

## MY ENEMY'S ENEMY IS MY FRIEND<sup>1</sup>

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An experiment was performed to explore the generality of the proposition that people like those who punish their enemies and reward their friends. Results indicated that the attractiveness of a person who punishes one's enemy or rewards one's friend is not limited to situations which provide indications of attitude similarity, gratitude, or social support. Specifically, the experiment was designed to show that this phenomenon occurs in spite of the fact that the situation was arranged so that: (a) The stimulus person's behavior in no way suggested that his attitudes were similar to those of S; (b) the stimulus person was clearly unaware of S's relationship to the latter's enemy or friend—thus he was not trying to help S; and (c) it was clear that S and the stimulus person would have no opportunity to meet and gain any social benefit from sharing a mutual friend or enemy. Methodologically, the possibility of bias was reduced by using separate Es, who were partially blinded as to treatment, and a 3rd person (similarly blinded) to collect the dependent-variable data.

It makes sense to assume that, all other things being equal, if two people discover that they share a common enemy, their mutual attractiveness will increase. This proposition is a simple derivation from balance theory (Heider, 1958). But such a situation may consist of one or more underlying factors. For example, if I know nothing about the reason why another person dislikes my enemy, I might assume that we dislike him for the same reasons and, therefore, that we share similar beliefs and attitudes. Thus, suppose that Person X's most outstanding characteristic is that he is a pompous ass, and I dislike him for it. If I learn that Person Y also dislikes X, I might assume that Y dislikes X for the same reason. A similarity of beliefs and attitudes has been shown to increase attractiveness (Byrne, 1961; Newcomb, 1961). Accordingly, I might like X because I feel that we both dislike people who exhibit "pompous assiness." Second, I might believe that this other person dislikes my enemy because he knows that I dislike him. This would suggest that my enemy's enemy likes me. Since people generally like

those who like them (Aronson & Linder, 1965; Backman & Secord, 1959), I might come to like him. Finally, this relationship may have certain concrete practical advantages. Specifically, if I dislike X and I discover that Y dislikes X also, I may feel that it is conceivable that Y and I might band together and beat X up or plot strategy against him or at least engage in some satisfying malicious gossip. Thus, I might like Y purely because he can do me some tangible good.

One may wonder whether the above criteria are essentially for the phenomenon to occur. For example, suppose X behaved harshly to me. If Y behaved negatively to X, would I increase my liking for Y even if (a) he were unaware that X had behaved harshly toward me, (b) his nasty behavior toward X was inspired by a totally different set of events, and (c) there was no opportunity for us to socialize and commiserate? For example, if X had insulted me at a cocktail party, and 2 weeks later I noticed a police officer (Y) issuing a summons to X for a traffic violation, would that police officer become dear to my heart? The authors' guess is that he would. It is the authors' contention that Heider's proposition is a general one, not limited to such mediating events; that is, there is something good about seeing one's enemy punished—in and of itself. Conse-

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quently, it is predicted that individuals will like their enemy's punisher even if the two events are noncontingent and unrelated, that is, even if the punisher's behavior implies neither attitude similarity nor utility. By the same token, individuals will come to like a person who rewards someone who treated them kindly—even if the two events are noncontingent and unrelated.

## METHOD

### *General Overview*

The general procedure involved placing the subject in a situation in which he was treated either harshly or pleasantly by an experimenter and then allowing the subject to overhear the experimenter being treated either harshly or pleasantly by the latter's supervisor. The subject was then given an opportunity to express his feelings for the supervisor. It was obviously essential that the supervisor's evaluation of the experimenter be separate from and unrelated to the experimenter's evaluation of the subject.

### *Subjects and Design*

The subjects were 40 male and 40 female introductory psychology students at the University of Texas. They were randomly assigned to one of four conditions designed to test the hypothesis: pleasant experimenter-pleasant supervisor, pleasant-experimenter-harsh supervisor, harsh experimenter-pleasant supervisor, harsh experimenter-harsh supervisor.<sup>2</sup>

### *Procedure*

The subjects volunteered for participation in a study of creativity. When the subject arrived, the experimenter<sup>3</sup> led him into a cubicle and introduced himself as a graduate student who was assisting Dr. Cope in his creativity project. The experimenter explained that the purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between creativity and college performance. He informed the subject that he would present him with a series of three pictures and that the subject's task would be to write a story about each picture—what the situation is, what led to the situation, what the people are thinking or feeling, and what they will do. The subjects were told that they would have only 4 minutes to write each story.

