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DEPRESSION AND INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION: THE ROLE OF
PERCEIVED SIMILARITY

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DEPRESSION AND INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION:
THE ROLE OF PERCEIVED SIMILARITY

by

Abram B Rosenblatt

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
In the Graduate College
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ABSTRACT

The relationship between similarity and liking of depressives was investigated. It was hypothesized that similarity would positively covary with subjects liking of depressed and nondepressed targets. In addition, given that similarity affects liking, it was expected that nondepressed subjects would prefer nondepressed targets but depressed subjects would not share this preference. The results clearly supported a role for similarity in how people perceive depressives. Similarity positively covaried with liking and nondepressed subjects showed a preference for nondepressed targets that was not shared by depressives. Tests of supplementary hypotheses confirmed that depressives perceive their best friends as being more depressed and more dissimilar than the best friends of nondepressives. The findings suggest that perceived dissimilarity is one factor contributing to nondepressives' relative dislike of depressives. They also indicate that depressed individuals perceptions of and preference for others may differ from those of nondepressives in ways that may contribute to their problems.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The interpersonal difficulties faced by the depressed individual have become the subject of increasing study (e.g. Coyne, 1976a, 1976b; Coyne and Strack, 1983; Hammen and Peters, 1977, 1978; Lewinsohn, Mischel, Chaplin & Barton, 1980; Libet and Lewinsohn, 1973). Most of the work in this area converges on Coyne's (1976a; 1976b) central thesis that people find the behavior of depressives aversive. Given the importance of social approval and social support to psychological well being (e.g. Greenberg, Pyszczynsky & Solomon, 1986; Sarason & Sarason, 1985) we need to know why people react negatively to depressed individuals. Research addressing this issue has primarily focused on two general factors. First, depressives seem to elicit negative affect in those around them. Empirical work has demonstrated that subjects who have spoken to depressives are significantly more depressed, hostile, anxious and rejecting than subjects who have spoken to nondepressives (Coyne, 1976b, Hammen and Peters, 1977, 1978; Strack and Coyne, 1983). Second, the work of Lewinsohn and his colleagues (Lewinsohn, Mischel, Chaplin and Burton, 1980; Lewinsohn and Shaffer, 1971; Libet and Lewinsohn, 1973) has revealed a deficit in

depressives' social skills, specifically an inability to elicit positive reinforcers from the social environment.

Considering the complexities involved in interpersonal interactions, it is likely that other factors also contribute significantly to the depressive's interpersonal problems. A well documented finding from the social psychological literature on attraction suggests one such factor: similarity is a determinant of liking (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Byrne, Ervin and Lamberth, 1970; Byrne and Griffith, 1966; Byrne and Nelson, 1965; Byrne and Ramey, 1965; Schoeneman, Byrne and Bell, 1976). This research has demonstrated that the more similar to one's self a person is perceived to be, the more favorably one will evaluate that person. Perhaps, then, depressives are not liked by nondepressives partly because of perceived dissimilarity. If so, then nondepressed individuals should evaluate a depressed target less favorably and perceive him or her as less similar to themselves than a nondepressed target. In addition, favorability of evaluation for the depressed targets should covary directly with perceived similarity. The present study was derived to test these hypotheses.

Interestingly, an entirely opposite prediction for the relationship between similarity and liking of the depressive can also be derived from the social psychological literature. Several studies have shown that when a target possesses some negative characteristic, then individuals actually like the targets less, the more attitudinally

similar they are (Lerner and Agar, 1972, Novak and Lerner, 1968, Taylor and Mettee, 1971). Presumably, individuals reject and distance themselves from similar others who have negative qualities because of the threat that then they, themselves, may possess the undesirable trait. This analysis suggests the possibility that the more similar a depressed person is perceived to be, the more he or she would be disliked.

