[Deflecting Reactance: The Role of Similarity in Increasing Compliance and Reducing Resistance](#)

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Abstract:
On the basis of the approach–avoid dynamics assumed by reactance theory (S. S. Brehm & J. W. Brehm, 1981) and other models (E. S. Knowles & J. A. Linn, 2004), it was predicted that interpersonal similarity can reduce reactance by increasing compliance and by reducing resistance. A communicator's similarity to the participant was manipulated by identical first names and birthdays (Experiment 1) and by congruent values (Experiment 2). People then read essays in which the communicator did or did not threaten their attitudinal freedom. Threats caused boomerang effects only when the communicator's similarity was low or unknown. When the communicator was highly similar to the participant, people agreed strongly, regardless of threat. Similarity increased the force toward persuasion by increasing liking, and it decreased the force toward resistance by making the message seem less threatening. Implications for reactance theory and for resistance to persuasion are discussed.

Article:
Sometimes, social influence backfires (J. W. Brehm,1966; S. S. Brehm &Brehm, 1981). Social influence can threaten people's freedom to decide autonomously, to form their own opinions, to hold various attitudes (or none at all), and to do what they feel free to do. When people think that a freedom is threatened they experience *reactance*, a motivational state aimed at restoring the threatened freedom (J. W. Brehm, 1966). One way to bolster a threatened freedom is to exercise the freedom—people thus seek censored activities, show "boomerang effects" in response to threatening messages, and choose forbidden decision alternatives (J. W. Brehm & Cole, 1966; J. W. Brehm & Mann, 1975).

Congruent with reactance theory, a large literature shows that social influence is more successful when it does not threaten important freedoms (S. S. Brehm &Brehm, 1981; Wicklund, 1974), yet, according to the theory, threats to freedom do not inevitably reduce compliance. The theory suggests conditions in which people will comply with threatening messages, although few experiments have examined these conditions. After reviewing the theoretical basis for persuasion in the face of threats to freedom, this article describestwo experimentsthat show how interpersonal similarity can overcome resistance to persuasion in threatening influence contexts.

DEFLECTING REACTANCE
How can reactance be prevented in the face of threats to freedom? The answer comes from the approach–avoid dynamics of social influence assumed by *reactance theory*, which proposes that influence attempts create forces to comply and forces to react (S. S. Brehm &Brehm, 1981). As Worchel and Brehm (1971) contended, "Social-influence threats to freedom ... create a combination of positive and negative forces, and the resultant behavior is a function of these opposing forces" (p. 303). Viewing reactance and compliance as products of conflicting forces implies several ways of overcoming resistance to persuasion (see Knowles & Linn, 2004). First, acting on either force independently will affect compliance. A communicator can increase the positive force toward compliance, perhaps by increasing his or her credibility or attractiveness. Conversely, the communicator can re-duce the negative force by undermining resistance (Davis & Knowles, 1999). Second, affecting both forces simultaneously—increasing the positive force and decreasing the negative force—should sharply affect compliance. Relative to the first two methods, it causes the largest shift in the resultant ratio of positive to negative forces.

When a communicator delivers a message that contains a threat to freedom, the message creates a positive force to comply as well as a stronger force to react. If the negative force is reduced so that the forces are equal, then no attitude change will appear—the person will show neither enhanced agreement nor disagreement. If the negative force is substantially reduced, so that the positive force outweighs the negative force, then the person will comply. The analysis of positive and negative forces organizes ways of deflecting reactance in the face of threats to freedom. Some methods for deflecting reactance increase the positive force; other methods decrease the negative force. Committing people to interact with the communicator in the future (Pallak &Heller, 1971), for example, increases the force toward compliance. Anticipated interaction, by affecting liking and the need to interact harmoniously, should increase the reasons for compliance. Methods based on reducing resistance include makingpeople feel incompetent to exercise a freedom (Wicklund & Brehm, 1968); having people exercise a freedom prior to the threat (Snyder & Wicklund, 1976), thus reducing the perceived magnitude of the threat; increasing the anticipation of regret that would follow reactance (Crawford, McConnell, Lewis, &Sherman, 2002); and seeing another person reassert the threatened freedom, thus reducing the threat to one's own freedom by implication (Worchel & Brehm, 1971).

