An Attribution Analysis of the Effect of Communicator Characteristics on Opinion Change: The Case of Communicator Attractiveness

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This study tested the attribution hypothesis that message persuasiveness decreases to the extent that the position the communicator advocates is expected on the basis of a characteristic he possesses. Some subjects read a message by an attractive or unattractive communicator who espoused a desirable or undesirable position on one of two topics, while others, without reading the message, estimated the likelihood that the communicator would advocate each position. On expectancies, undesirable positions were judged more likely than desirable ones, and a Source Attractiveness X Position Desirability interaction showed attractive-desirable and unattractive-undesirable communicator-position pairings judged likelier than attractive-undesirable and unattractive-desirable pairings. On opinions, main effects showed attractive communicators more persuasive than unattractive communicators and desirable positions more persuasive than undesirable positions. However, a Source Attractiveness X Position Desirability interaction indicated that attractive communicators were more persuasive than unattractive ones given undesirable positions but only equally persuasive given desirable positions. The attractiveness main effect on opinions was interpreted in terms of communicator likability, while the parallelism between expectancies and opinions (and other responses) with regard to the other effects supported the attribution interpretation. Choice or no choice about receiving a message had only a marginal effect on opinion change.

If the prediction of attitude change is approached from an attribution theory perspective (Heider, 1958; Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967, 1973), it becomes important to understand the role of the perceiver's causal inferences concerning why a communicator advocates a particular position in a persuasive message. The extent to which the perceiver accepts or rejects the position advocated in the communication can be considered an outcome or consequence of this causal analysis.

The present research represents the perceiver's causal analysis in terms of his expectancies concerning the position the communicator takes in the message. Is the position expected on the basis of the information available concerning the communicator's personal characteristics and the pressures in his situation? To the extent that the position is unexpected, the recipient of the message tends to discount these characteristics and pressures as plausible causes and to regard the position as providing a relatively veridical interpretation of the external reality it purportedly describes. Attributing a position to external reality rather than to a particular characteristic of the communicator (other than his expertise)1 or feature of his situation is assumed to enhance persuasiveness. Therefore, messages should be more persuasive to the extent that they advocate unexpected positions.
Representing causal inferences in terms of expectancies is consistent with attribution theory. As Jones and Davis (1965) suggested and others have demonstrated (Ajzen, 1971; Lay, Burron, & Jackson, 1973), the less expected an act, given the actor's situation, the stronger is the perceiver's inference that the actor's dispositions correspond to his actions. Yet, unlike the perceivers described by Jones and Davis, the recipient of a persuasive message may have prior information about the communicator's dispositions and be concerned with ruling out these dispositions, along with situational pressures, as causes of the position taken in the message. The less expected a communicator's position, given his personal characteristics and situational pressures, the stronger is the perceiver's inference that the message corresponds to external reality.

A few earlier persuasion experiments are compatible with an attribution perspective, though they were not interpreted by their authors in these terms, or, for that matter, in terms of any systematic framework. For example, Walster, Aronson, and Abrahams (1966) demonstrated that a low credibility source (a criminal) was more persuasive than a high credibility one (a prosecutor) when recommending more powerful courts, while the prosecutor was more persuasive when recommending less powerful courts. Perceivers presumably expected a criminal to advocate less powerful courts and the prosecutor to advocate more powerful courts. Koeske and Crano (1968) found that subjects agreed more with a statement attributed to an author whose ideological position was thought to be contrary to the statement than with the same statement attributed to an author whose ideology was consistent. Perceivers presumably attributed the consistent statements to ideological bias. A number of other opinion change findings (e.g., Mills & Jellison, 1967; Steiner & Field, 1960) are also compatible with the attribution hypothesis but probably represent attributions of positions to pressures in the communicator's situation rather than to his personal characteristics.

The present research focused on a particular communicator characteristic—communicator attractiveness—and was designed to provide more direct evidence that causal attributions affect opinion change. Despite an empirical history characterized by rather heterogeneous operationalizations, attractiveness has generally shown a positive relationship to opinion change, especially when manipulations have been based primarily on differences in likability (McGuire, 1969). In the present study the communicator either praised or derogated college students prior to delivering a persuasive message to college student subjects. He then took a position that was discrepant from the subjects' own positions, but either strongly desirable or undesirable for them.

