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On the Importance of Trust in Interpersonal Attraction from Attitude Similarity

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This article is dedicated to Donn Byrne who first demonstrated the causal link between attitude similarity and interpersonal attraction and passed away on August 10, 2014 at Albany, New York.

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Abstract

Trust has been identified as a key factor in relationship development and appreciation of group members. However, trust has not been previously considered as a reason for attitude similarity to result in attraction. Thus, in the current research, the authors investigated trust as a key component of attraction based on attitude similarity. Trust was shown to significantly mediate attitude similarity effects on attraction when measured alone (Experiment 1), and alongside positive affect in the participants (Experiment 2A), respect for the partner (Experiment 2B), or inferred partner's attraction to the participants (Experiment 2C). Trust was also shown to have independent effects on attraction when juxtaposed with all three of the traditional mediators of attitude similarity effects (Experiment 3). Implications of these findings for models of attraction are discussed.

Key words: acceptance, affect, attitude similarity, inferred attraction, respect

On the Importance of Trust in Interpersonal Attraction from Attitude Similarity

Trust is a key to human social interaction of many types. Trust can originate in simple physical similarity between two strangers (DeBruine, 2002) and can arise from the way people say "Hello" to each other (McAleer, Todorov, & Belin, 2014). In close relationships, attributional statements about seemingly problematic issues were more predictable from *trust* between them than from their levels of *marital satisfaction* (Rempel, Ross, & Holmes, 2001). It is unsurprising, therefore, that relationship formation "begins with trust and the disambiguation of the partner's motives" (Murray & Holmes, 2009, p. 910).

In the context of interdependent groups, Cottrell, Neuberg, and Li (2007) investigated the characteristics (e.g., trustworthy, intelligent, etc.) that make one an ideal group member. Trustworthiness was identified as the single most important attribute. As the authors noted, "… people tend to assign *trustworthiness* [emphasis ours] high values on Likert scales of importance, to select *trustworthiness* as the most necessary characteristic, and to allocate large portions of limited resources to increase target *trustworthines*s" (p. 225). Also included among the lists of qualities was *similarity* between the participant and the ideal target (i.e., *similar to me*). Similarity did not make to the list of the most important characteristics, nor did its mean value exceed the midpoint of 5 on the 9-point scale of characteristic importance. Thus, Cottrell et al. noted that the manipulation of similarity alone in previous studies might have created "… the impression that similarity is a more important variable for assessing others than it really is" (p. 229).

The foregoing quotation might seem at odds with the well-established attitude similarity and attraction link (SAL) in social psychology. To experimentally demonstrate the SAL, Byrne (1961) asked participants to first complete an attitude

survey. When they arrived for a later interaction session, they were provided with a "partner's" survey that included responses surreptitiously made similar to or dissimilar from the participant's own responses to the first attitude survey. Participants examined the survey and rated the partner along attraction items mixed with filler items. Participants typically report being attracted to the stranger to the extent they share attitudes (Byrne, 1971, 1997; Montoya & Horton, 2013). In everyday life, people also judge "favorably those who are most similar to them…" (Pfeffer, 2013, p. 275), and those who are similar to their peers and supervisors do particularly well in organizations (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2002).

How, then, might one reconcile the consistent effects of attitude similarity on attraction with the relative lack of importance of similarity as a feature of an ideal group member? A number of possibilities present themselves, some of which seem more theoretically interesting than others. On the more mundane side, one might wonder whether the abstract and somewhat de-contextualized nature of the term "similarity" used by Cottrell et al. (2007) might have contributed to lack of importance of similarity in partner's choice. Whenever a person is described as similar to another, one naturally asks, "similar in what regard?" Participants in the Cottrell et al. (2007) studies were provided with no information about how the abstract other was "similar to me." Similarity could refer to many characteristics, such as physical appearance, attire, socioeconomic status, or gender as opposed to attitudes and beliefs. Even when "like-minded" was added as a similarity item in Study 2 of Cottrell et al. (2007), there was no way for participants to know whether the similarity included like-mindedness on issues of importance to them (typical of attitude-similarity manipulations) or not.

In the current research, we address a more theoretically interesting possibility. That is, even when attitude similarity has an influence on attraction, it could be that

trust is having a *powerful* and *proximal rol*e in translating that similarity into attraction. If so, it could be that social perceivers often notice the trustworthiness of the other as a salient feature, perhaps even more salient than the attitude similarity that created the trust. If trust plays the central role implied by the Cottrell et al. (2007) analysis and by the close relationships literature more generally (e.g., Murray & Holmes, 2009; Rempel et al., 2001; Simpson, 2007), then trust should predict interpersonal attraction above and beyond the other mediators that have been identified as playing a role in translating attitude similarity into attraction. Those mediators include inferred attraction (i.e., the perceiver assuming that the new acquaintance would like the perceiver, Condon & Crano, 1988; Montoya & Horton, 2012), respect for the acquaintance (Montoya & Horton, 2004), and the experience of positive affect by the perceiver (Byrne & Clore, 1979; Singh, Yeo, Lin, & Tan, 2007). This analysis suggests that the three traditional mediating variables of the SAL have missed an important part of the explanation. That is, none of those mediators directly captures the extent to which the participant trusts the potential partner. If trust plays the central role that is suggested, then trust should be conceptually and empirically distinguishable from the previously established mediators and should contribute to attraction above and beyond those alternative mediators.