After the subject had written a story, the experimenter silently read it and marked it with various

<sup>2</sup> In actuality, 86 subjects were run. Because of suspiciousness, 2 subjects were discarded in each of Conditions 2, 3, and 4, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Two different experimenters were used in the experiment. They ran an equal proportion of subjects in all conditions; the results were not influenced by the identity of the experimenter.

coded grading signals. During his reading of each story and after the reading of all three stories, the manipulation of either pleasant experimenter or harsh experimenter was put into effect. In order to reduce opportunities for bias, the experimenter was kept ignorant of the condition in which the subject was to be run until this point in the experiment. This was determined randomly. When it was essential to ensure equal numbers of subjects per condition, the senior author determined the condition of each subject in advance and handed the experimenter a folded slip of paper before each subject was run. The slip contained the word "harsh" or "pleasant." After delivering the initial instructions and while the subject was writing the first story, the experimenter simply reached into his pocket, unfolded the paper, and determined the subject's condition. Thus, the initial instructions were delivered in ignorance of the subject's condition. At this point the manipulation commenced.

*Harsh condition.* While he read each story, the experimenter occasionally emitted a displeased and condescending grunt, sigh, or grumble. After reading all three stories, the experimenter stated that although the final scoring was not completed and would take more time he would give the subject a tentative evaluation. He then proceeded to tell the subject that his stories were unimaginative and uncreative. The evaluation was given starkly and somewhat brutally, with no punches pulled. The experimenter acted as if he enjoyed making these negative statements.

*Pleasant condition.* In this condition the evaluation was essentially the same. The experimenter told the subject that although the final scoring was not completed and would take more time he would give the subject a tentative evaluation. He then told the subject that his stories were uncreative and unimaginative. But in this condition the experimenter treated the subject very gently. Specifically, he told him not to be too worried about it—that although the test was a good measure of creativity, it was only one test. In short, although the experimenter told the subject that according to his analysis of the test results the subject was uncreative, he let the subject down gently rather than harshly; he allowed the subject to save face.

A few seconds before the experimenter finished his evaluation, he casually leaned against the door of the testing room and rubbed his foot against the air vent. This served as a signal to the "supervisor" who, although waiting some distance from the door, was able to see it move. After waiting a few seconds, the supervisor knocked on the door, entered, excused himself for interrupting, told the experimenter that he must talk to him for a moment, and asked the experimenter to step into the hall. The experimenter stood up and introduced the supervisor to the subject. The supervisor shook hands with the subject and escorted the experimenter into the corridor.

Although they were careful to close the door behind them (so as not to arouse the subject's suspicions), the situation was such that the subject

could easily overhear their conversation through the air vent at the bottom of the door.

At this point the second variable was manipulated: the supervisor's treatment of the experimenter. Half of the subjects were randomly assigned to the pleasant-supervisor condition, half were randomly assigned to the harsh-supervisor condition. The conversations in each condition are presented in that order below:

I read that report you wrote for me, and, well, I think it's one of the finest analyses of the articles I've seen in a long, long time. In particular, I thought you made an excellent selection of references. I don't think I could have done a better job myself—and I know that area pretty well! Also, I think I'll make up another copy of your paper so I can show it to my other research assistants as an example of the sort of work I want from them and just as an example of good, creative work. Uh, I'm on my way to see the department chairman right now and, well, because I'm so impressed with the sort of work you've been doing here, I'm going to ask him if we can get you an increase in salary. Well, I have to run now so you can get back to your subject.

I read that report you wrote for me, and I think it's, well, virtually worthless. It's sloppy and somewhat stupid. I can see no logical reason for using the references you cited. They have absolutely no relevance to the topics you were supposed to write about. I have an idea you were just using those references as filler material. Well, there's a lot of irrelevant material, and the quality and the organization are both very poor. OK, I'm going to give you a couple of days to do it over. As a matter of fact, I'm on my way right now to see the department chairman, and I'm going to ask him if there's anyone else we have who could replace you if you continue to do bad work. OK, I've got to run now so you can get back to your subject.

After he had been "evaluated," the experimenter reentered the room with a gloomy face if he had been negatively evaluated and a smile if positively evaluated. He told the subject that that was all they had time for and instructed him to go upstairs to the psychology office where the secretary would give him credit for the experiment.

