



# The Moderating Role of Implicit Self Esteem on Seating Choice



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## Background

- Previous research in our lab has found that people tend to sit closer to physically similar others in naturalistic and laboratory settings.
- One potential theoretical explanation for this involves attitudinal similarity; that is, people assume physical similarities indicate attitudinal similarities. For example, wearing glasses is often associated with numerous attitudinal stereotypes (intelligent, introverted, unathletic, etc., see Harris, Harris & Bochner, 1982; Harris, 1991). People often assume that attitudinally similar others will be less likely to reject them (Byrne, 1997), and as a result, tend to sit beside similar others (Mackinnon, Jordan, & Wilson, 2009).
- If the above is true, a person who is particularly sensitive to rejection should be even *more* likely to gravitate towards similar others.
- The literature has shown that people with low *explicit* self-esteem tend to be sensitive to rejection (c.f. Nezelek et al., 1997). It is reasonable that people with low *implicit* self-esteem might also be rejection sensitive and socially cautious. Implicit self-esteem can be conceptualized as preconscious, positive associations with the self-concept.
- The current study uses seating choice as an indirect measurement of liking and/or attraction towards persons wearing glasses.

**Hypothesis:** Participants will be more likely to sit beside others who are similar in glasses-wearing status when they are low in implicit self-esteem.

## Sample

- Data was collected from tables set up in public areas on campus at Wilfrid Laurier University.
- Thirty-nine people participated in this study.
- The sample was 48.7% male, with a mean age of 23.
- 28.2% of participants (N=11) were wearing glasses at the time of the study.

## Procedure

- Four chairs were present; two were occupied by confederates.
- The confederates were selected to be the same sex (female) and skin color (Caucasian) as well as similar in age and clothing style.
- On any given trial, one confederate was wearing non-prescription glasses and the other was not.
- Glasses wearing for the confederates, as well as the side each confederate sat on were counterbalanced across trials.
- We were interested primarily in which seat the participant chooses to sit, as well as the role of implicit self-esteem.
- Implicit self-esteem was measured after the participant chose a seat

## Materials

The Name Letter Preference Task (Jones, Pelham, Mirenberg & Hetts, 2001) was used as a measure of implicit self-esteem. It asks participants to rate how much they like each letter of the alphabet on a 9-point scale. Participant initials were collected in the demographic section, at the end of the study. People high in implicit self-esteem indicate that they like the letters in their own initials (first and last name only) more than people without those letters in their initials do. A difference score was calculated for the Name Letter Preference Task for each participant by taking the rating given to their first and last name initials, and subtracting the mean rating given to that letter by all other participants without that initial in their name.