SIMILARITY AND REACTANCE

An untested method for reducing resistance involves interpersonal similarity. Unlike other methods, which affect the positive or the negative force, high similarity might simultaneously affect both positive and negative influence forces. If so, then similarity should be a particularly potent method of overcoming reactance in the face of threats to freedom. Similarity increases the positive force toward compliance by increasing liking (Byrne, 1971, 1997). Attraction to the communicator is a well-known force toward compliance. Liking another person increases the tendency to like objects that the other person likes (Heider, 1958). Similarity also enhances the communicator's credibility, which further increases the force toward compliance. As Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) remarked,

An individual is likely to feel that persons with status, values, interests, and needs similar to his own see things as he does and judge them from the same point of view. Because of this, their assertions about matters of which the individual is ignorant but where he feels the viewpoint makes a difference ... will tend to carry special credibility. (p. 22)

Similarity should decrease the negative force toward resistance by influencing perceptions of the degree of threat. Similarity and liking profoundly affect social perception—people interpret the actions of liked others in positive, flattering ways. In an early study of similarity (Kelley &Woodruff, 1956), students at a progressive college listened to a recorded speech advocating a return to conventional teaching practices. Throughout the speech, the audience would clap, indicating approval of the communicator's arguments. When students thought that the audience consisted of faculty members from their college, they faced an inconsistency: A group they liked supported a position they disliked. These people changed their impressions of the communication to be more consistent with their own view and with the view of their group. They viewed the speaker's arguments as more progressive, relative to a group believing the audience consisted of community members from another town.

Furthermore, people make flattering attributions for the actions of liked others. Regan, Straus, and Fazio (1974) found that people made internal attributions for a liked person's success and external attributions for a liked person's failure. Research on interpersonal closeness and attribution shows similar findings (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot,1998). People blamed distant others, but not close others, for the dyad's failure: Closeness increased liking, and liking reduced attributions for failure (cf. Campbell, Sedikides, Reeder, &Elliot, 2000). Other research shows that liked others are spared the blame for one's own failure (Silvia &Duval, 2001). After failing a creativity task, people made attributions to the self and to the group members who created the task. People who made self-serving attributions pinned the blame on the disliked group members; the liked group member, however, was not blamed for the individual's failure.

Taken together, research suggests that similarity can have multiple effects relevant to deflecting reactance. First, similarity can increase the positive force toward compliance by increasing liking for the communicator. Second, similarity can reduce the negative force toward resistance by fostering positive interpretations of the communicator's actions, particularly the degree of threat in the message. If people seethe similar person's message as being less threatening, then the force toward resistance is less strong. By amplifying the positive force and reducing the negative force, similarity could be particularly effective at creating compliance in the face of threats to freedom.

EXPERIMENT 1

In Experiment 1, people encountered a communicator who varied in similarity. In one condition, people had a highly similar communicator who shared their birthday, first name, gender, and year in school. In another condition, people had a less similar communicator who did not share any of these features. In a third condition, people received the message without getting any information about the communicator. People then received a message that did or did not threaten their freedom to hold a different attitude. Agreement with the communicator was then measured. When similarity is low or unknown, threats to freedom should reduce agreement with the communicator's position. When similarity is high, however, reactance should be averted; people will agree with the communicator even when the message is threatening.

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 62 undergraduates (19 men and 43 women) enrolled in Introduction to Psychology at the University of Kansas (KU) volunteered to participate and received credit toward a research participation option. Each person was randomly assigned to condition in a 3 (similarity: high, low, unstated) × 2 (threat to attitudinal freedom: high, low) between-subject factorial design, using randomized blocks of six. Separate blocking sets were used for each gender, ensuring similar proportions of men and women in each cell.