Some existing research is supportive of this possibility. In previous research, the most important mediator for the SAL has been an inference that the partner would be attracted to the participant (Condon & Crano, 1988; Singh, Chen, & Wegener, 2014). In most research examining inferred attraction, it is measured after a manipulation of attitude similarity (Insko, Thompson, Stroebe, Shaud, Pinner, & Layton, 1973). However, Montoya and Insko (2008) directly manipulated the partner's attraction to the participant in order to examine what they called a *reciprocated*

attraction effect (i.e., liking the other because the other likes you). In addition, they measured trust before the participant's attraction to the partner. Consistent with the current emphasis, trust mediated the influence of the partner's liking on the participants' attraction to the partner. If trust can account for effects of actual attraction of the partner, then it seems quite possible that trust could also play a key role in accounting for effects of inferences of attraction that come from attitude similarity. As inferred attraction and trust serve as intuitive appraisals of acceptance of the participant by the partner (Montoya & Insko, 2008) and as a signal of the safety and comfort in approaching the partner (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006), it is possible that both inferred attraction and trust are key mediators of the SAL.

Trust also appears separable from at least some of the previously identified mediators for the SAL. For example, in an impression formation context, Singh, Simons, Young, Sim, Chai, Singh, and Chiou (2009) examined the roles of trust and respect in accounting for influences of *other-profitable* (warmth) and *self-profitable* (competence) traits of a target partner (Peeters & Czapinski, 1990; cf. Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Trust mediated effects of the other-profitable traits on attraction, but respect mediated effects of self-profitable traits on attraction. Thus, in the context of the SAL, it seems likely that trust in the partner might play a separable role from respect for the partner.

In the current research, our primary goal was to establish trust that is distinct from the other mediators as an important mediator of the SAL. Beyond this primary goal, we also pursued some secondary hypotheses regarding potential sequences of the mediators to examine where trust might fit. The experimental work by Montoya and Insko (2008) suggested that trust might be more proximal to attraction than inferred attraction. Sequences of the other mediators surrounding trust were more exploratory.

In sum, our research can contribute to the literatures on interpersonal attraction, trust, and relationships in at least two important ways. First, this work would identify a central role for trust in accounting for the robust and consistent effects of attitude similarity on attraction to a novel other. A mediating role for trust would be consistent with research on close relationships (e.g., Murray & Holmes, 2009) and might also help to explain why trust was identified as more important than similarity per se as a feature of an ideal relationship partner or group member (Cottrell et al., 2007). A key aspect of making the case for trust is to show that trust is not captured by any of the previously identified mediators of the SAL. Second, where possible, we examine potential sequences for the mediators (such as trust mediating the strong influences of inferred attraction in creating the SAL; cf., Singh, Ng, Ong, & Lin, 2008; Singh et al., 2007).

We test the hypothesis that trust is a key mediator of the SAL across five experiments. In Experiment 1, we examine the plausibility of trust as a mediator of the SAL. More compelling evidence comes from Experiments 2A, 2B, and 2C, where trust is included in models alongside the previously identified mediators of positive affect, respect, and inferred attraction, respectively. In these datasets, we distinguish trust from attraction and from the other mediators, ensuring that the various mediators are not simply alternative measures of some general positivity or negativity toward the potential partner. Finally, in Experiment 3, trust is included alongside all the previously-identified mediators. If trust is a key mediator of the SAL, then trust should emerge alongside inferred attraction as a strong mediator of the SAL by being consistently influenced by attitude similarity and by consistently mediating the SAL. In previous research, when two or more of the previously-identified mediators were used to predict attraction, positive affect and respect have often shown weaker relations with attraction than inferred attraction (e.g., Singh et al., 2007, 2008, 2014). Thus, if respect

and positive affect play a role, they might contribute (along with attitude similarity) to the level of inferred attraction or trust but might not be the proximal mediators carrying trust or inferred attraction effects to attraction.

Experiment 1

Method

Participants and design. Introductory psychology university students (73 females, 17 males) in Singapore participated in partial fulfillment of their module requirements. We randomly assigned them to one of the three conditions of 0, .5, and 1 proportion of similar attitudes.

Attitude survey. We operationalized attitudes as responses to a 12-item attitude survey. Support for each attitude issue was expressed by reporting one's level of approval on a six-point scale (i.e., *strongly approve the position, moderately approve, slightly approve, and slightly, moderately, or strongly disapprove it*; Byrne, 1971). Participants responded to each issue by checking one of the six levels of approval.

The issues were selected from a larger pool of 24 controversial topics in the participant population (Singh & Ho, 2000; Singh et al., 2014). Issues chosen were only those for which there was equal support versus opposition and the level of support versus opposition was also equal (to the extent that Chi-square analyses of choices across the six response options were nonsignificant in the original pretest). Therefore, issues were chosen such that attitude similarity or dissimilarity would not be confounded with the extent to which responses of the partner are normative versus counter-normative. In prior research, effects of attitude similarity have not been confined to particular subsets of these attitude topics (see Jia & Singh, 2009; Singh & Ho, 2000). The issues used in this experiment were *premarital sexual relations, strict*

discipline, ranking of schools, divorce, death penalty, belief in God, environmental protection, abortion, interracial dating, career for women, money, and *smoking*.

Experimental booklet. Based on the participants' responses to the attitude survey, we prepared a bogus "partner attitude survey" for each participant. Similar attitudes were operationalized as lying on the same side of the scale and just one position away from the participant's own responses. Dissimilar attitudes, by contrast, were three levels of approval away from the participant's response and, therefore, fell on the opposite side of the scale (Byrne, 1971).

A Partner's Opinion Questionnaire contained four trust, four attraction, and 12 filler items. The filler items were mixed with the trust and attraction items, but the trust items always preceded the attraction items. As Table 1 shows, the trust items tapped the participants' belief in the benevolence of and comfort with the partner (Montoya & Insko, 2008; Singh et al., 2009). However, the attraction items asked for the participant's *intention* to meet with the person, know the person more, and work with the person and hence tapped *behavioral attraction* (Montoya & Insko, 2008; Singh et al., 2014). All items had 7-point scales: 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*).