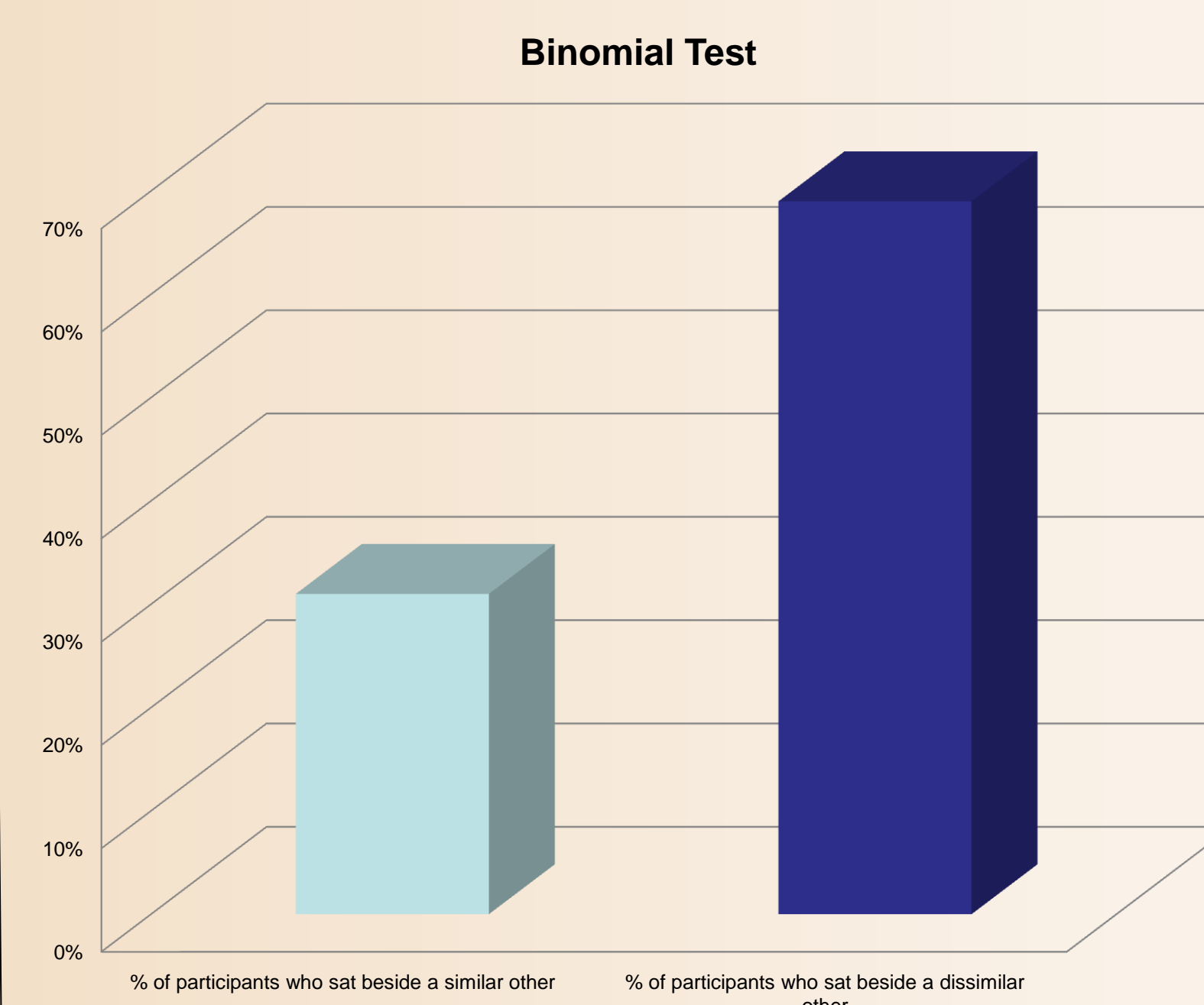
*Are persons low in implicit self esteem more likely to sit beside a confederate who is similar in glasses-wearing status?*

Binary Logistic Regression: Implicit SE predicting dichotomous seating choice (1 = Sitting beside similar other; 0 = Sitting beside dissimilar other):

B	Likelihood Ratio Test	P value	Odds Ratio
-0.56	6.757	.01	1.75

- This model was able correctly to classify 92.6% of persons who sat by a dissimilar person and 50.0% persons who sat beside a similar person, for an overall success rate of 79.5%, an improvement of 10.3% over the intercept only model.
- Each one-unit decrease in implicit self-esteem indicates that the respondent is approximately 1.75 times more likely to sit beside a person with similar glasses-wearing status.

## Results



*Are people more likely to sit beside a person similar in glasses-wearing status to themselves?*

- A simple binomial test revealed that people were *less* likely to sit by a person similar in glasses-wearing status (31%) than by a dissimilar person (69%) than expected by chance ( $p = .024$ ).
- This effect was not driven by glasses-wearing participants or non-glasses wearing participants exclusively.
- This effect is contrary to prior findings in our lab (i.e. Similarity attracts). It is possible that the forced choice paradigm used in this study taps something different than seating distance. More research is needed to fully understand these findings.

Take home message: As implicit self esteem decreases, the tendency to sit beside a similar person increases. Because most people tend to have high levels of implicit self esteem, we find an overall tendency for people to sit with a dissimilar person. We speculate that persons low in implicit self-esteem are more rejection sensitive, and as a result, they tend to sit beside persons who have a stronger physical resemblance.