Although this hypothesis is certainly plausible, we do not expect to provide support for it because of the differences between depression and previously used "undesirable" qualities. Prior studies identified the target in clearly negative terms such as: an "addict" (Lerner and Agar, 1972); a person who has suffered a "nervous breakdown" (Novak and Lerner, 1968); and a person who acts in an obnoxious manner (Taylor and Mettee, 1971). Depression, however, although certainly a state people want to avoid, may not have such a stigmatizing quality. In fact, Coyne (1976) posits that individuals attempt to aid depressives with gestures of support in spite of their affectively aversive reactions. In addition, depression is unusual in that whereas relatively few people have experienced a "nervous breakdown", serious addiction, schizophrenia or most other mental disturbances, most people have experienced some degree of depressive symptomatology. This familiarity may make depression less threatening than other negative characteristics used in the prior research. Consistent with this point, Clove and Jeffrey (1971) found that

non-handicapped subjects who had experienced confinement to a wheelchair had less negative reactions to a handicapped person than non-handicapped subjects who had not had such an experience. Given these factors, individuals are far less likely to be threatened by being similar to those who exhibit depression. Therefore, we expect the same positive relationship between perceived similarity and liking of depressives that is consistently found for non-stigmatized targets.

If perceived similarity does mediate reactions to depressed individuals, then depressed individuals may evaluate depressed targets more favorably than would nondepressed individuals because they should not perceive depressed targets as dissimilar to themselves. In fact, if depressives actually perceive themselves to be especially similar to other depressives, they may actually like a depressed target more than a nondepressed target. However, the other factors mentioned previously that encourage negative reactions to depressives may mitigate against such a reversed preference. Surprisingly, there is no prior research on how depressed individuals react to variables in targets such as level of similarity and depression. The present study was designed as a step toward rectifying this situation.

To test these hypotheses derived from the similarity attraction relationship, depressed and nondepressed subjects were asked to evaluate two other subjects on the basis of an attitude survey and a personality inventory (actually the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), Beck, 1967) that each subject had supposedly filled out. For each

subject, one of the targets was made to appear attitudinally similar and the other was made to appear attitudinally dissimilar. Half the subjects evaluated a target whose BDI indicated moderate depression while the other half evaluated a target whose BDI indicated no depression. Measures of perceived similarity and liking were obtained. In addition, a measure of the subject's willingness to meet the target was also obtained. We expected that nondepressed subjects would prefer nondepressed targets and would find them more similar than depressed targets. Depressed subjects, on the other hand, were expected to show either an equal or a greater liking for depressed targets and to find them more similar than non-depressed targets. Finally, across subjects, attitudinally similar targets should be preferred and perceived similarity should positively covary with liking. Confirmation of these hypotheses would provide evidence for the role of perceived similarity in reactions to depressives. Given the lack of prior research, this study also provides important evidence concerning whether or not depressed individuals are similar to nondepressed individuals in preferring similar others and whether they differ from nondepressed individuals in the way they react to other depressives.

In order to test a number of subsidiary hypotheses, data on the subject's perceptions of their best friends were also collected. If depressed individuals react more favorably to, and receive more favorable responses from, other depressives, then they should perceive their best friends as more depressed than do nondepressives. In

addition, this analysis suggests that for depressives, level of depression may be a more important determinant of friendships than attitude similarity, therefore depressives' best friends may be perceived as less attitudinally similar than are nondepressive's best friends.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Subjects.

Undergraduates in introductory psychology classes were given the BDI and an attitude survey at the beginning of the semester as part of a mass testing session. From this pool, the experimenters contacted the highest and lowest BDI scorers, asking them to participate in a study on the perception of others as a way of fulfilling a research participation requirement for the course. As part of the cover story and to provide a current measure of depression, the BDI was given to each subject at the start of the experimental session. Subjects with BDI scores of 10 or above on this testing were assigned to the depressed group and subjects with scores of 3 or below were assigned to the non-depressed group. This procedure yielded 25 depressives with a mean BDI score of 15.9 (on the border between mild and moderate depression as established by Beck, 1972) and 20 non-depressives with a mean BDI score of 1.7. With BDI scores ranging from 10 to 34, this depressed sample compares favorably with previous studies of depression among college populations (e.g. Alloy et al 1981; Alloy and Abramson, 1982; Goling and Terrel, 1977; Hammen, 1981; Hammen and Kratz, 1976; Miller and Seligman, 1973, 1975; Tabachnik et al 1983). It should be noted, however, that BDI scores represent severity of depressive

symptoms but do not necessarily indicate the presence of the full clinical syndrome.