Procedure. In the first session, participants completed an attitude survey in small groups, and signed up for an interaction study in the next week. In the second session, a female experimenter met them in small groups. She told them that (a) there would be an interaction session with another same age-sex peer; (b) two of them would be "working together later as partners in a project;" and (c) they had to first form an opinion of the partner based on the partner's responses to the previous week's attitude survey.

Participants examined the supposed partner's attitude survey, formed an opinion of the partner for 1 min, and then answered the items that followed in the booklet (that

included the trust and attraction items). After collecting the completed booklets, the experimenter informed the participants that there was no actual interaction session scheduled. She fully debriefed them before ending the session.

Results and Discussion

Construct distinction. To distinguish trust from attraction, we performed a two-factor maximum likelihood analysis on the eight responses with a promax rotation (cf. Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012). Table 1 lists the factor patterns in the responses. Whereas the trust responses primarily loaded on the first factor, the attraction responses loaded on the second factor. The fit of the two-factor measurement model to the data, $\chi^2(13) = 26.75$, $p < .01$, was much better than that of a single-factor model, $\chi^2(20) = 95.92$, $p < .001$ [$\chi^2_\Delta(7) = 69.17$, $p < .001$]. Thus, we regarded trust and attraction as distinct constructs.

The Cronbach alphas (αs) of the trust and attraction responses were very high (see Table 1). We averaged responses to the four respective trust and attraction items. The two composite responses were correlated, $r(88) = .64$, $p < .01$.

Similarity effects. In separate one-way between-group analyses of variance (ANOVAs), the similarity effect was significant for trust, $F(2, 87) = 36.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .46$, and attraction, $F(2, 87) = 8.60$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .17$. Table 2 reports the means (*M*s) and standard deviations (*SD*s) of the two responses as a function of proportion of similar attitudes. We compared the three means by polylinear contrasts. The linear components of 1.31 for trust and of 0.68 for attraction were significant, *p*s < .001. However, the quadratic component of -0.09 for trust and of -0.06 for attraction were nonsignificant, *p*s > .27. Thus, there was a positive linear relation between proportion of similar attitudes and each response (Byrne & Nelson, 1965)

Mediation analyses. We specified the proportion of similar attitudes as the independent variable (IV), trust as the mediating variable (MV), and attraction as the dependent variable (DV) in a mediation analysis using SPSS Process Model 4 (Hayes, 2013). Model 4 estimated (1) the indirect effect of attitude similarity on attraction via trust (indirect effect = *ab*, where *a* = the IV effect on the MV; *b* = the MV effect when both the MV and the IV predict the DV), (2) the bias corrected 95% confidence interval (CI) around that indirect effect from 5000 bootstrap re-samples, and (3) the mediation effect size (ES) (i.e., ES = *ab*/*c*, where *c* is the total effect of the IV on the DV). We accepted the indirect effect as greater than zero if its bias-corrected 95% CI excluded zero.

The indirect effect of attitude similarity on attraction via trust was significant (IE = 1.06; 95% CI: 0.66, 1.57). However, the direct effect of attitude similarity on attraction (*c*' = *c* – *ab*) was nonsignificant, B = -0.10, *t* = -0.47, *p* = .71. Thus, trust mediated the SAL, with a large ES of 1.10.[1]

Discussion. As hypothesized, trust in the partner is indeed distinct from attraction toward him or her. Evidence for a strong mediation of the SAL by trust supports the plausibility of trust as a mediator alongside the previously-identified mediators for the SAL. However, stronger evidence for the role of trust would come from experiments in which trust is directly compared with the previously-identified mediators.

Experiments 2A, 2B, and 2C

To examine the role of trust alongside the previously-identified mediators, we measured trust with positive affect, respect, or inferred attraction in Experiments 2A, 2B, and 2C, respectively.

Method

Participants and design. Participants in Experiment 2A (47 females, 21 males) and 2B (48 males, 48 females)[2] were from the same population as in Experiment 1, and those in Experiment 2C (33 females, 27 males) were from another university in Singapore. The condition in Experiment 1 with half similar and half dissimilar attitudes added little to the analysis because there was only a linear and no curvilinear relation between the proportion of similar attitudes and attraction. Thus, for the rest of our experiments, we reduced the design to only 0 and 1 proportions of similar attitudes. These extreme conditions had also produced stronger attitude-similarity effects in previous research (Singh, 1974).

Materials and procedure. The materials, procedures, and the measures of trust and attraction were identical to those in Experiment 1. The changes across the three experiments were in the measured additional mediator of *positive affect, respect*, or *inferred attraction*.

We assessed positive affect in the participants in Experiment 2A through responses to four items (*active, attentive, inspired,* and *determined*) that overlapped with the *interest* and *activation* dimensions of positive affect (Egloff, Schmukle, Burns, Kohlmann, & Hock, 2003).[3] This aspect of positive affect might differ somewhat from that used in some previous studies relating affect to the SAL (e.g., Singh et al., 2007, 2008). However, recent research using the current measures has also found mediation of the SAL by positive affect (Singh et al. 2014).

Instead of positive affect, in Experiment 2B we measured respect for the partner through four respect items (i.e., *My future interaction partner will probably be successful in life*; *…would achieve all of his or her goals*; *… is probably good at everything that s/he does*; and *… would make a good leade*r.). The randomized trust and respect items preceded the attraction items within the questionnaire.