Procedure

A male experimenter greeted the participant and led him or her to a private room. On entering the room, the participant could see two tables: a small table with a chair, and a larger table against the opposite wall. The larger table contained three file folders marked with big numbers. The experimenter explained that the study was the second part of a two-semester study on personality, reading, and writing. Last semester, several hundred participants had presumably completed a battery of personality scales and wrote three essays. During the present semester, the researchers wanted to collect information on reading and personality. The participant expected to complete a series of personality scales, read the three essays written by a single person from the previous semester, and give impressions and opinions about the essays. Participants were assured of anonymity (Wright &Brehm, 1982); they expected to seal their questionnaires in an envelope and place it into a box full of envelopes.

The participant's attention was drawn to the three file folders on the opposing table; these folders ostensibly containedthe essays. Three essays were used to divert suspicion from the "first essay," which was the only essay people actually read. Expecting to read several essays was intended to increase potential reactance through implied threats—if the first essay threatens attitudinal freedom, people might expect the remaining essays to assail other freedoms. To divert suspicion further, the experimenter said that three types of essays—opinion, imaginative, and factual—were collected, and the participant would randomly receive one person's set of essays from the set of several hundred different people.

Participants read apage-long description of the study and then completed a brief "Background Items" questionnaire said to be "included in all of our studies." This survey asked for the participant's first and last names, gender, date of birth, home state, year in school, major, and favorite hobbies. Afterward, the experimenter re-entered the room and gave the participant the "Personality Questionnaire" that allegedly assessed the aspects of personality thought to be relevant to reading and writing; the questionnaire contained filler

scales. The experimenter took the participant's informed consent form, the page describing the study, and the Background Items sheet before leaving the room.

Similarity manipulation. While the participant completed the personality questionnaire, the experimenter (who had been unaware of condition assignments before this point) went to a nearby control room, consulted a random assignment chart, and prepared the similarity manipulation. The experimenter made a Background Items sheet describing the person whose essays the participant would ostensibly read. In the *high similarity* condition, the communicator shared the participant's first name, birthday, gender, and year in school (the last two being necessitated by the first two) and had Kansas as the home state, was in the 1st year at KU, put "still unsure" when asked for a major, and listed "hanging out with friends, watching movies, cycling, guitar" as hobbies. Perceiving similarity on names and birthdays has the same general effects as perceiving similarity on more important dimensions (Brown, Novick, Lord, &Richards, 1992; Miller, Downs, &Prentice, 1998). In the *low similarity* condition, the communicator did not share the participant's first name, birthday, or gender. Instead, participants encountered "Dean Tesser" or "Diana Tesser," who was born January 7, 1982; all other information (home state, hobbies) was the same as in the high-similarity condition. In the *unstated similarity* condition, no information was given about the communicator. This final condition was included to see if merely having information about the communicator mattered.

Threat to attitudinal freedom manipulation. The sheet containing the similarity manipulation was stapled on top of a second sheet, which contained the communicator's "first opinion essay." To maximize reactance, I used a topic that nearly all university students would endorse. Threatening attitudinal freedom creates more reactance when people agree with the communicator's position (Worchel &Brehm, 1970; Wright, 1986). When people disagree, the mere fact of disagreement establishes their freedom to hold a contrary attitude and thus reduces reactance (S. S. Brehm &Brehm, 1981).

In the *high threat* conditions, participants received the following essay:

Well, for my first opinion essay I want to write about the attitude that KU has about the students. *I know I will persuade you about this.* In their rush to satisfy the faculty, staff, alumni, and the sports and business communities, KU has forgotten an important group, the students. Sometimes it seems like students are second-class citizens here. Who gets the worst parking spots? When the faculty and staff demand higher salaries, who foots the bill? When sports fans flood the campus for sporting events, who can't get a parking space (or sometimes even drive onto campus) to use the libraries or computer facilities? And the close ties between KU and big businesses, like Coke and credit card companies, are also a little strange. The university certainly gets money by allowing corporations to sell and market to students; what do the students gain? I think that KU needs to remember its primary purpose: promoting excellent education. *I know you agree with my opinion. In fact, you're really forced to agree because KU students can't have differing opinions on this issue*.

