Similarity in the Communication Skills of Young Adults: Foundations of Attraction, Friendship, and Relationship Satisfaction

BRANT R. BURLESON and WENDY SAMTER

The current paper reports a study assessing how similarities in levels of social-cognitive and communication skills affected friendship choices by young adults. Participants (208 college students) completed a battery of tasks providing assessments of one social-cognitive and five communication skills. Sociometric procedures were used to determine interpersonal attraction and friendship patterns. Results indicated that participants were attracted to peers having social skill levels similar to their own. In addition, pairs of friends had similar levels of communication skills related to the expression and management of emotional states. Moreover, pairs of friends having low levels of communication skills were just as satisfied with their relationships as were pairs of friends having high levels of skills. The results are viewed as consistent with a "rewards of interaction" analysis of the effects of similarity on interpersonal attraction.

Communication scholars have long been interested in factors that promote interpersonal attraction (see Duck & Pittman, 1994). Many early studies on attraction processes conducted by communication researchers (as well as others) were influenced by Byrne's (1971) effectance-arousal analysis of the role played by attitudinal similarity in interpersonal attraction. Byrne's work has been extensively criticized in recent years by communication scholars (e.g., Sunnafrank, 1991) and others (e.g., Berscheid, 1985). Criticisms of this work have led to several alternative analyses of the effects of similarity on interpersonal attraction.

One of the more intriguing alternatives to the effectance-arousal model has become known as the rewards of interaction model (e.g., Berscheid, 1985; Davis, 1981). Whereas Byrne's model focused on how perceived similarities influence attraction, the rewards of interaction account emphasizes the attraction-enhancing effects of actual similarities in certain cognitions and behaviors. Rewards-of-interaction theorists argue that actual similarities in certain attitudes, values, interests, and behaviors enhance the quality of interpersonal interactions, thus rendering them more rewarding for participants. Further, the rewards of interaction account sensibly maintains that people will be more attracted to and more likely to form close relationships with those whom they enjoy interacting. Thus, the rewards of

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interaction account sees certain similarities as fostering enjoyable interactions which, in turn, promote attraction and relationship development.

The rewards of interaction account has been developed in the communication discipline by Burleson and his colleagues (e.g., Burleson, 1995; Burleson & Samter, 1994). Since social skills are fundamental to interactional success, persons with similar levels of social skills should enjoy interacting with each other more, and hence should be more attracted to each other, than persons with dissimilar social skills. In particular, similarities in levels of interpersonal cognitive complexity (a key index of social-cognitive development; see Burleson, 1987) and functional communication skills (the abilities through which people accomplish practical goals such as comforting, persuading, and informing others; see Applegate, 1990) may lead to more enjoyable interactions, and hence relationship development.

Level of social skill development reflects, in part, what people find interesting and important in interpersonal relationships and social interactions. For example, compared to persons with less developed social-cognitive and communication skills, high-skilled interactants see social situations in more complicated ways, emphasize the affective and relational features of social relationships, value skills used for the expression and management of affect, and are more likely to engage in disclosures focusing on personalities and dispositions (see the review by Applegate, 1990). In contrast, low-skilled interactants see social situations in less complicated, more straightforward ways, emphasize the instrumental and status aspects of social relationships, value skills used for accomplishing instrumental objectives, and are more likely to engage in disclosures focusing on external activities and events than on personalities and dispositions. Thus, level of social skills influences (a) the types of the conversational topics people find interesting in unstructured situations, (b) the characteristics of others that are noticed and attended to, and (c) the features of social situations and relationships that are viewed as important.

The differences between low- and high-skilled persons suggest that the highly skilled are likely to enjoy interactions with other highly skilled persons more than interactions with the less skilled (and vice versa for low-skilled individuals). Interactions between those having similar skills are more likely to be experienced as interesting, stimulating, fun, and enjoyable whereas interactions between those having dissimilar skills may be experienced as boring, obnoxious, strained, awkward, and uninteresting. The enjoyability of social interactions should impact directly on attraction to interactional partners. Hence, persons having similar levels of social skills, who are expected to have more enjoyable interactions, should be more attracted to each other than to persons of dissimilar skill levels.