It should be noted that at the time the supervisor was acting either harshly or pleasantly to the experimenter, the supervisor was ignorant as to whether the experimenter had been pleasant or harsh to the subject. Similarly, while the experimenter was acting either pleasantly or harshly to the subject, the experimenter was unaware as to whether the supervisor was about to treat him pleasantly or harshly. Thus, since an interaction is being predicted, this technique of "partial ignorance" effectively guards against the systematic bias described by Rosenthal (1966). For a greater elaboration of the applicability of this partial ignorance technique, see Aronson and Carlsmith (1968).

*Dependent variable.* The dependent variable was administered by the departmental secretary who was, of course, ignorant of the subject's experimental condition. As she prepared to give the subject credit for participation in the experiment, she said that she had a request to make on behalf of the supervisor of the experiment the subject had just participated in. After ascertaining that the subject recalled having met the supervisor, she proceeded to tell him that he (Dr. Cope) was spending 1 year at the University to do research for the National Science Foundation. In regard to a different project he was directing, she continued, the National Science Foundation had recently informed him that he must use a different body of subjects taken from the local community instead of the college students he had been using as subjects. The result was that the supervisor needed hundreds of nonuniversity people within the next 2 weeks and that the job of contacting people and convincing them to volunteer was enormous. She said that the supervisor did not have the staff to do this work, and he could not afford to pay for it; he was really desperate and needed a favor. Specifically, he had requested that she ask anyone to help him by making phone calls. She said that she had a long list of several thousand phone numbers randomly selected from the Austin telephone directory. She asked:

Would you be willing to help Dr. Cope by making some phone calls and asking people to serve as subjects? Other people have volunteered to call anywhere from 2 to 50 people—would you be willing to help him out?

The number of phone calls served as the dependent variable, being a reflection of the positive feelings the subjects held for the supervisor.

After the subject made his decision, the secretary thanked him. She then handed him a short questionnaire which she introduced as a departmental questionnaire designed to determine the effectiveness and viability of the departmental requirement that all introductory psychology students serve as subjects. The significant item on the questionnaire was an evaluation of the experimenter. The secretary was ignorant of the subject's experimental treatment while she was soliciting his aid in making phone calls and administering the questionnaire. Thus, the inevitable minor variations in her tone and manner could not have had a systematic effect on the results.

After the subject completed the questionnaire, Dr. Cope entered the office and debriefed him. Because all of the subjects had received a rather negative evaluation, they were delighted to learn that the evaluation was preprogrammed rather than an accurate reflection of their creative ability.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before presenting the primary data, it is necessary to determine if the major manipulation worked: Did the subjects like the harsh

experimenter less than the pleasant experimenter? Recall that the subjects were asked to complete a series of rating scales which were introduced as a departmental questionnaire aimed at determining their reaction to the experiment. Included in this questionnaire was a direct evaluation of the experimenter: "How much did you enjoy working with the experimenter?" The results indicate that the manipulation was effective. Subjects were more favorably disposed to the experimenter in the pleasant conditions than in the harsh conditions ( $p < .005$ ).<sup>4</sup>

The hypothesis was that the subject would like his enemy's enemy more than his enemy's friend, and that he would like his friend's friend better than his friend's enemy. Specifically, it was predicted that the subject would volunteer to make the most phone calls as a favor to the supervisor if the latter had acted either harshly to the experimenter who treated the subject harshly or pleasantly to the experimenter who had treated the subject kindly. The results are presented in Table 1. Inspection of the table reveals that the subjects were willing to make more phone calls for a supervisor who was his enemy's enemy than for one who was his enemy's friend. Similarly, subjects were willing to make more phone calls for a friend's friend than for a friend's enemy. The data were analyzed by analysis of variance (Table 2). The prediction is reflected in the interaction between the experimenter's behavior toward the subject and the supervisor's behavior toward the experimenter. The interaction is highly significant ( $p < .005$ ). Separate contrasts were performed between the harsh supervisor and the pleasant supervisor within the pleasant-experimenter condition and between the harsh supervisor and the pleasant supervisor within

<sup>4</sup> A rather interesting serendipitous finding should be reported. Specifically, there was an interaction between the sex of the subject and the behavior of the supervisor as it affected the liking of the subject for the experimenter ( $p < .005$ ). Generally, males tended to like the experimenter if he was pleasantly treated by the supervisor; females liked the experimenter better if he was harshly criticized by the supervisor, irrespective of how the experimenter behaved toward the subject. This may reflect a tendency for women to be more nurturant and/or less impressed by success than men.