In Experiment 2C, we separately labeled the trust and attraction items as *Your Opinion of the Partner* and *Your Attraction toward the Partner*, respectively. In a new *Partner's Attraction toward You* questionnaire, we included the same attraction items but framed them to tap inferences about how attracted the partner might be toward the participant (e.g., *My future interaction partner would like to meet me*; … *would like* to *be with me*) (Singh et al., 2014).

Results

Construct distinction. To distinguish trust from attraction, we pooled the data from the three experiments (i.e., 2A-2C; $N = 224$) and then performed a two-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the eight responses in AMOS with a correlation between the two factors. In another one-factor CFA, we specified the responses to the eight questions as one factor. The two-factor measurement model showed a better fit to the data: $\chi^2(19) = 41.68$, $p = .002$, non-normed fit index/Tucker-Lewis index (NNFI/TLI) = 0.96, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.98, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07, standardized root mean residual (SRMR) = .03, than the single-factor model, $\chi^2(20) = 107.28$, $p < .001$, NNFI/TLI = 0.86, IFI = 0.90, RMSEA = .14, SRMR = .06[$\chi^2_\Delta(1) = 65.60$, $p < .001$]. Thus, we further confirmed the distinction between trust and attraction.

The αs of all measures but respect (.69) were above .80 (see Table 3). We averaged the four relevant responses to form each construct. The scores ranged from 1 (*low*) to 5 (*high*) on the positive affect measure and from 1 (*low*) to 7 (*high*) on the remaining eight measures. We report the αs of and correlations among the three constructs of Experiments 2A-2C in Table 3. All correlations, but that between trust and attraction in Experiment 2C, were moderate in size. In the pooled analysis, the αs

of trust and attraction were .83 and .85, respectively, and correlation between them was .69.

Similarity effects. We tested the significance of the difference between the two attitude similarity conditions for each response by independent-group *t* tests and estimated the ES using *r* as an index. We report the results from Experiments 2A, 2B, and 2C in the top, second, and third parts of Table 4, respectively. All responses were uniformly higher to a partner holding similar rather than dissimilar attitudes.

Single mediators. We first conducted two single-mediation analyses, using the same Process Model 4 as in Experiment 1, to show that each of the two MVs in each experiment reliably mediated the SAL. Significant indirect effects of attitude similarity on attraction were observed in Experiment 2A via positive affect (IE = 0.22; 95% CI: 0.02, 0.60; ES = .19) and trust (IE = 0.82; 95% CI: 0.45, 1.26; ES = .72), in Experiment 2B via respect (IE = 0.40; 95% CI: 0.15, 0.75; ES = .30) and trust (IE = 1.09; 95% CI: 0.63, 1.63; ES = .82), and in Experiment 2C via inferred attraction (IE = 0.76; 95% CI: 0.11, 1.40; ES = .42) and trust (IE = 1.19; 95% CI: 0.79, 1.70; ES = .65). Thus, in each case, trust served as an additional mediator of the SAL.

Sequential models. As a new way to examine indirect effects of trust controlling for effects of the alternative mediators, we performed two sequential mediation analyses of the data from each experiment by Process Model 6 (Hayes, 2013). In the first analysis, we specified trust as MV_1 (indirect effect = a_1b_1) and the previously established mediator as MV_2 (indirect effect = a_2b_2). Consequently, the dependency of MV_2 on MV_1 (d_{21}) was also estimated (indirect effect of $MV_1 \rightarrow MV_2 = a_1d_{21}b_2$). In the second analysis, we placed trust after the other mediator (i.e., trust was MV_2 and the other mediator was MV_1). The sequential mediation model partitions the total effect of the IV on the DV (i.e., c) not only into its direct (c') and indirect effects (i.e., a_1b_1 for

MV_1 and a_2b_2 for MV_2) but also the sequential indirect effect ($MV_1 \rightarrow MV_2 = a_1d_{21}b_2$). The analysis provides a test of the indirect effects of each mediator (controlling for influences of the other mediator) as well the sequential mediation.

We present the results from Sequential Model 1 (trust as MV_1) in the top row of panels in Figure 1, and results from Sequential Model 2 (trust as MV_2) are in the bottom row of panels. Results from Experiments 2A, 2B, and 2C are in the left side, middle, and right side panels, respectively, of Figure 1. Consider the IV effect on trust (a_1) and the other MV (a_2) of each experiment in Figure 1. Attitude similarity influenced trust in all three experiments, ps < .001, and inferred attraction in Experiment 2C, p < .01. However, there was no such effect on positive affect or respect, ps > .37. The mediation results of Table 5 further show that the indirect effect of attitude similarity via trust was significant and large in all three experiments. The nonsignificant indirect effect via inferred attraction in Experiment 2C was unexpected, though the sequential indirect effect from Inferred Attraction → Trust was significant. The sequential analyses for Experiments 2A-2C did not provide any clear indication of whether trust would follow or precede positive affect or respect. However, the indirect effect through Inferred Attraction → Trust (IE = 0.37) was stronger than the indirect effect via Trust → Inferred attraction (IE = 0.20). Thus, it could be that trust would follow rather than precede inferred attraction (cf. Montoya & Insko, 2008).

Discussion

In Experiments 2A-2C, we confirmed the distinction between the constructs of trust and attraction, and we demonstrated that trust consistently mediates the SAL above and beyond the previously identified mediators of positive affect, respect, and inferred attraction, respectively. Initial analyses examining possible sequences of mediation involving the various mediators were not conclusive regarding the ordering

of trust with positive affect and respect. However, the pattern of mediation was stronger when inferred attraction preceded rather than followed trust in Experiment 2C. This pattern suggested that trust might serve as a more proximal influence on attraction, and that inferred attraction might help to carry influences of attitude similarity through trust to attraction.