The expectancies elicited by manipulating a communicator's attractiveness or unattractiveness in this way were assessed directly by having a separate group of subjects, who were exposed to the communicator but not his message, rate the likelihood that the source would advocate certain positions. In general terms, the relevant expectancies were assumed to be "Attractive people say pleasant things" and "Unattractive people say unpleasant things." Furthermore, attractiveness based on a communicator's pro- or anti-student orientation was thought capable of generating especially strong expectancies with regard to his advocating a position desirable or undesirable to students. The attractive communicator should be expected to take a desirable position and the unattractive one an undesirable position, while the attractive/undesirable and unattractive/desirable combinations should be relatively unexpected. Since persuasiveness is assumed to decrease to the extent that the communicator's position is expected, the interaction between the attractiveness of the communicator and the desirability of the position advocated should be significant on opinion change as well as on expectancies.

Attribution does not, however, provide a complete model of the role of communicator attractiveness in persuasion. Like other communicator attributes, it may affect opinion change via additional mechanisms. Thus, because of the greater likability of attractive communicators, opinions were also expected to reflect a tendency for attractive communicators to be generally more persuasive than unattractive ones. Such an overall difference in persuasiveness due to likability is compat-
ble with several social psychological principles (e.g., cognitive balance, reciprocity of liking, social reinforcement), and the present study was not designed to discriminate among them. Although the probable tendency for attractive communicators to generate higher levels of opinion change than unattractive ones must be taken into consideration when interpreting the opinion data, a parallel difference between the communicators should not occur in the expectancy data.

Finally, the hypothesized attribution effects may be weakened if goals other than achieving an objective causal analysis of the message are salient for the perceiver. For example, having the recipient choose to receive the message may focus the perceiver on his own behavior by making him feel responsible for the consequences of what he has chosen (Eagly & Whitehead, 1972).

Choice is particularly interesting in relationship to communicator attractiveness because the literature suggests that while attractive communicators may be more persuasive than unattractive ones when subjects have no choice about receiving a message, unattractive communicators may be more effective when subjects do have a choice (Himelfarb & Arazi, 1974; Jones & Brehm, 1967). This reversal under choice conditions of the usual attractiveness effect suggests that choice may influence the mechanism by which communicator characteristics affect opinion change. In the present experiment, half of the subjects chose to receive the persuasive message, while the other half had no opportunity to choose.

**Method**

**Overview**

In a 2 (Choice vs. No Choice) × 2 (Attractive vs. Unattractive Source) × 2 (Desirable vs. Undesirable Position Advocated) × 2 (Veneral Disease vs. Unemployment Topic) between-subjects factorial design, subjects, after reading a persuasive message, gave their opinion and other responses. Expectancy subjects rated the likelihood that the attractive or unattractive source would advocate each position on one of the two topics.

**Subjects**

Subjects were 358 undergraduate psychology students (153 males, 205 females) from the University of Massachusetts. Nine were eliminated because they either questioned the cover story (7, distributed evenly among cells) or declined to read a persuasive message (2, in choice conditions). In addition, 88 subjects served in expectancy groups, and 39 control subjects responded only to the opinion questionnaire. Extra course credit was given for participation.

**Procedure**

Addressing groups of subjects averaging 15–20 persons, the experimenter explained that subjects would respond to a questionnaire assessing opinions on social issues. She then gave subjects a “stabilization process” rationale for preceding the questionnaire by a persuasive message. This rationale, adapted from Jones and Brehm (1967), was that being exposed to someone’s opinion and the arguments he uses to support his opinion gets people into the “right frame of mind to be critical and careful about evaluating their own opinions” and therefore makes it possible to measure their opinions more accurately.

The experimenter next gave each subject a mimeographed handout containing further information about the persuasive message. The handout explained that each subject would read a transcript of an interview that had been tape-recorded as part of an opinion survey (supposedly) conducted on campus. Participants in this survey, including students, faculty, staff, and visitors, had been asked to give an opinion on an issue and then support that opinion with evidence. The handout stated that over 100 different interviews covering 10 topics were available and that, by random selection, almost every subject would get a different interview to read. The handout also stated that a subject might read an interview in which the opinion expressed was quite different from his own since the interviews represented a wide sampling of opinions. In choice conditions only, the handout concluded by asking subjects whether they agreed to read an interview.

The experimenter then gave each subject an interview transcript which contained the attractiveness, topic, and desirability manipulations as well as the persuasive message itself (see below). After allowing approximately 8 minutes for reading the transcripts, she collected them and distributed a questionnaire on which subjects reported background information (age, sex, etc.) and their opinions on a variety of issues. One opinion item stated exactly the position taken in the interview transcript that the subject had just read. Next, the experimenter explained that in order to understand the “stabilization process” better, subjects would complete a questionnaire concerning their reactions to the interview. This questionnaire (described below) assessed various responses and checked the experimental manipulations. Finally, subjects were debriefed, sworn to secrecy, and excused.