The hypothesis that similarities in levels of social-cognitive development are associated with interpersonal attraction, relationship formation, and relationship satisfaction has, thus far, been the focus of only limited research. For example, in two studies Burleson, Kunkel, and Szolwinski (in press)
found that college students were more attracted to both strangers and dating partners having similar levels of cognitive complexity. In several short-term longitudinal studies, Neimeyer and his associates (e.g., Neimeyer & Mitchell, 1988) found that persons having similar levels of cognitive complexity were more likely to develop friendships with each other than with those having dissimilar levels of cognitive complexity. Burleson and Denton (1992) found that spouses exhibited a moderate degree of similarity in their cognitive complexity levels, while Neimeyer (1984) found that couples similar in cognitive complexity were more satisfied with their marriages than couples having dissimilar complexity levels. In sum, a growing body of findings supports the idea that similarity in cognitive complexity enhances attraction, relationship development, and relationship satisfaction.

Very few studies have examined the extent to which persons with similar levels of functional communication skills are attracted to one another. Budeson and Denton (1992) found that spouses were similar in their levels of perceptual accuracy (a message reception skill) and communication effectiveness (a message transmission skill). In a study of elementary school children, Burleson (1994) found that classmates having similar levels of social-cognitive and functional communication skills were more likely to be attracted to one another and form friendships with each other than with classmates who were less similar.

Thus, there is only sparse evidence directly supporting the notion that similarities in levels of social skills enhance interpersonal attraction. In particular, few studies have examined the extent to which young adult friends exhibit similar levels of cognitive complexity, and no research to date has assessed the extent to which young adult friends manifest similarity in levels of functional communication skills. Thus, the present study was undertaken in the effort to replicate and extend the results of previous work examining social skill similarity among partners in close personal relationships. Specifically, we hypothesized:

**H_1:** Young adults will be attracted to peers having levels of cognitive complexity similar to their own.

**H_2:** Young adults will be attracted to peers having levels of functional communication skills similar to their own.

**H_3:** Pairs of young adult friends will have similar levels of cognitive complexity.

**H_4:** Pairs of friends will have similar levels of functional communication skills.

One implication of hypothesizing that friends will have similar levels of social skills is that friendships among pairs of low-skilled individuals should be just as satisfying for those involved in them as friendships among pairs of high-skilled individuals. This implication is, admittedly, at variance with the common notion that good (i.e., highly developed) social skills facilitate the development of satisfying friendships. Nonetheless, Burleson and Denton (1992) found that marital partners having similarly low levels of social skills were no less satisfied with their marriages or their spouses than marital partners having similarly high levels of skills. We thus posed a research question asking whether low-skilled friendship pairs are less satisfied with
their relationship than high-skilled pairs. Although a direct measure of satisfaction with specific friendships was not obtained in the present study, an assessment of loneliness was obtained. For young adults, self-reported degree of loneliness is a good index of overall satisfaction with interpersonal relationships (Russell, Peplau & Cutrona, 1980). Further, research indicates that persons having as few as one "good" friend are significantly less lonely than persons lacking such a friend (see Samter, 1994). It seemed reasonable, then, to treat self-reported loneliness as an index of satisfaction with the friendships examined in the present study. Thus, the specific research question addressed by this study was:

RQ1: Will friends with similarly low levels of communication skills be less satisfied with their relationships (i.e., more lonely) than friends with similarly high levels of communication skills?

Further, the similarity-attraction hypothesis suggests that friends having similar levels of social skills (whether low or high) should be more satisfied with their relationships than friends who have dissimilar skill levels. This reasoning suggested a final hypothesis:

H3: Friends having similar levels of communication skills will be more satisfied with their relationships (i.e., less lonely) than friends having dissimilar levels of communication skills.

METHOD

Participants

The data reported here were originally collected as a part of a larger investigation focusing on determinants of peer acceptance in a group living situation (see Samter, 1989). This focus made fraternities and sororities an especially attractive subject pool. The participants in the study were students attending a large public university in the American midwest. Two fraternities and two sororities were involved in the project with a total of 208 students participating in the study (102 males and 106 females); in each house, the participation rate exceeded 80%. As is typical in much of the "Greek" system, the fraternity and sorority houses on the campus at which the study was conducted were racially segregated; hence, all participants in the current study were white. The mean age of the sample was 20.52 years.