One key limitation of Experiments 2A-2C was their modest sample sizes. The size of the studies might have been responsible for some of the marginal (perhaps anomalous) results. For example, in Experiment 2A, the dependency parameter (*d*; i.e., the influence of one MV on the other MV) was not significant in either sequential model, but the independent mediations by trust and positive affect were both significant in only one of the sequences, not the other (trust mediation was significant in both, but positive affect mediation was weaker and nonsignificant in one of the models). Also, perhaps in part due to sampling error, the relation between trust and attraction was somewhat higher in Experiment 2C (r = .81) [4] than was true across the three samples (r = .69). Such high correlation may have affected the mediation analyses, and one might question based on that study alone whether trust and attraction represent different constructs. We believe that the analyses across samples consistently argue for trust and attraction as separable. Further, the mediational patterns in Experiment 2C seem consistent with previous experimental work directly manipulating attraction of the other to the self (Montoya & Insko, 2008). Even so, we sought to provide replication and more complete evidence of the role of trust in a larger sample in Experiment 3.

Experiment 3

In Experiment 3, we sought to obtain additional support for the key role of trust in accounting for attitude similarity effects on attraction and to put ourselves in a better position to examine the possible ordering of the various mediators. While we

manipulated attitude similarity between the participant and the partner in the same way as in Experiment 2A through 2C, we measured trust, positive affect, respect, and inferred attraction all in one study, using a much larger *N* than in any of those experiments.

Method

Participants and design. Eighty males and 144 females from the same populations as in previous experiments participated. We randomly assigned them to eight cells of a 2 (attitude similarity) x 4 (order of mediator measurement: OMMs) between-participants factorial design (*n*s = 10 males and 18 females per cell). The attitude issues and levels of similarity were the same as in Experiments 2A-2C. However, there were four OMMs: (1) inferred attraction → trust → respect → affect; (2) inferred attraction → trust → affect → respect; (3) trust → inferred attraction → respect → affect; and (4) trust → inferred attraction → affect → respect. These OMMs allowed measurement of inferred attraction and trust at the first and second orders twice and that of respect and affect at the third and fourth orders twice. We used these OMMs because the literature and our previous research has been consistent with the causal flow from inferred attraction to trust (Montoya & Insko, 2008), centrality of trust in relationship formation (Cottrell et al., 2007), and proximity of positive affect (Singh et al., 2014) or respect (Montoya & Horton, 2004) to attraction.

Procedure and measures. The procedures and response measures were similar to those in the previous experiments. However, we named the affect and respect measures as *Your Feelings Scale* and *Your Respect for the Partner Scale*, respectively. All responses were measured along uniform 7-point scales (1= *low*; 7 = *high*).

Results and Discussion

Construct distinction. We conducted a series of CFA analyses to ensure that trust is empirically distinct from the three previous mediators of the SAL. First, the five-factor CFA for all 20 responses had better fit indices, $\chi^2$160) = 418.36, $p < .001$, NNFI/TLI = 0.88, IFI = 0.90, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .06, than a CFA specifying a single factor, $\chi^2(170) = 941.76$, $p < .001$, NNFI/TLI = 0.67, IFI = 0.71, RMSEA = .14, SRMR = .10 [$\chi^2_\Delta(10) = 523.40$, $p < .001$]. None of the correlations among the five composite measures (see the bottom part of Table 3) was as high as in Experiment 2C. In addition, a three-factor CFA for the 12 responses forming the inferred attraction, trust, and attraction constructs yielded superior fit indices, $\chi^2(51) = 195.36$, $p < .001$, NNFI/TLI = 0.90, IFI = 0.92, RMSEA = .12, SRMR = .06, to a single-factor CFA, $\chi^2(54) = 370.81$, $p < .001$, NNFI/TLI = 0.79, IFI = 0.83, RMSEA = .16, SRMR = .07 [$\chi^2_\Delta(4) = 175.45$, $p < .001$]. Focusing on the pairs of factors that had the strongest relations, the fit indices for two-factor CFAs for inferred attraction and trust, inferred attraction and attraction, and trust and attraction were much better than those for their corresponding single-factor CFAs [$\chi^2_{\Delta s}(1) > 75.11$, $ps < .001$]. Collectively, then, these results confirm our position that trust is distinct from attraction as well as the three previous mediators of the SAL.

Similarity effects. In preliminary ANOVAs, there was no moderation of the similarity effect on any of the five measures by sex of the participants, OMM, or their interaction. Thus, we analyzed the data in the same ways as in preceding three experiments. The mean trust, inferred attraction, respect, positive affect, and attraction responses reported in the bottom of Table 4 are again significantly higher when the partner had similar than dissimilar attitudes.

Single mediators. The indirect effects of attitude similarity on attraction via positive affect (IE = 0.11; 95% CI: 0.03, 0.23; ES = .10), respect (IE = 0.38; 95% CI:

0.23, 0.57; ES = .34), inferred attraction (IE = 0.92; 95% CI: 0.66, 1.24; ES = .82), and trust (IE = 1.01; 95% CI: 0.75, 1.29; ES = .90) were all greater than zero. The high ESs for mediation by inferred attraction and trust portray them as key mediators of the SAL.

Two-mediator models. Before examining all of the mediators in one analysis, we pitted trust against positive affect, respect, or inferred attraction in precisely the same way as in Experiments 2A, 2B, and 2C, respectively. Results from tests of Sequential Models 1 and 2 are displayed in Table 5 and in the six path diagrams of Figure 2. The pattern of results closely replicated those in Experiment 2A through 2C. As listed in Table 5, trust had strong indirect effects in all models (significantly stronger than for positive affect or respect, and not statistically different from inferred attraction). There were some slight differences in that the mediation by inferred attraction on its own was stronger and significant in Experiment 3 (whereas it was not significant in Experiment 2C). Also, across the experiments, there was no clear indication regarding whether trust should precede or follow inferred attraction in the sequence.

