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Abstract

Research has shown a general trend for people to choose friends and romantic partners who are similar in race, socioeconomic status, attractiveness, and physical appearance. The current study is interested in micro-level behaviors between strangers that might lay the groundwork for this tendency in more established relationships. Prior observational research in our lab revealed a general tendency for students to sit beside physically similar others within a naturalistic classroom setting. The current study expands on these naturalistic studies by examining the phenomenon within a laboratory setting. Specifically, we propose that participants will sit closer to a confederate who physically resembles them. In this study, participants came into the lab one at a time to join a female confederate posing as another participant. Photos of participants were coded for physical similarity to a confederate by independent coders. Attractiveness was also coded. Before a short social interaction with the confederate, participants placed their chair relative to the confederate. The distance between the chairs was measured once the participant left. Results showed that participants sat closer to the confederate as physical similarity to the confederate increased. This finding remained significant even when controlling for sex and race. Interestingly, participants also tended to sit closer to the confederate when they matched her level of attractiveness. Physical similarity and attractiveness similarity each accounted for unique portions of the variance when predicting seating distance in a multiple regression analysis. The implications of these findings for early relationship formation are discussed in the context of prior research.