Procedures

Interpersonal cognitive complexity. A two-role version of Crockett's (1965) Role Category Questionnaire (RCQ) was used to assess interpersonal cognitive complexity. Participants provided separate, written descriptions of a liked and a disliked peer. Each impression was scored for the number of interpersonal constructs it contained according to procedures summarized by Burleson and Waltman (1988). The index of interpersonal cognitive complexity was formed by summing the number of constructs contained in each impression. Coding reliability was assessed by having two independent judges score the RCQs completed by a subsample of participants (N = 25).
interater reliability, as assessed by intraclass correlation, was .95. The extensive evidence supporting the reliability and validity of RCQ assessments of cognitive complexity is summarized by Burleson and Waltman (1988).

**Message elicitation.** Five communication skills were studied: comforting skill, conflict management skill, persuasive skill, and two aspects of ego-support skill—celebratory skill and encouraging skill. Considerable theoretical and empirical work indicates that these skills play important roles in the friendships of young adults (see Burleson & Samter, 1994). Moreover, college students report that they value affectively oriented communication skills such as comforting, conflict management, and ego support in their friends (Burleson & Samter, 1990). To assess these skills, message samples were elicited through responses to hypothetical situations. For example, to elicit comforting messages, participants were asked how they would respond to a friend who (a) had just been dropped by the person he/she had been dating for a long time, (b) had failed an important test for which he/she had studied a great deal, and (c) had just found out he/she had lost the competition for a major academic scholarship.¹

**Message coding.** After unitizing,² data were content analyzed with hierarchically organized coding systems. The systems for coding conflict management and ego support were developed specifically for use in the current study. Systems for coding comforting and persuasive responses were adapted from other work and chosen because extensive evidence documents their reliability and validity (see Burleson, 1987). All of the hierarchies contained three major divisions. In general, the hierarchical ordering of the divisions reflected the extent to which the listener's perspective was focused upon and adapted to. In comforting, a high level of adaptation is manifest when the speaker acknowledges, elaborates, and legitimizes the other's feelings. In persuasion, a high level of adaptation occurs when the speaker demonstrates how a request benefits or meets the goals of the listener. Highly adapted conflict management strategies legitimize the other's identity as an autonomous, rational, and well-intended person. Finally, well-adapted messages in both ego support systems elaborate how specific attributes of the listener can help him/her accomplish a particular endeavor. Thus, high levels of adaptation in celebratory ego support occur when the target is given credit for the success (as opposed to crediting external sources such as luck, God, or low task difficulty); in encouraging ego support, adaptation occurs when the speaker suggests special characteristics and abilities that uniquely qualify the target for the challenging task at hand. Detailed presentations of these coding systems available in several sources (see Samter, 1989; also see Burleson, 1987). Data were coded by trained assistants; reliability assessments were obtained by having the assistants both code approximately 20% of the messages elicited for each skill. The following interrater reliabilities, as assessed by Cohen's *kappa*, were observed: .83 for comforting and persuasion, .79 for conflict management, .86 for celebratory ego support, and .83 for encouraging ego support.³
A general index of affectively oriented communication skill was created by summing standardized scores for the four communication skills focused on the management of affective states (comforting, conflict management, and the two forms of ego support). A principal components analysis showed these four measures to be unidimensional; a single factor was extracted by the analysis (eigenvalue = 1.92), with the loadings for the measures ranging from .66 to .73. In spite of the unidimensionality of these communication skill measures, the internal consistency for this four-component measure was only moderate (.64).

Assessment of attraction and friendship. Each participant was asked to name the three people in the house he/she “most liked.” Participants were regarded as “attracted” to those they nominated for the “most liked” role. Positive nominations were also used to identify friendship pairs. If an individual named by the participant as “most liked” reciprocated this nomination, the two were considered a friendship pair. Reciprocal nominations have been employed frequently to identify mutual friends within closed social systems such as classrooms and adult residential units (e.g., fraternities and sororities), and substantial evidence support the reliability and validity of this procedure (see Bukowski, Hoza, & Newcomb, 1994; Hays, 1989; McGuire & Weisz, 1982).

Assessment of loneliness. The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell et al., 1980) was employed to assess participants’ feelings of loneliness. This self-report inventory consists of 20 Likert-type items tapping how often respondents experience certain thoughts and feelings (e.g., “I lack companionship” “There are people I can turn to”). Extensive research has demonstrated the reliability and validity of this instrument (see Russell et al., 1980). In the current study, reliability and dimensionality analyses indicated that 14 of the 20 original items should be retained. Internal consistency of these 14 items was .87, as assessed by Cronbach’s alpha. Scores were summed over the 14 items and then converted to standard scores.