Four mediators considered simultaneously. Additional evidence for the importance of trust would come from consideration of trust above and beyond all of the previously identified MVs considered simultaneously. Given the uncertainty about the specific ordering of the MVs of inferred attraction, positive affect, and respect in mediating the SAL (Singh et al., 2014) and no clear expectations regarding the specific placement of trust among them, we examined the causal role of trust in parallel to the other mediators by Process Model 4. Figure 3 lists the regression coefficients.

The indirect effects of attitude similarity on attraction via inferred attraction, (IE = 0.65; 95% CI: 0.43, 0.94; ES = .58), trust (IE = 0.44; 95% CI: 0.22, 0.67; ES = .39), and respect (IE = 0.13; 95% CI: 0.05, 0.25; ES = .12), were all greater than zero, but

that via positive affect (IE = 0.04; 95% CI: 0.00, 0.11; ES = .03) was marginal. The size of the indirect effects via trust and inferred attraction did not differ from each other; nor did the size of the indirect effects via positive affect and respect differ from each other. However, the indirect effects via the two key mediators (i.e., trust and inferred attraction) were significantly greater than those via the two seemingly weaker mediators (i.e., positive affect and respect; cf. Singh et al., 2014).

Discussion

Experiment 3 added to Experiments 1- 2C by showing that trust plays a key role in mediating attitude similarity effects on attraction above and beyond all the other previously-identified mediators. Results for Experiment 3 were quite consistent with results of the previous experiments in three important ways. First, trust was distinct from attraction and the other potential mediators. Second, trust consistently mediated attitude similarity effects across experiments and regardless of which set of alternative mediators were included in the model. Finally, indirect effects via trust were consistently larger than those via positive affect and/or respect but similar to those via inferred attraction.

Though more exploratory in nature, we also examined possible positioning of trust before or after the other mediators in a sequence of mediators. Analyses of the potential placement of trust were rather equivocal. It seems quite plausible that trust could precede or follow a number of the other MVs (especially inferred attraction and respect).[5] Therefore, future research aimed at addressing the plausibility of a specific ordering might benefit from more direct manipulation of the hypothesized distal variable to examine its influence on the other mediators and on attraction (cf. Montoya & Insko, 2008).

General Discussion

Overall, our findings make a number of notable additions to the literatures on trust, relationships, and the role of attitude similarity in creating initial attraction. Previous reviews of attraction, group membership, and relationship creation have noted a key role for trust in a relationship partner (e.g., Cottrell et al., 2007; Murray & Holmes, 2009; Simpson, 2007). Yet, the voluminous literature on attitude similarity and attraction had never examined trust as a fundamental reason why shared attitudes would lead to liking of a potential acquaintance (see Byrne, 1997; Montoya & Horton, 2013). This neglect might seem especially unusual given that inferred attraction has long been hypothesized as part of the reason why shared opinions would lead to liking (e.g., Condon & Crano, 1988; Insko et al., 1973; McWhirter & Jecker, 1967; Montoya & Horton, 2012) and direct manipulations of partner attraction have postulated trust in the partner as a key to understanding such "reciprocal liking" (e.g., Montoya & Insko, 2008). Thus, the current research helps to integrate the key role accorded to trust in the relationships domain with the consistent effects of attitude similarity as a source of liking for novel potential interaction partners.

The current research clearly demonstrates that trust represents a construct that is separable from attraction and from the previously-studied mediators of positive affect, respect, and inferred attraction (e.g., Singh et al., 2014). Our work shows not only that trust is a separable construct but also that it is a key mediator of attitude similarity effects on attraction. That is, as predicted, trust mediated the SAL strongly when it was measured alone in Experiment 1, when it was measured with each of the three previously established mediators in Experiment 2A-2C, and when it was measured and analyzed alongside of all of them in Experiment 3. In fact, the indirect effect of attitude similarity via trust was consistently stronger than that via positive affect in Experiments 2A and 3 and via respect in Experiments 2B and 3. Thus, the current data accord with

Cottrell et al. (2007) in suggesting that trust is an important variable in acquaintanceship, adding further that attitude similarity can help to determine interpersonal attraction also through activating trust in the partner.

The current results also suggest that inferred attraction can independently mediate attitude similarity effects on attraction and might sometimes contribute to trust in the partner or develop from trust in the partner. Inferred attraction can be said to serve self-enhancement motives because of an appraisal of acceptance of the participant by the partner (Singh et al., 2014). It makes sense that this inference of likely acceptance by the partner could either contribute to a perception that the partner can be trusted or could develop, in part, from a sense that the partner can be trusted (because the partner and participant share important attitudes). The independent influence of inferred attraction when controlling for trust might suggest that the sense of belonging or acceptance by the partner is an important component of attitude similarity effects on attraction. Experiment 3 showed similar mediation ES for inferred attraction and for trust (and larger indirect effects for inferred attraction than for trust when inferred attraction preceded rather than followed inferred attraction in sequential models). This pattern was not as consistent across experiments as was the strength of the trust effects (and the relative weakness of the positive affect effects), but we place greater confidence in the patterns from the larger Experiment 3.