Design.

Depressed and nondepressed subjects were randomly assigned to the depressed target (high BDI) or the nondepressed target (low BDI) conditions. Each subject was exposed to both the similar and dissimilar target conditions. Thus, subjects read 2 personality packets, one of which contained a similar attitude survey the other of which contained a dissimilar attitude survey. Both packets, in addition, contained either a high BDI or a low BDI depending on the condition. The design, therefore, was a 2(Depressed/Nondepressed subject) X 2(Depressed/Nondepressed target) between X 2(similar/dissimilar target) within, factorial. The order of the within subjects variable was counterbalanced.

Procedure.

Subjects were run in groups of three to five. Upon entering the room, they were told that they would be involved in a study of how people perceive other people. The experimenter, who was blind to the subject's condition, explained that the subjects would be reading the personality packets of two previous participants in the study. They would then answer some questions about how they felt about each person. In addition, subjects were told they would be completing a personality measure (the BDI) and an attitude survey that would then be anonymously given to future participants in the study. After these instructions

were given, subjects were sent into individual rooms where they were told they would find all the necessary materials and instructions.

Once in the rooms, subjects completed a BDI and an attitude survey created for this study. The attitude survey consisted of 20 statements (such as I believe marriage is important) followed by a five point scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree). They then proceeded to the personality packets. Each packet contained a completed BDI and a completed attitude survey. There were two alternate versions of the low BDI (score=1) which comprised the nondepressed target condition, and two alternate versions of the high BDI (score=21) which comprised the depressed target condition. The attitude survey was either similar or dissimilar to the attitude survey filled out by the subject at the beginning of the semester in the mass testing session. The similar attitude survey consisted of responses identical to the ones the subject gave at the start of the semester whereas the dissimilar survey consisted of responses opposite to the ones the subject gave at the start of the semester (e.g., if the subject circled a 1, the dissimilar target appeared to circle a 5). After reading each packet and filling out the dependent measures for each, the written instructions asked the subject to fill in a blank attitude survey and a blank BDI as they believed their "best friend" might and as they believed an "average person" might. When they finished, subjects returned to the main room for debriefing.

Dependent measures.

The dependent measures for each personality packet consisted of the Interpersonal Judgement Scale, (IJS, Byrne 1971) and an "interest in meeting" measure constructed for the study. The interest in meeting measure consisted of four options ranging from "I definitely do not want to meet this person" to "I definitely want to meet this person and would like the experimenter to arrange a meeting." These options were presented as real and subjects were told to write down their names and phone numbers if they wished to meet the person. The six items from the IJS were summed (after Byrne, 1971) to yield a general score indicating how much the subject "liked" the person described by the packet. The simulated BDI's were scored in the standard manner to give the BDI of a "best friend" and of an "average person". Finally, the summed absolute values of the differences between the attitude survey responses given by the subject in the experimental session, and the simulated attitude survey responses given for the "best friend" and the "average person" yielded measures of how attitudinally different the subjects responses were from the simulated responses for best friend and average person.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Perceived Mood and Similarity of Target.