The italicized sentences are the threatening elements; they were not italicized in the study. In the low-threat condition, participants received the same essay without the italicized sentences. Adding coercive statements to a communication is one of the most widely used threat manipulations in reactance research (see S. S. Brehm & Brehm, 1981).

Recall that the participants thought the first essay was already sitting in a folder on the other table in the experimental room. Making the person believe that the communicator's demographic information and essay had been sitting in the room the whole time was intended to avert suspicion about the similarity manipulation. The experimenter needed a covert way of switching the dummy folder in the room for the new folder containing the similarity and threat manipulations. The experimenter placed the new folder, which was identical to the dummy folder, behind his clipboard. When the participant opened the door, the experimenter entered and asked him or her to place the questionnaire in an envelope to ensure anonymity. While the participant spent a few seconds folding the questionnaire, the experimenter switched the folders. The switch was done covertly via a "slate switch" (Annemann, 1983). From the participant's perspective, the experimenter entered, gave an envelope, retrieved the folder marked *1*, and placed it onto the participant's desk.

The experimenter opened the folder and removed the questionnaire. In the high- and low-similarity conditions, the first sheet contained the Background Items sheet for the fictional communicator; there was no top sheet in the unknown-similarity condition. The experimenter justified the information by noting that "people find it helps to have a bit of information about the person's background when judging their writing"; he also asked the participant to mark whether the participant knew the person, as a way of forcing attention to the person's information and further justifying the information's presence. The experimenter asked participants to go over the background information, read the essay on the next page, and then answer the questions following the essay. The main dependent measure was "How much do you agree with the author?" on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Participants then put their questionnaires into envelopes to ensure anonymous responses. After probing for suspicion or prior knowledge of the experiment, the experimenter debriefed the participants.

Results and Discussion
Did high similarity enable persuasion in the face of threats to freedom? Initial analyses found no differences between the low- and unstated-similarity conditions, so subsequent analyses collapsed them into a single low-similarity group. A 2×2 factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a significant main effect of similarity, $F(1, 58) = 21.02, p < .001$; no effect of threat ($F < 1$); and a marginal interaction, $F(1, 58) = 2.64, p < .11$. The overall ANOVA was followed up with planned contrasts that tested the central predictions.

The data in Table 1 show the effects of similarity and threat on agreement with the communicator. When similarity was low, people in the low-threat condition agreed more than people in the high-threat condition, $t(58) = 2.04, p < .046$. This replicates the standard reactance effect. When similarity was high, however, people in the low- and high-threat conditions agreed equally ($t < 1$). Similarity had a strong effect on agreement. When threat was low, people agreed more with the similar communicator than with the dissimilar communicator, $t(58) = 2.03, p < .05$. When threat was high, people still agreed more with the similar communicator than with the dissimilar communicator, $t(58) = 4.48, p < .001$. This shows persuasion in the face of threats to freedom.

Experiment 1 demonstrates both reactance and compliance. Threatening messages reduced agreement relative to normal messages, but only when similarity was low. When similarity was high, threats to freedom did not create reactance. In fact, the threatening-and-similar communicator did not merely "do no harm" or avert disagreement—this communicator was effective. People agreed with the threatening-similar communicator as much as they agreed with the unthreatening-similar communicator; people agreed with both communicators close to the ceiling of the scale.

TABLE 1
Effects of Threat to Freedom and Similarity on Agreement: Experiment 1

	Low Similarity		High Similarity	
	Low Threat	*High Threat*	*Low Threat*	*High Threat*
M	4.95	4.19	5.90	6.18
SD	1.19	1.21	1.44	.87
n	20	21	10	11

Note. Means can range from 1 to 7; higher values represent higher agreement. The low-similarity condition reflects the collapsing of the low-similarity and unknown-similarity conditions.