RESULTS

Similarity in Social Skills and Interpersonal Attraction

Hypothesis 1 predicted that persons would be attracted to those having a similar level of cognitive complexity, and Hypothesis 2 predicted that persons would be attracted to those having similar levels of communication skills. To test these hypotheses, the skill levels of each participant’s nominees for the “most liked” category were averaged. These average skill levels were then correlated with participants’ skill levels. The resulting matrix of 49 correlations (7 skill indices for each participant x 7 skill indices for the average of the “most liked” nominees) is reported in Table 1.

The correlations reported in Table 1 strongly support the notion that persons are attracted to those having levels of social skills similar to their own. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, participants’ levels of cognitive complex-
Table 1: Correlations between Subjects' Social Skill Levels and the Average Skill Levels of Their "Most Liked" Nominees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Indices</th>
<th>&quot;Liked&quot; Nominees' Social Skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COGCOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COGCOM</td>
<td>.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMF</td>
<td>.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMGT</td>
<td>.28***</td>
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<tr>
<td>EGO1</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>EGO2</td>
<td>.19**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERS</td>
<td>-.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFFECT</td>
<td>.34***</td>
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</tbody>
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Note: Ns range from 185 to 196. COGCOM = cognitive complexity, COMF = comforting skill, CMGT = conflict management skill, EGO1 = celebratory ego support skill, EGO2 = problem-solving ego support skill, PERS = persuasion skill, AFFECT = affective communication skill index.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

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TABLE 2
Correlations Between Friends' Levels of Social Skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>COGCOM</th>
<th>COMF</th>
<th>CMGT</th>
<th>EGO1</th>
<th>EGO2</th>
<th>PERS</th>
<th>AFFECT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COGCOM</td>
<td>.14†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMF</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMGT</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.28***</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGO1</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGO2</td>
<td>.12†</td>
<td>.13†</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERS</td>
<td>-.12†</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.33***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFECT</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.33***</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.17*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.33***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Ns range from 120 to 135. Coefficients on the diagonal are intraclass correlations; those below the diagonal are Pearson correlations. COGCOM = cognitive complexity, COMF = comforting skill, CMGT = conflict management skill, EGO1 = celebratory ego support skill, EGO2 = problem-solving ego support skill, PERS = persuasion skill, AFFECT = affective communication skill index.

that observed for the attraction analysis, and thus provide support for Hypothesis 4. Low to moderate positive correlations (ranging from .15 to .35) were observed between an individual's skill levels and those of his or her friends. This suggests that participants were not only attracted to, but also formed friendships with, others whose skills in comforting and conflict management were similar to their own. As in the attraction analysis, friends did not have similar levels of persuasion skill. Nor were their levels of ego support skills significantly associated.

Similarity in Communication Skills and Relationship Satisfaction (Loneliness)

The research question asked whether pairs of friends with low levels of communication skills would be less satisfied with their relationships (i.e., more lonely) than pairs of friends having high levels of communication skills. To address this question, groups of low-skilled and high-skilled friend pairs were created. A median split was performed on the index of affective communication skill; this index combined standardized scores on the comforting, conflict management, and ego support skill assessments. Low-skill friend pairs were defined as those where both partners scored below the median on the affective communication index (A' = 37). High-skill pairs were defined as those where both partners scored above the median on the affective communication index (A' = 35). Finally, mixed-skill pairs (A' = 40) were those where one partner scored above the median on the affective communication index while the other partner scored below the median. Friends' standardized scores on the UCLA Loneliness Scale were summed and then restandardized to provide a dyadic measure of relationship satisfaction; a high score thus indicated a high degree of loneliness within the dyad. A t-test comparing the mean dyadic loneliness score for the low-skilled friend
pairs \( M = -0.12, SD = 1.037 \) with the mean loneliness score for the high-skilled pairs \( M = -0.10, SD = 0.947 \) found that the two groups did not significantly differ, \( t(70) = 0.07, p > .90 \). Thus, pairs of low-skilled friends were no more lonely than pairs of their high-skilled counterparts.