Four Likert scale questions were created to check the similarity/dissimilarity and depressed/nondepressed-target manipulations. A 2(depressed/non-depressed subject)X 2(depressed/non-depressed target) between X 2(similar/dissimilar-target) within, analysis of variance was conducted on these questions. When asked to rate on a seven point Likert scale (where 1 = not at all similar and 7 = extremely similar) how similar the target was to themselves, subjects rated the attitudinally similar targets as significantly more similar ($F(1,41) = 180.0, p < .0001$) than the attitudinally dissimilar targets. When asked to rate on a seven point scale the mood of the target (where 1 = extremely low mood and 7 = extremely high mood) subjects rated the nondepressed targets as significantly higher in mood ($F(1,41) = 16.71, p < .0002$) than the depressed targets. No significant differences were found when subjects were asked how well the attitude survey and the BDI they had just taken described themselves. Finally, when asked how well they felt they knew the person described by the personality packet they had just read, subjects felt they knew the similar targets better than the dissimilar targets, $F(1,41) = 4.91, p < .035$.

Table 1.

Mean scores for subject-target interactions.

Measure:	Similarity		IJS		Interest in Meeting	
Subjects:	<u>Nondep</u>	<u>Dep</u>	<u>Nondep</u>	<u>Dep</u>	<u>Nondep</u>	<u>Dep</u>
<u>Target</u>						
Nondepressed	4.7 _b	3.8 _{ab}	36.1 _a	24.6 _b	2.4 _a	1.7 _b
Depressed	3.5 _a	4.2 _{ab}	24.6 _b	25.1 _b	1.6 _b	1.9 _b

Note: For similarity, 1=not at all similar, 7=extremely similar; for the IJS, 6=least liking, 42=most liking; for Interest in meeting, 1=do not want to meet, 4=want to meet and would like experimenter to arrange a meeting. Pairwise t-tests found that means that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .06$.

Two significant two-way interactions emerged for the question assessing similarity. As expected, a significant interaction between subject level of depression and target level of depression was found, $F(1,41) = 5.47$, $p < .025$ (see Table 1). Nondepressed subjects tended to find nondepressed targets more similar than depressed targets ($t(18) = 1.72$, $p < .06$) whereas depressed subjects found depressed and nondepressed targets about equally similar to themselves, ($t < 1$). There was also a significant interaction between target similarity and target level of depression, $F(1,41) = 4.08$, $p < .05$. As Table 2 indicates, in general, similar targets were rated as more similar if nondepressed than if depressed ($t(43) = 2.17$, $p < .025$) whereas dissimilar targets were not.

The Interpersonal Judgement Scale.

A 2 X 2 between X 2 within, analysis of variance was performed on the liking score created from the six items of the IJS. The predicted main effect of similarity appeared, $F(1,41) = 94.35$, $p < .0001$. Overall, similar targets were rated more favorably than dissimilar targets. This main effect was qualified, however, by two significant two-way interactions. As expected, the subject's level of depression significantly interacted with the target's level of depression, $F(1,41) = 6.72$, $p < .015$. As Table 1 shows, nondepressed subjects greatly preferred nondepressed targets ($t(18) = 5.50$, $p < .0005$) whereas depressed subjects liked depressed targets as much as nondepressed targets ($t < 1$). In addition, whereas nondepressed

Table 2.

Mean Scores for Similarity-Target Level of Depression Interactions.

Measure:	Similarity		IJS	
<u>Target:</u>	<u>Similar</u>	<u>Dissimilar</u>	<u>Similar</u>	<u>Dissimilar</u>
Nondepressed	6.8 _a	1.7 _c	32.9 _a	21.0 _c
Depressed	5.8 _b	2.0 _c	29.1 _b	21.6 _c

Note: Pairwise t-tests found that that means that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

subjects liked nondepressed targets more than depressed subjects did, ($t(19) = 5.35, p < .0005$), there was no difference in liking of nondepressed and depressed subjects for the depressed targets, $t < 1$. The second interaction, between target similarity and target level of depression, $F(1,41) = 4.51, p < .04$, resulted from the fact that subjects preferred similar targets who were nondepressed over similar targets who were depressed ($t(43) = 2.32, p < .025$) whereas they liked dissimilar targets about the same regardless of level of depression ($t < 1$) (see Table 2). Perhaps this occurred because ratings of dissimilar others reached a psychological floor; there may be a real limit to how much dislike subjects will express in this type of situation.