EXPERIMENT 2
Experiment 1 supported the basic predictions about similarity and reactance. Experiment 2 extended the first study by examining the underlying dynamics in more detail. It is presumed that similarity increases reasons for compliance and decreases reasons for resistance. In particular, (a) similarity should increase liking, which is a force toward compliance, and (b) similarity should promote seeing the threatening message as less threatening, which reduces the force toward reactance. To test these predictions, Experiment 2 included measures of liking and perceived threat to freedom. Experiment 2 thus enabled a conceptual replication of Experiment 1 as well as analyses of whether similar communicators were liked more and seen as less threatening.

The interaction effect in Experiment 1 was marginally significant, perhaps because of the subtle manipulation of similarity. Experiment 2 thus used a stronger similarity manipulation. Participants ranked 10 values on the basis of personal importance and then encountered a communicator with a nearly identical or a nearly opposite value ranking. Personal values, as an important dimension of similarity, should enable a strong manipulation of similarity and a large effect of similarity on attraction (Byrne, London, & Griffitt, 1968; Byrne &Nelson, 1964, 1965). Furthermore, replicating Experiment 1 with a different manipulation demonstrates the generality of similarity's effects on reactance.

Method

Participants and Design

A total of 50 undergraduates (27 women and 23 men) from KU and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) volunteered to participate and received credit toward a research participation option. Each person was randomly assigned to condition in a 2 (similarity: high, low) × 2 (threat to attitudinal freedom: high, low) between-subject factorial design, using randomized blocks of four. Separate blocking sets were used for each gender, ensuring nearly equal proportions of men and women in each cell. Two participants were excluded—one was highly suspicious, and the other did not follow the procedure—leaving a total of 48 participants.

Procedure

The procedure was identical to Experiment 1, with a few exceptions. Participants ranked 10 values (equality, happiness, justice, peace, true friendship, power, exciting life, accomplishment, freedom, and creativity) in terms of personal importance. The experimenter made a bogus values survey for the fictional communicator while participants completed filler scales. In the *high similarity* conditions, the communicator had a nearly identical value ranking; the first and last ranks were always identical, and the participant's top and bottom three values always appeared in the communicator's top and bottom three. In the *low similarity* conditions, the communicator had a nearly opposite value ranking.

After reading the communicator's values, people completed a "First Impressions Scale," actually Byrne's (1971) attraction measure. This measure of liking has two items, embedded within some filler items: "If you met, how much do you think you would like this person?" and "Overall, how positive or negative does this person seem?" Participants then read the persuasive communication. The same opinion essay was used, but it was reworded slightly. First, all of the threatening elements appeared at the end of the essay. This was done in the unlikely event that threats at the start of a message introduce unknown confounds associated with message processing. Second, for participants from UNCG (approximately 25% of the sample) the essay read *UNCG* instead of *KU*.

After reading the essay, participants completed a short questionnaire. Agreement with the communicator was measured with one item: "How much do you agree with the author?" Three items measured the perceived coerciveness of the communication: (a) "The essay writer was trying too hard to persuade me," (b) "The essay writer was trying to keep me from making up my own mind about the topic," and (c) "The essay writer was 'pushy.'" The final item was a manipulation check for the similarity manipulation: "Overall, how similar are you to the author?" All questions used 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from *not at all* to *very much*.

Results

Initial analyses found no significant effects involving gender or the location of data collection, so these variables are not discussed further. The descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 2.

Manipulation Check for Similarity. A factorial ANOVA on the similarity manipulation check revealed a sole main effect of similarity, $F(1, 44) = 66.4, p < .001$. High value similarity led to high perceived similarity, regardless of whether the communicator threatened the person's attitudinal freedom.

