

ATTRACTION & HOSTILITY

Albert Pepitone

An Experimental Analysis of
Interpersonal and
Self Evaluation



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Preface

Social psychology's interest in attraction and hostility can be traced back to the formative years of the discipline, when sociologically oriented scholars focused their attention on gregariousness, crowd violence, and other topics reflecting man's liking and disliking of other people. The concern continues on the present scene, where matters like aggression, intergroup hostility, group cohesiveness, self-evaluation, and the need for affiliation are ubiquitous in the research literature. For all its significance, however, there is no organized body of knowledge which can even pretend to cover the field of attraction and hostility. This partly owes to the enormous range and kind of human behavior encompassed by these terms. So great is the diversity of data that it is difficult to imagine a comprehensive taxonomy, much less an

integrated theoretical structure. In the face of this situation, I have become increasingly convinced that, rather than continue to formulate and deal with general concepts and models which vaguely explain almost everything under the sun, social psychology should somehow delimit and dimensionalize these phenomena. Theories developed to handle such relatively circumscribed data would be able to make a more detailed accounting of them. In addition, such low-level theories would be more easily modified and displaced than more abstract constructions, which are notoriously imperturbable.

In keeping with this idea, this book focuses on what appears to be a common denominator of a good many attraction and hostility measures—interpersonal and self-evaluation. No doubt even this is too general a domain to be handled by any single theory: What determines the evaluation of another's ability may differ from what determines the evaluation of his love of country. The risk here of an overgeneralization is, however, inordinately less than in the case in which the theory, by not specifying any universe of discourse at all, impliedly handles the whole of attraction and hostility and then some.

The current diffuseness of knowledge about attraction and hostility phenomena also requires a simplification of research methodology. Until our knowledge and technology are such that we can gain control over all relevant variables in single, decisive experiments, it appears necessary to test hypotheses by whole programs of relatively simple studies arranged in rational sequence. In principle, each successive study adds the information which was uncontrolled or found lacking in the preceding study. Of course, the step-by-step, programmed approach does not imply uniform designs in which identical operational measures are employed in every study. Indeed, it is probably the case that a variety of experimental arrangements and operational measures can strengthen and enrich a theory faster than a program completely homogeneous in these respects. At any event, the measures of interpersonal and self-evaluation used in the program of studies reported in this book are diversified. They include various quantitative ratings and "open-ended" verbal expressions

and communications, as well as choice behavior and button-pressing. There was no philosophical position such as “phenomenology” or “neobehaviorism” which governed the selection of such measures; we used those which were feasible and appropriate in the circumstances.

Despite the eminent plausibility of the research strategy we have pursued, there is no thought that the hypotheses tested are, in their present form, absolutely true and immortal. In contemporary social psychology, it is a fact of life that more than one theoretical interpretation can almost always be offered for any given experiment. What we have tried to do is to make certain interpretations, consistent throughout a body of interrelated experiments, more probable than others. The observation that it remains for future studies to pin conclusions down more precisely is not a hedge but an appraisal that, at the present time, we are at least as much engaged in isolating and sharpening variables as in establishing invariant laws.

The central thesis that interpersonal and self-evaluations are in part determined by a cognitive-validation process seems like an intuitively obvious proposition. After all, would it make sense to postulate a need to distort social and self-evaluations? Yet, it is equally obvious that many interpersonal and self-evaluations fly in the teeth of rationality as defined by generally accepted criteria. Then too, several findings derived from the assumption of a cognitive-validation need—for example, that under certain conditions, more severe ethical violations lead to *less* self-defensiveness, self-deprecating persons are liked, and individuals with high self-esteem attribute more of their unfavorable characteristics to others than those with low self-esteem do—are not readily classified as banal, common-sense observations. By exposing the workings of a validation mechanism in interpersonal relations and self-attitudes, we are not implying that man is rational in the sense of a philosophical typology or grand scheme about human nature. The point is that whether and to what extent any individual is observed to validate his evaluations of others or of himself depends upon the presence and strength of other determinants of such evaluations besides validation and

upon the validity criterion used—which, of course, may not be the same as the generally accepted one. The book is essentially a detailed analysis of the major forces underlying various interpersonal and self-evaluations.

It is my pleasure to acknowledge the considerable help I have received in carrying out the research reported in the book and in the preparation of the book itself. First, warm thanks are owed to my present and former graduate and undergraduate assistants, whose contributions include helping design experiments, conducting the studies, and analyzing the data: Frances Berger, Stanley Einstein, Ronald Feldman, David Gray, Allen Harris, Stephen Jones, Dr. Robert Kleiner, Dr. Donald Lauer, Dr. W. H. Wallace, and Dr. Abe Wolf.

I have profited from the criticisms and suggestions of several colleagues in social psychology who read early drafts of the manuscript. Especially helpful and constructive were Professors Theodore Newcomb, John Thibaut, and Harold Kelley. I have also gained much from conversations with European confreres about some of the ideas directly or indirectly dealt with by the book: Dr. Claude Faucheux and Dr. Jacques Ardoino of France, the late Professor Andrzej Malewski of Poland, and Dr. Guido Cohen of the Netherlands. Professor Herman Hutte (University of Groningen, Netherlands) to whose department I was attached as a Fulbright research professor, deserves thanks for the research facilities he generously made available to me. I should also thank my colleagues in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, who have created a climate for research which would be hard to match anywhere. And, like most social psychologists in the United States, I am enormously grateful for the support and encouragement of Luigi Petrullo of the Group Psychology Branch of the Office of Naval Research (ONR). Almost all of the studies reported in this book were done under contract with ONR, and it is not an exaggeration to say that without this support the work would never have been done. Finally, I want to acknowledge with profound gratitude the many contributions of my wife, Dr. Emmy Pepitone. Apart from providing sound critical advice and constant encourage-

ment, she conducted one of the experiments, helped with the data analysis of many studies, and worked with me at every stage in the preparation of the book.