The final hypothesis of the study (H5) predicted that pairs of friends having similar levels of communication skills would be more satisfied (less lonely) in their relationships than friend pairs where the partners had dissimilar skill levels. To test this hypothesis, the low-skill and high-skill friend pairs were combined into a single group of similarly skilled friends. A t-test comparing the mean dyadic loneliness score for similarly skilled friends \( (M = -0.11, SD = 0.998) \) with the mean loneliness score for the mixed-skill group \( (M = 0.24, SD = 1.013) \) supported Hypothesis 5: Mixed-skill dyads reported significantly higher levels of loneliness than similarly skilled dyads, \( t(110) = 1.635, p = .052 \) (one-tailed test).

**DISCUSSION**

The results of this investigation extend our understanding of the role social skills play in the formation and development of young adults' relationships with peers. One set of analyses examined social skill similarity between participants and their most liked others; nominating someone as "most liked" indicates attraction to that individual. A second set of analyses examined social skill similarity between participants who reciprocated one another's most liked nominations; reciprocal liking nominations suggest a friendship between two individuals. There were some minor differences in the overall pattern of associations observed in our "attraction" analysis and our "friend pair" analysis. For example, participants' levels of cognitive complexity and ego support skills were more similar to those to whom they were attracted than to those with whom they shared a reciprocated friendship. Mostly, though, the differences between the attraction and friendship analyses were negligible, and our discussion therefore centers on general trends observed for both the attraction and friendship analyses.

The moderate correlation observed between a person's cognitive complexity and the cognitive complexity level of his or her most liked others indicates that participants were attracted to peers who functioned at a similar level of social-cognitive development. Cognitive complexity indexes the number and quality of cognitive structures through which persons interpret the thoughts, behaviors, and emotional states of others (see Burleson & Waltman, 1988). Thus, individuals who are highly differentiated conceive of people and relationships in more abstract and psychological ways than individuals who are less highly differentiated. As some authors have noted (e.g., Burleson, 1994; Duck & Pittman, 1994), interacting with others who do not share a similar cognitive bent on the social world may be frustrating. Research shows that differences in construct system development are manifest in the conversational topics people prefer (e.g., Delia, Clark, & Switzer, 1979), the forms of communication they value in others (Burleson & Samter, 1990), and styles of conversing (e.g., Kline, Hennen, & Farrell, 1990). Those whose
interpretations of others center on abstract and psychological features may view as shallow or superficial encounters with people whose interpretations are more concrete or role-based. Conversely, those with relatively concrete and simple systems of interpersonal constructs may view highly complex individuals as obsessive, overly analytical, and boring. Thus, as Dweck (1981) suggested, similarity in level of social-cognitive development appears to significantly influence who people perceive as desirable social companions and with whom they form friendships. Viewed in conjunction with the findings of previous studies examining the cognitive complexity levels of relationship partners (e.g., Burleson, 1994; Burleson & Denton, 1992; Burleson et al., in press; Neimeyer & Mitchell, 1988), the current results add credence to the notion that similarity in social-cognitive development is an important factor contributing to interpersonal attraction and relationship development.

In addition to possessing similar levels of social-cognitive skill, individuals were attracted to and formed friendships with others possessing similar levels of communication skill. Interestingly, however, it was only similarity in those communication skills concerned with the management of others' emotions (comforting, conflict management, and ego support) that had a bearing on attraction and friendship. Similarity in level of persuasion skill had no consequences for attraction or friendship formation.

A plausible explanation for these findings can be derived from studies exploring young adults' friendship expectations and activities. Considerable research on developmental changes in friendship conceptions and expectations indicates that by college age, friends are viewed as those with whom one exchanges intimacies, shares important parts of the self, reciprocally provides emotional support, and explores feelings (e.g., Tesch, 1983). Moreover, research examining the activities in which friends engage suggests that when young adults are together they talk about themselves, their relationships, and their feelings (e.g., Aries & Johnson, 1983). Thus, the discussion of feelings, hopes, plans, achievements, and worries is not only something young adults expect from their friends, it is also a primary activity in which they engage. The current results provide an interesting extension of the work on friendship conceptions and activities: It is not simply the capacity of two people to talk about feelings, hopes, expectations, etc., that matters in a relationship; rather, it is the capacity to talk about these matters in a similar way and on a similar level that promotes interpersonal attraction and friendship formation.