Limitations

It is important to note some potential limitations of the current research. One such limitation might relate to the type of positive affect measure that we used. As noted earlier, we assessed *interest* and *activation* aspects of positive affect rather than *joy* (Egloff et al., 2003). Previous studies had used more joy-related measures of positive affect (e.g., Byrne & Clore, 1970; Singh et al., 2007, 2008) as well as more

interest/activation-related measures (Singh et al., 2014). However, it is quite possible that these facets of positive affect are conceptually distinguishable and might play different roles in relation to trust and the other potential mediators. Thus, future research might benefit from a closer examination of the particular facets of positive affect that are engaged by similar attitudes. Although indirect effects of both joy-related and interest/activation-related measures have tended to be weaker than effects of inferred attraction in previous research, it could be that the different facets would differentially relate to trust (as either a contributor to trust or a consequence of trust).

The findings of the current research might also depend on the use of a relatively behavioral version of the interpersonal attraction measure (cf. Montoya & Insko, 2008; Singh et al., 2014) and the unique characteristics of the attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971). For example, Michinov and Monteil (2002) distinguished between more affective (liking-based) measures of attraction and more behavioral (intention) measures by showing that those two responses were influenced differently by the same manipulation. Previous research performed within the attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971) had shown consistent mediation results using more affective (Singh et al., 2007) or more behavioral (Singh et al., 2008) attraction measures. Nevertheless, there could be differences in both the sources of and consequences of liking versus willingness (or intention) to interact with a potential relationship partner. Thus, examination of different forms of attraction could constitute a productive direction for future research. It could also be that attraction to a potential partner in a dyadic task performance setting would develop and progress differently than attraction to a potential romantic relationship partner or friend.

Nevertheless, the measure of behavioral attraction may be conceptually interesting in its own right in that it tapped the desire to form and continue the

relationship (Montoya & Insko, 2008; Singh et al., 2014). Thus, it reflects motivation to engage in ongoing interactions with a new work partner. This type of behavioral intention might be important in a variety of interpersonal settings, even those in which liking per se does not play as much of a role.

Implications and Conclusion

We believe that the current research has broad conceptual implications for general models of interpersonal attraction. In forming impressions of others, it is assumed that people "…first, determine the intentions of the other person and group ... and, second, their ability to act on those intentions" (Fiske et al., 2007, p. 77). Similar assessments of a stranger's willingness and capacity to cooperate with the partner have recently been proposed as the two dimensions of a general model of interpersonal attraction (Montoya & Horton, 2014). Capacity/ability might relate to the factor we have labelled as respect in the current article. Our findings might also be taken to indicate that perceived intent or willingness of the partner can be thought of as involving two separable dimensions: *acceptance by* the partner (i.e., inferred attraction or the perceived desire of the stranger to continue the interaction) and *trust in* the partner (i.e., security that the partner will look out for one's interests). These three dimensions might be captured in attitude similarity settings by inferred attraction, trust, and respect. Thus, at least in some settings, this type of three-dimension model might prove useful compared with the extant two-dimensional cognitive formulations.

We also believe that a purely cognitive model of interpersonal attraction may fall short of the reality of relationship formation. In addition to affective features of trust, positive affect may still play a role. In the current research, positive affect mediated the SAL when considered singly or with trust but seemingly lost out when the other cognitive mediators were also considered. Some findings also indicate that

indirect effects of attitude similarity via positive affect might depend on affect's role in sequence with other mediators (see Footnote 5; Singh et al., 2007, 2014).

In conclusion, it can be said that trust should be considered as a key mediator of the SAL. Therefore, we agree with Simpson (2007) who noted, "Without trust, voluntary relationships are not likely to develop, let alone, grow or be maintained" (p. 460).

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Footnotes

1. When the direct effect takes a negative sign, mediation ES = ab/(c + |c'|).
2. In initial ANOVAs, gender of the participants did not moderate any of the effects.
3. We also measured negative affect in Experiment 2. There was no effect of attitude similarity on negative affect.
4. We thank two anonymous reviewers for pointing out this particularly strong relation.
5. To check on a subtle but sequential role of positive affect (cf. Singh et al., 2007), we evaluated two other models: (1) Positive affect → Inferred attraction → Respect → Trust and (2) Positive affect → Trust → Respect → Inferred attraction. In the former, Positive affect → Inferred attraction reliably mediated the SAL (IE = 0.05; 95% CI: 0.01, 0.11; ES = .03). In the latter, both Positive affect → Trust (IE = 0.02; 95% CI: 0.01, 0.06; ES = .02) and Positive affect → Inferred attraction (IE = 0.03; 95% CI: 0.01, 0.08; ES = .03) also mediated the SAL. Perhaps weak mediators like positive affect and respect are more likely to mediate the SAL through their sequential rather than direct mediating roles. Further, positive affect seems to precede both inferred attraction and trust in generating attraction from attitude similarity.

Table 1

Maximum Likelihood Factor Patterns in the Trust and Attraction Responses in Experiment 1

Responses to the items	Factor 1	Factor 2
Factor 1: Trust		
T1: My partner would look out for my interests	**.72**	.17
T2: My partner would act benevolently toward me.	**.84**	-.03
T3: This partner would make me feel secure.	**.92**	-.07
T4: I would find this partner to be dependable.	**.75**	.08
Factor 2: Attraction		
A1: I would like to meet my partner.	.03	**.79**
A2: I would like to be with my partner.	.11	**.55**
A3: I look forward to working with my partner.	.08	**.82**
A4: I would like to get to know this person better.	-.09	**.87**

Note. T = Trust; A = Attraction. Partner = "future interaction partner"

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviations of Responses as a Function of Proportion of Similar Attitudes in Experiment 1

Responses and Reliability	Proportion of Similar Attitudes		
	0	0.5	1
Trust (.86)	3.18 (0.88)	4.23 (0.91)	5.04 (0.74)
Attraction (.90)	3.55 (1.08)	4.11 (0.68)	4.52 (0.91)