Agreement and Reactance. A factorial ANOVA tested whether similarity and threat affected agreement with the communicator. This analysis revealed a main effect of similarity, $F(1, 44) = 30.32, p < .001$, which was qualified by the predicted interaction, $F(1, 44) = 5.57, p < .023$. The interaction was followed by planned ANOVA contrasts for the comparisons of interest. Table 2 shows the pattern of agreement. The pattern from Experiment 1 was replicated exactly. When similarity was low, threatening freedom caused reactance—the high-threat group agreed less relative to the low-threat group, $t(44) = 2.38, p < .022$. When similarity was high, however,

TABLE 2
Effects of Similarity and Threat to Freedom on Agreement, Similarity, Liking, and
Perceived Threat: Experiment 2

	Low Similarity		High Similarity	
	Low Threat	*High Threat*	*Low Threat*	*High Threat*
Agreement	4.33 (1.61)	3.08 (1.50)	5.50 (0.79)	6.00 (1.04)
Similarity	2.42 (1.24)	2.50 (1.00)	5.33 (1.15)	5.50 (1.57)
Liking	3.08 (0.87)	3.71 (1.45)	5.92 (0.56)	5.75 (0.97)
Perceived threat	2.56 (1.27)	5.22 (1.26)	2.31 (0.88)	3.83 (1.50)

Note. $n = 12$ per condition. Means can range from 1 to 7; higher values represent higher agreement, similarity, liking, and threat. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

threats had no effect—the high- and low-threat groups did not differ ($t < 1$). Furthermore, people in the high-similarity conditions agreed strongly with the communicator's message. High similarity increased agreement in both the low-threat, $t(44) = 2.23, p < .031$, and high-threat, $t(44) = 5.56, p < .001$, conditions. As before, the experiment shows both failed and successful social influence.

Effects of Similarity on Liking. Similarity should increase liking for the communicator (Byrne, 1971). A factorial ANOVA on the two-item measure of attraction (a = .91) found only a main effect of similarity, $F(1, 44) = 69.2, p < .001$. (No interaction would be expected, because liking was measured before threat was manipulated.) As expected, people in the high-similarity group expressed more liking for the communicator than did people in the low-similarity group. This replicates the results of many past experiments (Byrne, 1971) and shows how similarity creates liking, a positive force toward compliance.

Effects of Similarity and Threat on Perceptions of Threat. Similarity should reduce the negative force toward resistance by promoting positive interpretations of the threat: If the threat seems smaller, then reactance should decrease. The three items measuring perceived threat were averaged into a single index (a = .89). A factorial ANOVA revealed two significant main effects and no interaction ($F = 2.5, p < .12$). The main effect of threat showed, not surprisingly, that the low-threat groups perceived the communication as less coercive than did the high-threat groups, $F(1, 44) = 33.7, p < .001$. The main effect of similarity found that the high-similarity groups perceived the communication as less coercive, $F(1, 44) = 5.15, p < .028$.

The main effect of similarity shows that similarity reduced perceptions of threat. The important test, however, is whether similarity reduced perceptions of threat even when the communicator was highly threatening. This prediction was tested with a planned contrast. As anticipated, within the high-threat conditions, the high-similarity group perceived the communicator as less coercive than did the low-similarity group, $t(44) = 2.72, p < .009$. This shows how similarity can reduce the negative force toward resistance by reducing perceived threat.

Discussion
Experiment 2 replicated and extended the findings of Experiment 1. First, the same pattern of agreement appeared, exactly replicating Experiment 1. When similarity was low, threatening attitudinal freedom led to less agreement. When similarity was high, however, threatening freedom had no effect: People strongly agreed with

the communicator regardless of the level of threat. By replicating the first study with a different manipulation of similarity, Experiment 2 lends additional support for a moderating role of similarity in reactance. Beyond replication, Experiment 2 showed that similarity increased liking (the positive force) and reduced perceptions of threat (the negative force).

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Although many experiments find that persuaders are more effective when they avoid threatening persuasion tactics (S. S. Brehm &Brehm, 1981), threats will not always cause resistance to persuasion. The theoretical issue for reactance theory is to explain when people do and do not show reactance in the face of threats to freedom. These experiments examined interpersonal similarity as a moderator of reactance. Similarity can shift the balance of forces toward compliance and resistance by affecting both forces simultaneously. First, feeling similar to another person increases attraction to the person (Byrne, 1971). Liking is a well-known force toward compliance (Heider, 1958). Second, similarity and attraction promote resistance-reducing perceptions. People interpret the actions of liked others in ways that maintain a positive image of the other person, such as minimizing differences of opinion (Kelley &Woodruff, 1956) and making other-enhancing attributions for the liked person's actions (Regan et al.,1974; Sedikides et al., 1998; Silvia &Duval, 2001). People may thus interpret coercive actions as being less coercive when they are made by similar others.