Similarity-IJS correlation.

As predicted, the similarity measure correlated highly with the IJS scores for both depressed and nondepressed subjects exposed to both depressed and nondepressed targets. The correlations were: .92 ($df = 18, p < .0005$) for the nondepressed subjects exposed to the nondepressed targets; .82 ($df = 18, p < .0005$) for the nondepressed subjects exposed to the depressed targets; .78 ($df = 22, p < .0005$) for the depressed subjects exposed to the nondepressed targets; and .66 ($df = 28, p < .0005$) for the depressed subjects exposed to the depressed targets.

The "Interest in Meeting" measure.

Results from the "interest in meeting" measure generally confirmed the results from the IJS. Again, there was a main effect

such that similar others were preferred, $F(1,41) = 35.06$, $p < .0001$. As on the IJS, a significant interaction was found ($F(1,41) = 7.28$, $p < .01$) in which nondepressed subjects were significantly more willing to meet nondepressed targets than were depressed subjects ($t(19) = 1.88$, $p < .05$), whereas there was no difference between depressed and nondepressed subjects willingness to meet depressed targets ($t < 1$) (see Table 1). The nondepressed subjects were also more willing to meet nondepressed targets than depressed targets ($t(18) = 2.02$, $p < .05$), whereas depressed subjects showed no such preference ($t < 1$). Unlike the IJS, however, this measure yielded a three-way interaction that qualifies interpretation of the two-way interaction, $F(1,41) = 4.41$, $p < .04$. The cell means for this interaction, along with the corresponding means for the IJS, are displayed in Table 3. The pattern of means indicates that in all conditions interest in meeting targets was greater for the similar targets than for the dissimilar targets, but interest was especially high in the nondepressed subject, similar/nondepressed target condition. Indeed, the nondepressed subjects were significantly more interested in meeting the similar/nondepressed target than were the depressed subjects ($t(19) = 4.60$, $p < .0005$). These subjects were also more interested in meeting the similar nondepressed target than they were in meeting the similar depressed target ($t = 4.6$, $p < .0005$). In contrast, the depressed subjects tended to show the reverse preference, demonstrating more interest in meeting the similar depressed target than the similar

Table 3.

Mean "Interest in Meeting" and Interpersonal Judgement Scale Scores.

<u>Interest in Meeting Score</u>		
	Nondepressed Subjects	Depressed Subjects
<u>Target</u>		
Non-Depressed		
Similar	3.2 _a	1.9 _{cd}
Dissimilar	1.7 _c	1.5 _{bc}
Depressed		
Similar	1.9 _{cd}	2.3 _d
Dissimilar	1.3 _b	1.6 _b
<u>Interpersonal Judgement Scale Score</u>		
	Nondepressed Subjects	Depressed Subjects
Non-Depressed		
Similar	36.1 _c	29.6 _a
Dissimilar	21.5 _b	20.6 _b
Depressed		
Similar	28.7 _a	29.6 _a
Dissimilar	20.5 _b	22.6 _b

Note: Pairwise t-tests found that means that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$.

nondepressed target ($t(22) = 1.53, p < .10$). In addition, depressed subjects tended to be more interested in meeting the similar/depressed target than were the nondepressed subjects ($t(22) = 1.49, p < .10$)

To further examine the three way interaction, separate two way ANOVAs were conducted for the depressed and the nondepressed subjects. The only significant effect for the depressed subjects was a main effect for similarity, $F(1,23) = 11.01, p < .003$; they preferred similar others but were not very influenced by target level of depression. In contrast, in addition to the similarity main effect ($F(1,18) = 23.49, p < .0001$), nondepressed subjects exhibited a main effect for target's level of depression, $F(1,18) = 10.62, p < .005$. This was qualified by an interaction between similarity and level of depression of the target, $F(1,18) = 4.31, p < .05$. Nondepressed subjects were more interested in meeting similar targets if they were not depressed ($t(18) = 4.33, p < .0005$), whereas the target's level of depression had no effect on interest in meeting dissimilar targets ($t < 1$).