TABLE 1  
MEAN NUMBER OF PHONE CALLS VOLUNTEERED  
ON BEHALF OF SUPERVISOR

<i>E</i>	Supervisor	
	Harsh	Pleasant
Harsh	12.1	6.2
Pleasant	6.3	13.5

the harsh-experimenter condition. Both were significant ( $p < .05$ ). As expected, there were no main effects due to the behavior of the experimenter or the behavior of the supervisor. Likewise, neither sex of the subject nor the identity of the person playing the role of experimenter affected the results to a significant degree.

The results, then, would seem to indicate that a person's hostility toward our enemy or pleasantness toward our friend is, in and of itself, sufficient to bring about an increase in our liking for him. In the present experiment, as far as the subject was concerned, the supervisor was unaware of the fact that the experimenter had been kind or unkind to the subject. Thus, the supervisor's treatment of the experimenter could in no way be construed as being caused by the experimenter's treatment of the subject. In addition, it was clear that the supervisor's reasons for being nice or nasty to the experimenter were unrelated to the subject's reasons for liking or

TABLE 2  
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

Source	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
<i>E</i> 's evaluation (A)	12.03	.12
Supervisor's evaluation (B)	8.53	.09
Sex of S (C)	122.00	1.26
Identity of <i>E</i> (D)	1.00	.01
A×B	816.40	8.42*
A×C	4.03	.04
A×D	140.83	1.45
B×C	48.13	.50
B×D	128.13	1.32
C×D	.40	.00
A×B×C	49.40	.51
A×B×D	25.20	.26
A×C×D	17.63	.18
B×C×D	.53	.00
A×B×C×D	143.00	1.47
Error	96.95	

\*  $p < .005$ ,  $df = 1/64$ .

disliking the experimenter. The subjects liked or disliked the experimenter because he was either kind or harsh during their encounter. On the other hand, the supervisor rewarded or punished the experimenter for his prior performance on a written report which had no relevance to the nature of the experimenter's behavior to the subject. Moreover, the vast difference in status between the subject and the supervisor made it extremely unlikely that the two would ever discuss their mutual feelings about the experimenter.

At the same time, it should be noted that all alternative explanations have not been ruled out. Although the subject and the supervisor clearly dislike the experimenter for different reasons, it is conceivable that the supervisor's negative evaluation of the experimenter could have had an effect on the impact of the experimenter's negative evaluation of the subject; that is, in the harsh-supervisor conditions, the supervisor told the experimenter that he wrote a poor report. This could imply that the experimenter is stupid and incompetent. If the subject had just received harsh criticism from a person, learning that he (that person) is stupid and incompetent could reduce the impact of this harsh treatment. Consequently, it is possible that the subject came to like the supervisor who treated the unpleasant experimenter harshly, not simply because we like people who punish our enemies, but, more specifically, because we like people who help us believe that a person who judged us harshly may be a stupid and incompetent person, and that, consequently, his harsh judgment may be erroneous. This alternative explanation is unlikely, however, because it is not symmetrical; that is, it does not apply in the pleasant experimenter-pleasant supervisor condition. Recall that, like the harsh experimenter, the pleasant experimenter rated the subject as uncreative—his manner was simply more pleasant as he made this negative evaluation of the subject. Consequently, when the pleasant supervisor implied that the pleasant experimenter was intelligent and competent, he was, in effect, offering support to the experi-

menter's evaluation of the subject as an uncreative person. In short, if we like someone because he questions the intelligence of someone who has recently judged us as uncreative, then we should have discovered a main effect due to the behavior of the supervisor. The fact that the data show a clear interaction and significant contrasts sharply reduces the plausibility of this alternative explanation.

The results suggest that balance theory applies in a behavioral context even in the absence of specific opinion similarity; that is, the data indicate that: (a) We like someone who likes someone that we like; (b) we like someone who dislikes someone we dislike; (c) we dislike someone who likes someone we dislike; and (d) we dislike someone who dislikes someone we like. This follows even though it is clear that the respective reasons for liking or disliking the target person are unrelated. The primary contribution of this experiment, then, is in the demonstration that the basic proposition of balance theory is true in a very general sense and is not limited to situations which are mediated by other phenomena, for example, by specific opinion similarity.

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