

## Current Problems and Resolutions

Under this heading are brief reports of studies that increase our understanding of compelling social problems, bring us somewhat closer to a solution, and show promise of transcending their own origin in the Zeitgeist. These Notes consist of a summary of the study's procedure and as many details about the results as space allows. Additional details concerning the results can be obtained by communicating directly with the author.

## The Relative Effects of Competence and Likability on Interpersonal Attraction

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**ABSTRACT.** Undergraduate students in Singapore ( $N = 80$ ) learned about the competence (low vs. high) and likability (low vs. high) of a future interaction partner and indicated their attraction toward that stranger. The effect of likability was two times as large as that of competence. Because of the additive effects of the two manipulated factors on attraction, the authors interpreted the preference for lovable fools over competent jerks as an outcome of a generalized supremacy of likability over competence.

**Keywords:** attachment, attraction, emotions

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PEOPLE ADMIRE AND LIKE OTHERS, and the loci of naive admiration and liking, argued Heider (1958), are in the head and the heart, respectively. Research on person cognition has further confirmed two such dimensions (e.g., Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005; Singh, Ho, Tan, & Bell, 2007), showing that admiring is an acknowledgment of someone's competence whereas liking is affective involvement with that person.

Although researchers have looked at how people judge the competence and likability of strangers on the basis of descriptions of the strangers' personality traits (Singh & Teoh, 2000) and attitudes (Singh & Ho, 2000), the relative effects of the competence and likability dimensions on interpersonal attraction remain unexplored. Because competence sometimes mediates the information–attraction link (Singh et al., 2007), it is theoretically important to know the relationship between competence and likability.

If competence is the sole mediator of the information–attraction link, then there should be supremacy of competence over likability (Hypothesis 1). However, Casciaro and Lobo's (2005) finding that likability is more important than competence in social settings (e.g., in choices of teammates in organizations) suggests that attraction should be driven more by likability than competence (Hypothesis 2). Casciaro and Lobo ensured neither the direction of causality nor the comparability between the levels of competence and likability they used. By crossing the same low and high levels of competence with those of likability, we tested the plausibility of Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Participants were 80 students from the National University of Singapore. They examined the relative standings of a same-gender stranger in two normal distributions of competence (i.e., general intellectual capability) and likability (i.e., how much others enjoyed being around that person). We developed partner descriptions from a 2 (order of information: competence-then-likability vs. likability-then-competence)  $\times$  2 (competence: low vs. high)  $\times$  2 (likability: low vs. high) factorial design ( $n_s = 10$  per cell). For checks on the manipulations, participants first rated the stranger's competence and likability on 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*lowest*) to 7 (*highest*). Participants next formed an impression of the stranger and judged him or her on a 10-item attraction scale (Singh, Ng, Ong, & Lin, in press). Responses yielded an internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of .85, and we averaged the responses to yield an attraction score (1 = *lowest*; 7 = *highest*) for each participant.

A 2 (manipulated level: low vs. high)  $\times$  2 (information: competence vs. likability) between-within analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the perceived manipulations obtained only the high–low difference,  $F(1, 78) = 302.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .80$ , confirming the comparability of the levels manipulated. In an ANOVA of attraction as the dependent variable, the effect of likability,  $F(1, 72) = 57.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .44$ , was nearly two times as large as that of competence,  $F(1, 72) = 22.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .24$ , supporting Hypothesis 2. Hence, the lovable fool (attraction score:  $M = 4.54$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) was rated higher than was the competent jerk (attraction score:  $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ),  $t(38) = 2.10$ ,  $p = .02$ .

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We propose that this preference for lovable fools (high in likability but low in competence) over competent jerks (low in likability but high in competence) results from a generalized supremacy of likability over competence. Because both competence and likability had additive effects, the information–attraction link agrees with the hypothesis of multiple mediators (Singh et al., in press).

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