Although the three way interaction on the IJS was not significant, ($F(1,41)=1.18$) inspection of the means for this measure in Table 3 indicates a pattern quite similar to that of the willingness to meet measure. Indeed, separate ANOVAs on the IJS for the depressed and nondepressed subjects yielded the same effects as for the interest measure. The nondepressed subjects again showed a main effect for target's level of depression resulting from their preference for

nondepressed targets, $F(1,18) = 10.21$, $p < .005$. The analysis conducted on the depressed subjects, on the other hand, showed no such preference ($F < 1$), yielding only a main effect for similarity, $F(1,23) = 28.48$, $p < .0001$. In contrast, in addition to a similarity main effect ($F(1,18) = 87.61$, $p < .0001$), the nondepressed subjects showed a significant two-way interaction, $F(1,18) = 6.90$, $p < .02$. Consistent with the interest measure, nondepressed subjects liked the similar target much better if nondepressed than if depressed ($t(18) = 4.35$, $p < .0005$), whereas liking for the dissimilar target was not affected by their level of depression, $t < 1$.

Similarity--Willingness to Meet Correlation.

The similarity measure and the willingness to meet measure were significantly correlated in three of the four between-subject conditions and marginally correlated in the fourth. These were: .74 ($df = 18$, $p < .0005$) for the nondepressed subjects exposed to the nondepressed target; .46 ($df = 18$, $p < .025$) for the nondepressed subjects exposed to the depressed condition; .36 ($df = 22$, $p < .05$) for the depressed subjects exposed to the depressed targets; and a marginally significant .34 ($df = 20$, $p < .07$) for the depressed subjects exposed to nondepressed targets.

Simulated Becks and Attitude surveys of Best Friends and Average Persons.

A 2(depressed/non-depressed subject) X
2(depressed/non-depressed other) analysis of variance was computed on

the simulated BDI and attitude survey data. The results show main effects but no interactions. As expected depressed subjects perceived their best friends as more depressed and more attitudinally dissimilar than did the non-depressed subjects, $F(1,32) = 8.97$, $p < .005$ and $F(1,32) = 11.71$, $p < .002$, respectively. There were, however, no differences in how depressed and non-depressed subjects perceived the average person on either the BDI or the attitude survey, (both F 's below 1). The only significant effect for the perception of the average person resulted from the depression level of the target, with subjects exposed to the depressed-target condition rating the average person as more depressed than subjects exposed to the non-depressed target condition, $F(1,32) = 14.45$, $p < .0006$.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The results clearly supported the idea that perceived similarity plays a role in how people respond to depressives. As predicted, similarity positively covaried with both liking for, and interest in meeting both depressed and nondepressed targets. Furthermore, nondepressed subjects perceived nondepressed targets as more similar and liked them better than depressed targets. Depressed subjects, on the other hand, exhibited no difference in perceived similarity or liking for nondepressed and depressed targets. So, whereas the previously documented nondepressive preference for other nondepressives was replicated, this pattern did not extend to depressives. In fact, there were a few weak indications in our results that depressives may even prefer depressed targets, although stronger evidence is required before such a preference can be said to exist. Inspection of the means in Table 3 indicates that liking for a similar target was especially high among nondepressed subjects who evaluated a nondepressed target. Thus, the difference between how depressed and nondepressed subjects react to depressed and nondepressed targets resulted primarily from a nondepressive preference for nondepressed similar targets that was not shared by depressives.

