Sex Differences in the Generalization of Attraction

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The effects of intergroup evaluations on intragroup attraction were assessed in a situation involving two-person teams that were all of the same sex. Male (N = 123) and female (N = 118) group members separately reported their political views to another dyad and then received either unfavorable, favorable, or no feedback regarding their team as a whole on the basis of this information. The results indicated that females evidenced more anger in response to the out-group’s unfavorable feedback than did males. These anger responses were related to attraction toward a teammate for males but not for females. Moreover, males evidenced less attraction toward an in-group member after receiving unfavorable rather than favorable intergroup evaluations, whereas females did not. On the other hand, only for females was attraction toward a teammate related to the perceived similarity of that individual within experimental conditions. Apparently, the greater cognitive orientation of females as compared to males toward another in-group member resulted in their being less susceptible to the influence of situationally induced affect.

The acquisition of attraction to social stimuli has often been conceptualized in terms of basic principles of S-R conditioning (Staats & Staats, 1958; Byrne & Clore, 1970; Lott & Lott, 1974). According to the reinforcement-affect model of attraction (Clore & Byrne, 1974), any social stimulus having reinforcement properties can function as an unconditioned stimulus (UCS) to evoke an implicit affective response (UCR). This response, which is assumed to vary along an unpleasant–pleasant subjective continuum, can

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3It should be noted that the views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect those of the Army or any other government agency. 
become associated with any discriminable stimulus (CS) in the situation. As a result of this conditioning process, a previously neutral stimulus (e.g., a person) can come to evoke an affective response (CR), and this response may mediate other overt reactions to the stimulus such as verbal reports of attraction. In short, environmental conditions that possess reinforcement properties can induce an internal feeling or mood state which mediates overt evaluative behavior.

To test the validity of this interpretation, it is necessary to construct conditions in which there is only a temporal association between the person to be evaluated (i.e., the CS) and the unconditioned stimulus. Griffitt and Guay (1969) conducted such a test by having subjects of both sexes relate original stories about TAT cards to a Rater and Observer all of the same sex. The expressed function of the Rater was to assess the creativity of each story, while that of the Observer was unrelated to this evaluation process. After unfavorable or favorable creativity ratings had been administered, the Storyteller also received from either the Rater or the Observer an attitude survey that expressed views which were moderately similar to his (her) own. The attraction of Storytellers toward the moderately similar individual varied only as a function of the favorability of the creativity ratings and did not depend on whether or not that person was responsible for them. Thus, in theoretical terms, support was derived for the conditioning of attraction hypothesis but no evidence was found for the ability of individuals in these circumstances to discriminate between different sources of affect.

The conditioning of attraction effect was replicated (McGinley & McGinley, 1972) in a situation involving female Storytellers who had visual contact with the Observer but not the Rater. Storytellers were given various proportions of favorable creativity ratings (.25, .50, or .75) that were communicated to the Observer as well. The subject then evaluated herself and the other two participants (also female) along dimensions related to attraction (likeability and desirability as a work partner). As in the Griffitt and Guay (1969) study, attraction toward all three target persons varied only as a function of the proportion of positive reinforcements administered and not according to responsibility for them.

Conditioning and discrimination effects were both demonstrated in an experiment by Bleda (1976). Participants in each session of this study consisted of 3 two-person teams of the same sex that were not in visual contact with one another. Each team member separately conveyed his (her) political views to one of the other dyads (Evaluating Group). The latter group then rated the former either favorably or unfavorably along a series of evaluative dimensions (e.g., sincerity). No feedback was received from the third (Control) team which also was rated by the Evaluating group. The feedback was found to influence attraction toward both groups but this