The current study also found that pairs of friends with similarly low levels of communication skills were no more lonely than pairs of friends with similarly high levels of skills; this finding replicates a similar result obtained by Burleson and Denton (1992) in their study of married couples. These results support the notion that low-skilled individuals seek each other out as relationship partners, rather than being "left to each other" as a function of highly skilled persons choosing to interact with only like-skilled partners. Thus, it appears that those with highly developed social skills are not
necessarily the partners of choice for all persons. This finding is consistent with recent critiques of the social skill literature (e.g., Parks, 1995) suggesting that many persons may not subscribe to the “ideology of intimacy” so popular in some areas of the social sciences.

Moreover, we found that friend pairs having similar skill levels (whether low or high) were significantly less lonely than friend pairs having dissimilar skill levels. The measure of loneliness used in the current study assessed general loneliness rather than dissatisfaction with a specific relationship; hence, the current results may systematically underestimate the influence of skill similarity on relationship satisfaction. Nonetheless, these findings suggest that the loneliness-buffering effects of friendship (see Samter, 1994) may be strongest for friends having similar skill levels. Indeed, interacting with a friend who has a substantially different skill level may be unsatisfying and stressful, and thereby exacerbate feelings of loneliness.

Although this study detected several significant (and interesting) similarities in the social-cognitive and communication skills of those who were attracted to and formed friendships with one another, the magnitudes of these relationships were only moderate. This suggests that neither interpersonal attraction nor friendship formation is solely a function of social skill similarity. It is also possible that the comparatively modest correlations observed in this study are, in part, due to the social skills we chose to examine. Research (e.g., Hays, 1989) suggests that in addition to managing feelings and massaging egos, friends are expected to be sources of entertainment, fun, and diversion. If initiating and maintaining relationships is as much rooted in the everyday activities of casual conversation, telling jokes, and sharing stories as it is in the sharing of emotional intimacies, then similarity in more general conversational and narrative skills may be significant predictors of attraction and friendship.

Finally, the possibility remains that similarity in skill levels is an outcome of relationship development rather than a causal engine driving it. Against this view, studies have found that similarities in cognitive complexity do not increase over time for either dating partners (Burleson et al., in press) or married couples (Burleson & Denton, 1992). Nonetheless, there is a need for longitudinal studies assessing individuals' social skills before acquaintance (i.e., at the beginning of their tenure in a fraternity or sorority), determining whether people subsequently become friends with those having similar skill levels.

ENDNOTES

1. A complete list of the situations used to elicit messages from participants for each of the skills assessed is available from the first author on request.
2. Guetzkow's U was employed to obtain an estimate of unitizing reliability. This index is based on the number of disagreements observed among coders; thus, a small number indicates high reliability. Four coders evaluated 38 protocols containing a total of 403 units. Guetzkow's U for pairs of coders ranged from .00 to .005. The average U observed was .003.
3. For comforting and conflict management, indices were formed by averaging scores across the three situations for each skill. Considering the small number of items used, acceptable
internal consistencies, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha, were observed (.69 for comforting and .60 for conflict management). Indices of ego support skill were separated into two measures: one consisted of a participant's average score on the two celebratory situations and the other consisted of his or her score on the encouraging ego support situation. Finally, responses to only one hypothetical situation were retained to assess subjects' levels of persuasive ability.

4. Relying on reciprocal nominations within closed systems may not capture participants' closest or most important friendships. Thus, the magnitudes of the correlations observed between the skill levels of participants may actually underestimate the magnitude of the correlation between skills levels of closer or more intimate friends (assuming the association between similarity in skill levels and intimacy is linear). There are two reasons why we believe our procedures obtained samples of relatively close friend pairs in the current study. First, fellow members of fraternities and sororities constitute a likely pool from which residents would draw friends. Second, the dyads we identified as friend pairs also rated each other as very liked. Participants in the study rated their degree of liking for each of their three sociometric nominees on seven-point scales; the average liking rating was 6.9.

5. To be included in this analysis, each participant in each friendship dyad needed to respond to all hypothetical situations for each communication skill assessment. Only 112 of the 135 friendship dyads met this strict inclusion criterion; in the other 23 dyads, there was at least some missing data.

REFERENCES


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