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I Theoretical Considerations



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INTRODUCTION TO PART I

Attraction and hostility in a bewildering variety of forms seem to characterize every kind of human relationship. A man denounces his neighbor, a worker praises his foreman, a diplomat writes a negative evaluation of his assigned country, a husband and wife call each other vile names, union and management leaders excoriate the mediator, a boy and girl declare their mutual love, and an angry crowd threatens an integration leader.

It is generally agreed that such phenomena should be explained and made predictable by the behavioral sciences, but it is also inescapably clear that no theories, at present, can do the job. Perhaps one reason for the slow progress in the accumulation of precise knowledge is that theories have become so overgeneralized that they cannot easily be rejected. In attempting

to encompass a maximum range and diversity of data, concepts have had to be defined at rarefied levels of abstraction. As a result, flatly contradictory data are hard to come by. For instance, a cumulative look at the behavioral-science literature might well lead one to suppose that war, suicide, marital discord, juvenile delinquency, crowd hysteria, and many other phenomena are the direct consequences of "frustration." Although manifestly an oversimplified explanation, the concept of frustration has persisted tenaciously. Indeed, because of its apparent generality, the concept exudes an aura of scientific power and invincibility which has made it preferred to less abstract interpretations.

Furthermore, even though most prevailing theories are too general, their applications do not consistently range over the same domain of data. This means that rigorous comparisons as to their adequacy in handling given phenomena become difficult. For example, although intergroup and interpersonal hostility have not been neglected altogether, the group-dynamics approach to social psychology has been more concerned with the causes and consequences of interpersonal attraction. Individually oriented social psychology, on the other hand, has emphasized the study of aggression virtually to the exclusion of the attraction sector. The question arises—are there laws of aggression which are different from laws of interpersonal attraction, or can a single conceptualization cover both areas? To outline an answer to this question and to formulate the problem with which our experimental studies in Part II will be concerned, it will be useful to examine in some detail how the data of attraction and hostility have been conceptualized and explained by the major systematic approaches.

Chapter I examines the interpretations of group cohesiveness and individual aggression which, at least implicitly, are based upon highly general need-satisfaction or need-frustration models. Also considered within the satisfaction-frustration framework are interpretations of attraction and hostility data in terms of specific motivations, such as the need for status and security. In Chapter 2, several cognitive-consistency models which are relevant to attraction and hostility, including balance, congruity, and dissonance models, are described and evaluated in detail.

Finally, Chapter 3 analyzes a large variety of social behaviors which have been interpreted in terms of a specific cognitive motive or mechanism.

This survey of background theory strongly suggests that much of what lies in the vast and sprawling area of attraction and hostility can be interpreted as the reflection of a need in the individual to maintain a valid cognitive structure with respect to the valuation of himself and others. The experiments which form Part II of this book are devoted to testing the role and ramifications of this "cognitive-validation" need in a variety of attraction- and hostility-generating situations.

1 Need-Satisfaction and -Frustration Models

Of all the systematic approaches to social psychology, group psychology has concerned itself most directly with the data of interpersonal attraction. This approach conceptualizes attraction in terms of group cohesiveness. The *esprit* of military units, the morale of work groups, the level of community integration, the solidarity of the political left or right, the tight code of the underworld mob—these are all summarized by the term cohesiveness. Appropriate to this focus on group phenomena is the conceptual definition of cohesiveness which, according to Cartwright and Zander (1960), is “the resultant of all the forces acting on all the members to belong to the group” (p. 74). Although such a quantity exists only when a group exists, it is, as the definition implies, ultimately decomposable into the attrac-

tions which individuals have for the group. Indeed, the operational measures of cohesiveness most frequently used in research are based directly on *individual* acts and attitudes. A common index of cohesiveness is, for example, the frequency of "sociometric" choices—choices of friends or work partners made by individual group members among other group members or persons outside the group.

Although research applications of group cohesiveness have not dealt explicitly with the attraction of the individual for himself, such an aspect is implicit. If the individual is attracted to the group, it is not unreasonable to assume that, as a group member, some of the attraction is to himself. Presumably, to some extent, the conditions which affect the cohesiveness of the group affect the attitudes of the individual members toward themselves.

According to the group-dynamics conceptualization, the explanation of attraction is based both upon the needs of the individual and the characteristics of the group. Thus, if any motivation of an individual group member is held constant, his attraction to the group would theoretically vary with the amount of need satisfaction which the group can directly or indirectly mediate. The stronger the need which the group can satisfy, the greater the attraction. It has been customary to differentiate the various sources of need satisfaction provided by the group. The following classification is typical: Individuals are attracted to groups (or resist leaving them) because of the satisfactions derived from personal affiliation as such, because of the prestige gained through membership, because of the satisfactions provided by the group's achievement of its goals, or even more generally, because of the instrumental capacity of the group to mediate various social and nonsocial goals.

The need-satisfaction theory of cohesiveness has been stated at an extremely high level of generality and, thus, has the potential of great integrating power. From an empirical point of view, however, it is surely not known whether all social and nonsocial needs increase interpersonal attraction when satisfied by the group. Moreover, nothing in the formula predicts the