The differences that were found in this study between how depressed and nondepressed subjects perceived the targets demonstrates

that the social perceptions of depressives are in some ways different from the social perceptions of nondepressives. Although a great deal of previous research has focused on differences between depressives and nondepressives on such variables as cognitive distortions (e.g. Beck, 1976), reactions to successes and failures (e.g. Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1985), and depressive's reactions to social interactions (e.g. Haley and Strickland, 1986), this represents the first experimental evidence that differences in perceptions of and reactions to particular others also exist. The findings are far from conclusive but point to a need for further research on this previously neglected topic.

A frequent difficulty with prior studies examining the differences between depressives and nondepressives is that they lack evidence for a mechanism or variable which helps explain why the differences exist. We have obtained evidence which suggests that nondepressive subjects prefer nondepressive targets because, in part, they perceive them as more similar than depressive targets. Furthermore it appears that depressed subjects do not share this preference because they do not perceive nondepressed others as particularly similar to themselves. Thus this research not only establishes a difference between how depressed and nondepressed individuals react to others, but also suggests an explanation based on differences in perceived similarity of others.

It should be noted that previous studies have demonstrated exactly the opposite role for perceived similarity, showing it to covary negatively with attraction for targets presented as obnoxious, mentally disturbed or addicted to drugs (Lerner and Agar, 1972; Novak and Lerner, 1968; Taylor and Mettee, 1971). Our results support our contention that similar depressives are not threatening in the manner that similar targets with undesirable, stigmatizing or uncommonly experienced traits are. This suggests that depressives are viewed differently from people with other types of personality problems, perhaps because depression is something people can relate to from their own experiences. Clearly, further research on impressions of depressed individuals and people with other types of psychological problems is needed.

Of course, one weakness of this study was the artificial manner in which the targets were presented, via experimenter constructed questionnaires. Perhaps when confronted with an actual depressive, perceived similarity would be less of a factor given that in such an encounter the depressive's non-verbal and verbal expressions of negative affect and/or deficits in social skills might prove to be more important factors. Nonetheless, the present results still suggest that perceived dissimilarity is one contributor.

One implication of the nondepressive's preference for nondepressed others is that nondepressives will tend to seek out and maintain friendships with other nondepressives; therefore, nondepressed individual's best friends are likely to be nondepressed. This

preference, however, leaves the depressive in a disadvantage with respect to gaining nondepressed friends. Considering that depressives liked others about the same regardless of whether they were depressed or nondepressed, they would not be especially motivated to take the extra steps required to gain nondepressed friends. This analysis is supported by the finding that depressive's best friends appear to be more depressed than nondepressive's best friends. In addition, given that depressives are less numerous than nondepressives, depressives may be limited in their choices of best friends so that they may have to settle for others who are not otherwise that similar to themselves. Consistent with this idea, depressive's best friends were viewed as less similar than were nondepressives best friends. Because this data relies on the subjects reports about their best friends, it can be questioned whether their perceptions of their friends are accurate. Perhaps depressives have a general tendency to view others as depressed and dissimilar (Tabachnik, Crocker and Alloy, 1983). However, some doubt is cast on this interpretation because no such tendency was found in this study for the subjects' ratings of the average person.

Given this evidence, it is possible that the depressive's close and immediate social network predominantly consists of more depressives than a nondepressive's social network. If so, depressives may find their problems exacerbated and maintained by their social relationships with other depressives. Furthermore, since people like to compare themselves with similar and available others as a means of determining

what are appropriate beliefs, attitudes and actions, (Brickman and Bulman, 1977; Festinger, 1954), depressive's would likely reinforce each others depressive tendencies. Such processes could contribute to a cycle in which the more depressed these individuals become, the more dissimilar and hence unattractive they will appear to nondepressed others, and the more they must rely on a social network made up of depressed others. Part of the work of a therapist may therefore be to help the client alter his or her social network in such a way as to break such a depressed vicious cycle. Although the idea of productively using the patient's family and social network as agents of change is certainly not new, (c.f. Haley, 1971; Speck and Attneave, 1971) specific theoretical extensions and practical applications of this type of work to depression warrant further investigation.

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