Expectancy subjects were given the same “stabilization process” rationale (see above) for the transcripts which they thought would be followed by an opinion questionnaire. The transcripts they received were identical to those of the other subjects.
up to the point where the persuasive communication began. Thus, expectancy subjects were exposed to either an attractive or unattractive source who was about to give his opinion on one of two topics. They then estimated the likelihood that the source would advocate each of the two positions (presented in counterbalanced order).

Control subjects completed the opinion questionnaire without receiving a persuasive message or any experimental inductions.

**Interview Transcripts**

The transcripts began with an interviewer asking an interviewee (source), Mr. Holmes, for some background information. Mr. Holmes was portrayed as a counselor who had worked for the past 8 years at either the university infirmary (in venereal disease messages) or the university job placement center (in unemployment messages). After Mr. Holmes either praised or insulted undergraduates in response to the interviewer's question ("How do you like working with undergraduates?")}, the interviewer asked him to read verbatim (from a set of standard statements that was supposedly provided) the one statement that most closely expressed his opinion on the topic (either venereal disease or unemployment). Mr. Holmes read a statement, which was the desirable or undesirable position on either venereal disease or unemployment (see below). At the interviewer's request, Mr. Holmes then gave evidence supporting his position. This passage contained five distinct arguments. Finally, the interviewer thanked Mr. Holmes for participating in the study.

**Independent Variables**

**Choice.** In choice conditions only, the mimeographed handout that all subjects read before they received the interview transcripts contained the following additional material:

Some people find it objectionable to be exposed to opinions that differ strongly from their own. Since you could get such an interview, it is our policy for ethical reasons to let you decide whether or not you would like to read one of the interviews. It is all right if you feel that you would just rather not read an interview. We leave the decision of whether to participate in this part of the experiment completely up to you. Please indicate your decision here. Do you agree to read one of the opinion interviews?

Below this paragraph, subjects put a check mark next to the word "yes" or "no."

**Source attractiveness.** Mr. Holmes either praised or insulted undergraduates upon being asked by the interviewer "How do you like working with undergraduates?" (cf. Jones & Brehm, 1967). In the attractive condition, Mr. Holmes answered:

Well, it's interesting that you asked that question. When I first began my job here at the university, I was a little apprehensive about being able to get through to undergraduates. Over the years, however, I've discovered that my apprehension was unwarranted. The undergraduates who I've met both through my counseling work and in other contexts impress me as being extremely responsible and mature people who are concerned, in general, with their role in society. As a result of this experience, I've come to the conclusion that the public too often underestimates both the ability and maturity of today's college student. Sometimes people don't give undergraduates enough credit. Working with undergraduates has really been quite rewarding for me.

In the unattractive condition, Mr. Holmes's answer was the same for the first two sentences but then diverged:

Over the years, I'm sorry to say, this apprehension has been justified. The undergraduates who I've met both through my counseling work and in other contexts impress me as being extremely irresponsible and immature people who are unconcerned, in general, with their role in society. As a result of this experience, I've come to the conclusion that the public too often overestimates both the ability and maturity of today's college student. Undergraduates get a lot more credit than they deserve. Sometimes, I wonder why I continue to do the work I do. Working with undergraduates certainly hasn't been very rewarding as a job for me.

**Topic and desirability of position advocated.** To provide an internal replication, two topics—venereal disease and unemployment among recent college graduates—were used. The undesirable and desirable positions on venereal disease were "Venereal disease will spread at such an astounding rate that it will soon become America's No. 1 health problem," and "Venereal disease will be controlled so successfully during the next five years that the current epidemic will be completely curtailed." The undesirable and desirable positions on unemployment were "During the next three years, unemployment among recent college graduates will surpass even the devastating level which occurred during the Great Depression of the 1930's," and "During the next three years, unemployment among recent college graduates will drop sharply."

Topics and positions were chosen after pretesting with an additional 40 subjects who rated opinion statements according to (a) how much they believed each statement (i.e., opinion ratings) and (b) how desirable the event described in each statement was. Criteria for selection of the desirable and undesirable positions included mean opinion ratings near midscale and mean desirability ratings near either the desirable or undesirable end of the scale, respectively. An additional criterion was that both opinion and desirability ratings have low variability.

