



Physical similarity and attractiveness similarity predict seating distance



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Introduction

Social networks are more similar in race, socioeconomic status, attitudes, attractiveness, and physical appearance than expected by chance.^{1,2} We are interested in micro-level behaviors between strangers that might explain *why* people end up in relationships with similar others. We propose that people will sit closer to strangers who are more similar in physical appearance to themselves. As a result, people are more likely to form relationships with physically similar others by virtue of simple proximity.³

Prior literature on seating patterns has focused almost exclusively on matching based on race and sex⁴. However, observational research in our lab revealed a general tendency for students to sit beside physically similar others within a naturalistic classroom setting over and above sex and race⁵. The current study expands on these naturalistic studies by examining the phenomenon within a laboratory setting.

Hypothesis 1: Physical similarity to a stranger will be negatively related to seating distance. That is, the more physically similar people are to a stranger, the closer they will sit.

Hypothesis 2: This relationship will remain significant when controlling for attractiveness similarity, perceived similarity, sex and race.

Method

Participants: Seventy-two undergraduate psychology students participated. 76.1% were Caucasian, 69% were female, and 98.6% were between the ages of 17-20.

Method

Procedure: Participants came into the lab one at a time to join a female confederate posing as another participant. Before a short, video-taped social interaction with the confederate, participants placed their chair relative to the confederate. Following this short interaction, photographs of the participants were taken to be coded for physical similarity to the confederate and attractiveness. The distance between the chairs was measured once the participant left.

Measures:

Seating Distance. The number of centimeters between the participant's chair and the confederate's chair.

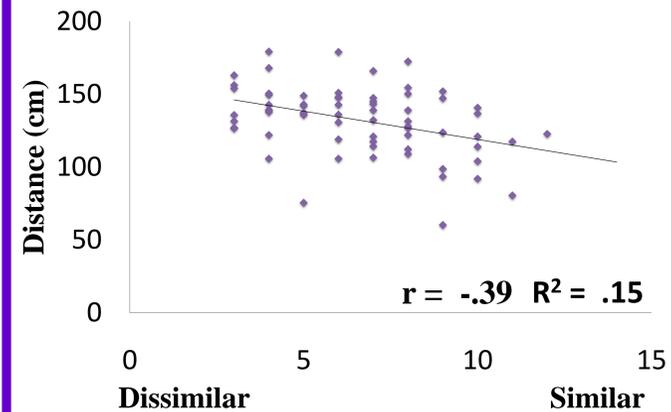
Physical Similarity ($\alpha = .76$). Three independent coders rated compared each participant's photo to the confederate, on a scale from 1 (Extremely Dissimilar) to 5 (Extremely Similar). Scores were summed into an average measure.

Attractiveness Similarity ($\alpha = .76$). Coders scored photos for overall physical attractiveness on a scale from 1 (Extremely Unattractive) to 5 (Extremely Attractive). To measure attractiveness similarity, we subtracted average ratings given to the participant from average ratings given to the confederate, and taking the absolute value. Low numbers = Higher Similarity.

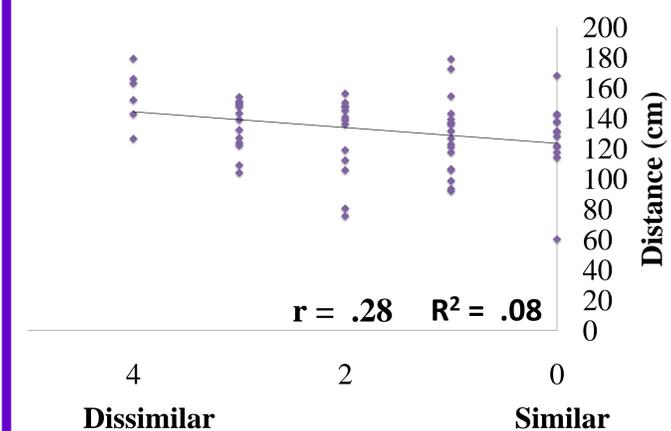
Perceived Similarity. Self-report on a 7-point scale: "Generally speaking, how similar in physical appearance were you and your partner to each other?"

Results

Physical Similarity Predicts Seating Distance



Attractiveness Similarity Predicts Distance



Multiple Regression: Physical Similarity Still Significant After Controls

Variable	B	SE B	β
Physical Similarity	-3.6	1.44	-.365*
Attract Similarity	4.28	2.18	.210†
Perceived Similarity	-0.91	1.99	-0.055
Sex	-3.25	5.63	-0.066
Race	3.26	7.56	0.06
R ²			.211**

† p < .06 * p < .05 ** p = .01

Conclusion

Participants sat closer to a confederate when there was stronger physical resemblance. This finding remained significant even when controlling for attractiveness, sex, race and perceived similarity.

By consistently choosing to sit closer to physically similar others, people put physical space between themselves and dissimilar others. As a result of simple proximity, people may have greater opportunities to form a relationship with physically similar others, while decreasing their opportunities to form relationships with dissimilar others.

This simple process may contribute to the homogeneity in physical appearance observed in personal relationships overall.

Works Cited

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