer- Geography
Dr. Sue Bartlett- Business
Dr. Daniel Belgrad- Humanities
Dr. Andrew Berish- History of Music
Dr. Jennifer Bosson- Psychology
Dr. Prisilla Brewer- Humanities
Dr. Allison Cleveland- Biology
Dr. Annette Cozzi- Humanities
Dr. Walter Danielak- Humanities
Dr. Katie Davis- Accounting
Dr. Karla Davis-Salazar- Anthropology
Dr. Dell Dechant- Theology
Dr. Marc Defant- Geology
Dr. Roy Dye- American Studies
Dr. Frederick Eilers- Biology
Dr. Mary Fournier- Arts
Dr. Jamie Goldenberg- Psychology
Dr. Charles Guignon- Philosophy
Dr. Gail Harley- Religion
Dr. Kathleen Heide- Criminal Justice
Dr. John Hodgson- Business
Dr. Frances Hopf- Mathematics
Dr. Anne Jeffrey- Art History
Dr. Celina Jozsi- Accounting
Dr. Michael Levan- Communications
Dr. Kenneth Malmberg- Psychology
Dr. Sean McAveety- Mathematics
Dr. Karol McIntosh- Mathematics
Dr. Constance Mizak- Environmental Science
Dr. Paul Morgan- History
Dr. Elizabeth Moses- Biology
Dr. Suzanne Murray- History
Dr. Jane Noll- Psychology
Dr. Christina Partin- Sociology
Dr. Ken Pothoven- Mathematics
Dr. Diana Roman- Geology
Dr. Brook Sadler- Philosophy
Dr. Thomas Sanocki- Psychology
Dr. Paul Schneider- Religion
Dr. Mark Stewart- Science
Dr. Peter Stiling- Biology
Dr. Elenica Stojanovski- Mathematics
Dr. Ashok Upadhyaya- Biology
Dr. Rebecca Wooten- Mathematics

OTHER : _____

Appendix A: (Continued)

How much do you dislike the professor you selected?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all								Very much

How strongly do you dislike the professor you selected?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all								Very much

How confident are you about your attitude toward the professor you selected?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all								Very much

Appendix A: (Continued)

Below is a list of 44 professors at the USF-Tampa campus. All teach introductory level courses like Geography, Biology, Business, Accounting, Psychology, Religion, etc. Please look over the list of the professors and recall if you have ever taken, or are currently taking, a course from each. Then do two things. FIRST, circle the names of every professor from the list with whom you have ever taken a class, including this semester. SECOND, of all of the professors you circled, place an 'X' next to the one you LIKE(D) the MOST. Even if you do not like this professor very strongly, please indicate the one you like(d) the most. If you have NEVER taken a class with any of these professors, please write in the name of a non-listed professor whom you like, in the line provided below. **This information will not be shared with the professors and all identifying information will be removed from your ratings.**

Dr. Kevin Archer- Geography
Dr. Sue Bartlett- Business
Dr. Daniel Belgrad- Humanities
Dr. Andrew Berish- History of Music
Dr. Jennifer Bosson- Psychology
Dr. Prisilla Brewer- Humanities
Dr. Allison Cleveland- Biology
Dr. Annette Cozzi- Humanities
Dr. Walter Danielak- Humanities
Dr. Katie Davis- Accounting
Dr. Karla Davis-Salazar- Anthropology
Dr. Dell Dechant- Theology
Dr. Marc Defant- Geology
Dr. Roy Dye- American Studies
Dr. Frederick Eilers- Biology
Dr. Mary Fournier- Arts
Dr. Jamie Goldenberg- Psychology
Dr. Charles Guignon- Philosophy
Dr. Gail Harley- Religion
Dr. Kathleen Heide- Criminal Justice
Dr. John Hodgson- Business
Dr. Frances Hopf- Mathematics
Dr. Anne Jeffrey- Art History
Dr. Celina Jozsi- Accounting
Dr. Michael Levan- Communications
Dr. Kenneth Malmberg- Psychology
Dr. Sean McAveety- Mathematics
Dr. Karol McIntosh- Mathematics
Dr. Constance Mizak- Environmental Science
Dr. Paul Morgan- History
Dr. Elizabeth Moses- Biology
Dr. Suzanne Murray- History
Dr. Jane Noll- Psychology
Dr. Christina Partin- Sociology
Dr. Ken Pothoven- Mathematics
Dr. Diana Roman- Geology
Dr. Brook Sadler- Philosophy
Dr. Thomas Sanocki- Psychology
Dr. Paul Schneider- Religion
Dr. Mark Stewart- Science
Dr. Peter Stiling- Biology
Dr. Elenica Stojanovski- Mathematics
Dr. Ashok Upadhyaya- Biology
Dr. Rebecca Wooten- Mathematics

OTHER : _____

Appendix A: (Continued)

How much do you like the professor you selected?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all								Very much

How strongly do you like the professor you selected?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all								Very much

How confident are you about your attitude toward the professor you selected?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all								Very much

Appendix B: Personal Information Exchange Sheet

Please answer the following questions about yourself. Your partner will answer the same set of questions about himself or herself, and the two of you will exchange your answers so that you can learn something about each other. *NOTE: Inside the parenthesis ( ) is how the form will be completed by the ostensible future interaction partner.*

What is your age? _____(22)_____

What is your home town? ____(Sarasota)_____

What is your favorite color? ____(Blue)_____

What is your favorite food? ____(Pizza)_____

Appendix C: End Questionnaire

Before meeting your partner please fill out the following questions.

To what extent do you feel like you know what kind of person your future partner is?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

How much do you feel like you know about your future partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

How much do you feel like you learned about your future partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

To what extent do you feel like you know what kinds of attitudes your future partner holds?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

The following statements are designed to measure what you are thinking at this moment. The best answer is what you feel is true to yourself at this moment.

Right now, I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

Right now, I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

Right now, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

Right now, I am satisfied with myself.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

Right now, I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little bit	Somewhat	Very much	Extremely

The questions below are used to assess how first impressions are made. Please use the scales provided to answer each question.

To what degree do you think you and your future partner will "click"?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

To what extent is your future partner someone with whom you could establish a friendship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

To what extent do you feel close to your future partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

Do you think that the interaction with your future partner will go smoothly?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

To what extent are you looking forward to the interaction task with your future partner?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

To what degree are you likely to discuss personal information with your future partner during the interaction task?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

How comfortable do you think the interaction task with your future partner will be?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Very Much

Below please jot down any details that you recall the experimenter having told you about your future interaction partner.

Demographic Information

I am (circle one): Male Female

I am _____ years old.

What is your race/ethnicity? _____