**Measuring Instruments**

**Expectancies.** On 15-point scales ranging from "very unlikely" to "very likely," expectancy sub-
results

manipulation checks

subjects in choice conditions perceived that they had more choice about reading an interview (X = 13.19) than did no-choice subjects (X = 5.85), F(1,333) = 253.24, p < .001. Desirable positions were rated more desirable (X = 13.58) than undesirable positions (X = 1.46), F(1,333) = 1778.62, p < .001. Subjects rated the attractive source more favorably than the unattractive source on the 12 adjective scales, multivariate F = 35.37, p < .001.

the expectancy subjects' likelihood ratings, presented in Table 1, indicated that the conditions necessary for obtaining the hypothesized attribution effects on opinion change were successfully established. The significant Source Attractiveness X Position Desirability interaction, F(1,84) = 43.49, p < .001, reflected the fact that the attractive communicator was judged more likely (p < .001) than the unattractive one to advocate desirable positions, while the unattractive communicator was more likely (p < .001) than the attractive one to advocate undesirable positions. Also, a position desirability main effect, F(1,84) = 10.87, p < .005, indicated that undesirable positions were judged more likely to be advocated (X = 8.86) than desirable positions (X = 6.65).

opinion change

the mean opinion change scores appear in Table 2. Analysis of variance yielded a significant Source Attractiveness X Position Desirability interaction, F(1,333) = 6.85, p < .01, predicted by the hypothesis. Opinion change was greater for the source-position combinations judged relatively unlikely by the expectancy subjects (i.e., the attractive/undesirable and unattractive/desirable combinations). When undesirable positions were advocated, the attractive source was much more persuasive (X = 2.07) than his unattractive counterpart (X = .47), F(1,333) = 12.10, p < .001. However, when desirable positions were advocated, the unattractive source was only slightly more persuasive (X = 2.26) than the attractive one (X = 2.14), F(1,333) < 1.00. This failure of the unattractive communicator to become significantly

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TABLE 1

MEAN LIKELIHOOD RATINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position desirability</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Source attractiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attractive</td>
<td>Unattractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undesirable</td>
<td>Venereal disease</td>
<td>6.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>6.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable</td>
<td>Venereal disease</td>
<td>8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>8.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>8.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Ratings are on a 15-point scale with 15 indicating "very likely." Cell n = 22 in each condition.
more persuasive than the attractive one when advocating a desirable position can be ascribed to the overall tendency for attractive sources to be more persuasive ($\bar{X} = 2.10$) than unattractive ones ($\bar{X} = 1.37$), $F(1, 333) = 5.01, p < .05$. The Choice $\times$ Source Attractiveness $\times$ Position Desirability interaction, which approached significance, $F(1, 333) = 2.99, p < .09$, reflected the greater tendency among no-choice subjects for unlikely source-position combinations (attractive/undesirable and unattractive/desirable) to be more persuasive.

A position desirability main effect indicated that desirable positions were more persuasive ($\bar{X} = 2.19$) than undesirable ones ($\bar{X} = 1.28$), $F(1, 333) = 7.82, p < .005$. Finally, a topic main effect showed that venereal disease messages were more persuasive, ($\bar{X} = 2.94$) than unemployment messages ($\bar{X} = .53$), $F(1, 333) = 54.01, p < .001$.

Perception of Source

Ratings of the source on the 12 adjective scales were treated by a multivariate analysis of variance, and only effects yielding a significant multivariate $F$ are reported. The two additional source ratings, how fair he was in evaluating the evidence concerning the topic and how careful he was in thinking out the reasons for his opinion, were analyzed separately on a univariate basis.

On the 12 adjectives as well as on the ratings of fairness and carefulness, the main effects of source attractiveness and topic were significant at or beyond the .01 level: Attractive sources were rated more favorably than unattractive ones, and sources discussing venereal disease were rated more favorably than those discussing unemployment. As on the other dependent variables, the Source Attractiveness $\times$ Position Desirability interaction proved significant on the set of adjectives ($p < .05$) and it was marginally significant on fairness and on carefulness ($p < .10$). Thus, although under both desirability conditions attractive sources were rated more favorably than unattractive sources, this difference was larger when undesirable positions were advocated. Since the only remaining significant effects failed to generalize across the source perception dependent variables (i.e., each was significant on only one dependent variable), they are not described.