Two experiments tested the prediction that similar people can persuade in the face of threats. In Experiment 1, people encountered a communicator who shared their first name and birthday, a communicator with a dissimilar name and birthday, or an anonymous communicator. In Experiment 2, people encountered a communicator with a nearly identical ranking of basic values or a communicator with a nearly opposite ranking of values. The communicator then delivered a normal message or a threatening message. Threatening messages from the dissimilar and anonymous communicators created reactance, relative to the normal messages, yet a threatening message from the similar communicator was just as persuasive as a normal message; the threatening influence attempt succeeded.

Experiment 2 examined why similarity enabled persuasion in the face of threats to freedom. As predicted, similarity increased liking, thus demonstrating how similarity increases a positive force toward compliance. Furthermore, similarity affected how people perceived the threat to freedom. People saw messages from similar communicators as less threatening than messages from dissimilar communicators. By reducing perceptions of the threat, similarity reduced a force toward resistance. The findings thus demonstrate how similarity can enhance compliance and reduce resistance. The end result is heightened agreement, even in the face of strong threats to attitudinal freedom.

The result of positive and negative forces can lead to agreement, disagreement, or no change. The classic reactance finding, of course, is disagreement in response to threats. In attempting to deflect reactance, many experiments found no change; the forces toward compliance and reactance were apparently equally strong, thus leading to no social influence. For example, prior exercise of the threatened freedom (Snyder & Wicklund,1976), anticipated future interaction with the threatening communicator (Pallak & Heller, 1971), and feeling incompetent to exercise the freedom (Wicklund &Brehm, 1968) reduced reactance, but they did not create positive social influence.

Positive social influence in the face of threats is an uncommon finding in reactance research. In one experiment (Crawford et al., 2002), reducing the negative force—emphasizing regret associated with resistance—led to substantial agreement with a persuasive attempt (although the level of threat was not manipulated). Another experiment reduced the negative force toward resistance by having another person assert the freedom, thereby restoring the participant's freedom by implication (Worchel &Brehm, 1971, Experiment 2). People were significantly persuaded by the threatening communicator when the threat was removed by implication. People agreed significantly with the threatening communicator, apparently because similarity shifted both the positive and negative forces engendered by the communication. This supports the assumptions about social influence

made by reactance theory and demonstrates that resistance to persuasion can be overcome despite threats to freedom.

Future research should examine the dynamics of similarity and reactance in more detail. One limitation of the present research is the lack of information regarding mediational pathways that connect similarity to persuasion. The experiments were designed to emphasize manipulated effects— that is, the effect of the similarity manipulation on liking, the interactive effect of similarity and threat on perceptions of threat—not internal mediation analyses. Thus, the order of measures of liking (after the similarity manipulation but before the threat manipulation) and perceived threat (after the measures of liking and agreement) in Experiment 2 precludes the comparison of different mediational models. At the same time, the large literature on social influence shows that it is reasonable to presume that liking and perceived threat affected agreement.

One promising direction for future work concerns mediating variables that were not examined in this research. Liking and perception of threat are certainly not the only proximal causes of compliance and resistance (e.g., Jacks &Cameron, 2003). It seems likely that similarity could moderate resistance to persuasion by affecting other variables, such as perceptions of the communicator's credibility, the importance of the issue, perceptions of argument quality, and degree of message elaboration. Exploring these directions will clarify the inner psychological workings of the approach–avoid metaphor of compliance and resistance that is popular in models of resistance to persuasion (S. S. Brehm &Brehm, 1981; Knowles & Linn, 2004).

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