Recall of Arguments

Analysis of the number of persuasive arguments recalled showed that the Source Attractiveness $\times$ Position Desirability interaction was significant, $F(1, 333) = 12.93, p < .001$: Given undesirable positions, subjects recalled more arguments if the source was attractive ($\bar{X} = 3.53$) rather than unattractive ($\bar{X} = 3.12$), $F(1, 333) = 7.64, p < .01$; however, given desirable positions, subjects recalled more arguments if the source was unattractive ($\bar{X} = 3.63$) rather than attractive ($\bar{X} = 3.25$), $F(1, 333) = 6.08, p < .05$. Finally, subjects recalled a greater number of arguments for venereal disease than unemployment messages, $F(1, 333) = 85.71, p < .001$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position desirability</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>No choice</th>
<th>Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attractive source</td>
<td>Unattractive source</td>
<td>Attractive source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undesirable</td>
<td>Venereal disease</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>-1.22</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable</td>
<td>Venereal disease</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.81</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Opinions were given on 15-point scales on which 1 signified "definitely false" and 15 signified "definitely true." The relevant control group opinion means were subtracted so that higher change scores indicate greater movement toward the message and negative scores indicate movement away from the message. The control group means were 6.97 for venereal disease undesirable, 6.15 for venereal disease desirable, 8.58 for unemployment undesirable, and 6.51 for unemployment desirable. Cell sizes ranged from 20 to 22.
Sex Differences

The sexes did not differ on opinion change, though females recalled a marginally greater number of arguments ($p < .08$). Females rated the source, who was male, as more generous, friendly, and modest and rated his analysis of the topic as more fair and careful than did males.

DISCUSSION

The principal finding of this study is that attractive and unattractive communicators were equally persuasive when advocating desirable positions, while attractive communicators were considerably more persuasive than unattractive ones when advocating undesirable positions. To determine the meaning of this finding from a theoretical standpoint, opinion change must be examined in relationship to the other dependent variables—particularly in relationship to the likelihood ratings given by expectancy subjects.

The major experimental hypothesis was that message persuasiveness is lowered to the extent that the position advocated in the message is attributed to a particular communicator characteristic rather than to the external reality it supposedly describes. It was intended that desirable positions would be attributed more strongly to attractive communicators than to unattractive ones, while undesirable positions would be attributed more strongly to unattractive communicators than to attractive ones.

In accord with attribution theory and research, it was assumed that a perceived characteristic of the communicator provides a causal explanation of his position to the extent that the position is regarded as likely to be advocated by a communicator possessing such a characteristic. Approached in terms of expectancies, an adequate test of the opinion change hypothesis required obtaining an appropriate pattern of likelihood judgments. This pattern was successfully obtained: Given only background information establishing the source's attractiveness, expectancy subjects judged the attractive communicator more likely than the unattractive one to advocate desirable positions and the unattractive communicator more likely than the attractive one to advocate undesirable positions. In addition, undesirable positions were judged more likely to be advocated than desirable positions. While not predicted, this tendency might suggest that students may generally hear, and thus come to expect, more bad news than good from persons in authority roles such as those held by our communicators.

Examination of the opinion change findings in relationship to the likelihood data reveals considerable parallelism. Both dependent variables yielded a position desirability main effect: Desirable positions were more unlikely and more persuasive. Both likelihood and opinion data yielded a Source Attractiveness $\times$ Position Desirability interaction: The incongruous combinations (attractive source/undesirable position and unattractive source/desirable position) were more unlikely and relatively more persuasive. Yet opinions but not likelihood ratings yielded a source attractiveness main effect: Attractive sources were more persuasive than unattractive ones. This effect was anticipated and could be interpreted by any number of nonattributional mechanisms. This tendency does, however, mean that an attribution interpretation of the opinion data is less straightforward than it might otherwise be because the form of the Source Attractiveness $\times$ Position Desirability interaction was not the same crossover type on opinion change as it was on the likelihood ratings. Yet if the heightened persuasiveness of attractive communicators is viewed as a product of their greater likability, the parallelism that the opinion and likelihood findings show in other respects still favors the attribution interpretation. Thus, with undesirable positions the usual persuasive advantage of attractive communicators became even more pronounced, while with desirable positions, the attribution effect served to contract

$^3$ The underlying cause for the desirability main effects is not entirely clear, in part because the desirable positions were slightly more discrepant from subjects' initial positions than were the undesirable positions (see control data accompanying Table 2). However, the fact that greater persuasiveness of desirable positions also occurred in past studies (Eagly & Acksen, 1971; Eagly & Whitehead, 1972; Steiner, 1968) suggests that the effects are not entirely a product of differences in discrepancy.
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(and slightly reverse) the usual difference favoring attractive communicators.

Subjects' perceptions of the source proved generally consistent with the attribution interpretation. Though the attractive communicators received, as predicted, consistently more favorable ratings than did the unattractive ones, the differences favoring the attractive communicators were larger when undesirable positions were advocated. The attractive communicator's greater advantage with undesirable positions can be explained in terms of the attribution effect, by which subjects reacted more favorably to communicators to the extent that their positions were unexpected.

Recall of Persuasive Arguments

Though recall was assessed primarily on an exploratory basis, it seems consistent with an attribution framework that perceivers' differing explanations of the position taken in a message affect how much attention they are willing to pay to the message and how well they comprehend and retain its contents. Thus, a message contrary to what a perceiver expects is worthy of close examination, while a message confirming what is expected is less worthy. These attribution predictions proved correct: The Source Attractiveness × Position Desirability interaction was again significant.

Interestingly, the tendencies for attractive communicators and desirable positions to be in general more persuasive were not paralleled in the recall data. In addition, the mean within-cell correlation between opinion change and recall was a nonsignificant —.04. The lack of a closer relationship between recall and opinion change underscores a point made by attitude researchers in the past—that verbal memory and opinion change are probably separate systems in part responsive to the same independent variables (e.g., Anderson & Hubert, 1963; Insko, 1964; Watts & McGuire, 1964). The issue of whether the quality of a person's reception of persuasive arguments affects opinion change is, however, somewhat different and cannot be adequately assessed by correlating recall and opinions since recall reflects not just reception but storage and decoding processes as well (cf. Eagly, 1974).

Effects of Choosing to Receive the Message

Since the hypothesized attribution effects on opinion change were marginally stronger when subjects had no choice about receiving the message, the findings lend some support to the hypothesis that choice lessens the tendency for the message recipient to focus on the causal antecedents of the message. Yet the present study provided no support for the dissonance hypothesis that unattractive communicators are more persuasive than attractive ones when subjects choose to receive a message (Himmelfarb & Arazi, 1974; Jones & Brehm, 1967). Since Himmelfarb and Arazi obtained the effect demonstrated by Jones and Brehm only at the highest of three levels of discrepancy and the present study failed to replicate it at all, any tendency for unattractive communicators to be more persuasive than attractive ones cannot be solely a product of the message recipient's choice. 4

The present findings fail to support dissonance theory in another respect. Not only should the dissonance aroused by choosing to receive a message be enhanced by receiving it from an unattractive source, but choosing to receive an undesirable position should further increase dissonance. Under choice conditions, then, attitude change should be greatest for the unattractive source advocating an undesirable position, least for the attractive source advocating a desirable position, and moderate for the remaining two source-position combinations. This ordering is the opposite of what was obtained in the present study.

The implications of the choice finding for attribution theory are interesting because research has typically examined the impact on the perceiver's attributions of the actor's choice in engaging in various behaviors (e.g.,

4 Replicability may be affected by the nature of the choice manipulation. Our manipulation was close to Himmelfarb and Arazi's but different from Jones and Brehm's. Unfortunately, Jones and Brehm's high- and low-choice conditions differed in a number of respects in addition to choice. It might also be noted that Cooper, Darley, and Henderson (1974) very recently demonstrated that in a high-choice situation a deviant-appearing communicator was more persuasive than a conventional-appearing communicator. While supporting the authors' dissonance perspective, this finding could, as they noted, also be interpreted within an attribution framework.
Jones & Harris, 1967). The present study suggests that the perceiver’s own choice in observing the actor may also influence attributional processes.

Conclusion

The present findings generally support the viewpoint that a communicator characteristic can affect opinions by influencing the message recipient’s inferences concerning why the communicator advocates a particular position. This interpretation would be quite speculative were it not for the support provided by the expectancy subjects who judged the likelihood of the various source/position combinations. If one regards their judgments as approximating the causal inferences of the experimental subjects, an attribution interpretation of the opinion change findings is considerably strengthened.

Finally, the generality of the present findings across topics should be noted. The replication on the topic variable meant that the complete experiment was performed with the venereal disease topic and again with the unemployment topic. Despite the strong topic differences indicating a more positive reaction to the venereal disease messages, the two sets of findings did not differ in any theoretically relevant respect.

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