Table 3

Reliabilities and Correlations Among Constructs of Experiment 2A through 3

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
	Experiment 2A (N = 68)				
1. Trust	.80	-	-	-	-
2. Positive Affect	.28**	.84	-	-	-
3. Attraction	.67**	.46**	.91	-	-
	Experiment 2B (N = 96)				
1. Trust	.82	-	-	-	-
2. Respect	.52**	.69	-	-	-
3. Attraction	.65**	.52**	.88	-	-
	Experiment 2C (N = 60)				
1. Trust	.86	-	-	-	-
2. Inferred Attraction	.73**	.90	-	-	-
3. Attraction	.81**	.72**	.89	-	-
	Experiment 3 (N = 224)				
1. Trust	.81	-	-	-	-
2. Inferred Attraction	.68**	.88	-	-	-
3. Respect	.64**	.49**	.79	-	-
4. Positive Affect	.28**	.31**	.18**	.80	-
5. Attraction	.70**	.75**	.56**	.34**	.92

Note. The corresponding αs are listed along the diagonal. ** $p < .01$

Table 4

Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses to Attitudinally Dissimilar versus Similar Partner and Results from Tests of Significance and Effect Size in Experiment 2A through 3

	Partner's Attitudes		Statistics and Effect Size (r)		
Responses	Dissimilar	Similar	*T*	*P*	r
		Experiment 2A			
Trust	3.43	4.61	5.99	.001	.57
	(0.86)	(0.83)			
Positive Affect	1.88	2.32	2.10	.04	.25
	(0.85)	(0.88)			
Attraction	3.49	4.61	3.48	.001	.47
	(1.07)	(0.83)			
		Experiment 2B			
Trust	2.97	4.70	9.07	.001	.68
	(0.93)	(0.94)			
Respect	3.65	4.36	3.96	.001	.38
	(0.90)	(0.80)			
Attraction	3.51	4.83	5.43	.001	.48
	(1.31)	(1.06)			
		Experiment 2C			
Trust	3.14	4.74	8.46	.001	.74
	(0.78)	(0.68)			
Inferred Attraction	3.33	4.94	7.27	.001	.68
	(0.95)	(0.82)			
Attraction	3.33	5.15	7.65	.001	.70
	(0.93)	(0.91)			
		Experiment 3			
Trust	3.49	4.79	11.60	.001	.61
	(0.88)	(0.79)			
Inferred Attraction	3.62	4.81	9.27	.001	.53
	(0.96)	(0.97)			
Respect	3.98	4.55	5.27	.001	.33
	(0.87)	(0.75)			
Positive Affect	2.43	2.74	2.67	.004	.15
	(0.84)	(0.90)			
Attraction	3.90	5.02	7.62	.001	.46
	(1.28)	(0.88)			

Note. The *df*s for the independent-group *t* test of Experiments 2A, 2B, 2C, and 3 were 66, 94, 58, and 222, respectively.

Table 5

Indirect Effect of Attitude Similarity via Each Mediator and Its Sequential Effect Along with 95% CI and ES at Two Sequences in Experiment 2A through 3

		Experiments 2A-2C			Experiment 3		
Models	Mediators	IE	95% CI	ES	IE	95% CI	ES
		Sequential Mediation by Trust (T) and Positive Affect (PA)					
	T	0.73[a]	0.39,1.17	.65	0.94[a]	0.69,1.21	.84
1	T → PA	0.08[b]	-0.01,0.27	.07	0.06[b]	0.02,0.14	.06
	PA	0.09[b]	-0.07,0.31	.08	0.00[b]	-0.06,0.06	.00
	PA	0.17[b]	0.02,0.50	.15	0.06[b]	0.02,0.16	.06
2	PA → T	0.05[b]	-0.00,0.19	.04	0.05[b]	0.01,0.11	.05
	T	0.69[a]	0.35,1.12	.61	0.89[a]	0.64,1.15	.80
		Sequential Mediation by Trust (T) and Respect (R)					
	T	0.86[a]	0.40,1.39	.65	0.79[a]	0.52,1.07	.71
1	T → R	0.23[b]	0.05,0.54	.17	0.22[b]	0.09,0.37	.19
	R	0.03[c]	-0.10,0.23	.02	-0.05[c]	-0.19,0.00	-.04
	R	0.25[ab]	0.05,0.57	.19	0.17[b]	0.07,0.30	.15
2	R → T	0.15[b]	0.06,0.33	.11	0.21[b]	0.11,0.35	.19
	T	0.72[a]	0.30,1.20	.54	0.58[a]	0.38,0.80	.52
		Sequential Mediation by Trust (T) and Inferred Attraction (IA)					
	T	0.99[a]	0.60,1.45	.54	0.62[a]	0.40,0.87	.55
1	T → IA	0.20[b]	-0.09,0.57	.11	0.39[a]	0.23,0.57	.35
	IA	0.19[b]	-0.08,0.60	.11	0.30[a]	0.11,0.56	.27
	IA	0.39[a]	-0.24,0.93	.22	0.69[a]	0.46,0.97	.62
2	IA → T	0.37[a]	0.16,0.76	.21	0.22[b]	0.13,0.36	.20
	T	0.62[a]	0.31,0.98	.34	0.39[ab]	0.24,0.64	.35

*Note***.** The IEs with different superscripts differ significantly at $p = .05$. In each sequential mediation test reported, the first and last indirect effects are of the respective preceding and the succeeding MVs themselves, but the center one is the sequential effect of the preceding MV on the mediation by the succeeding MV.

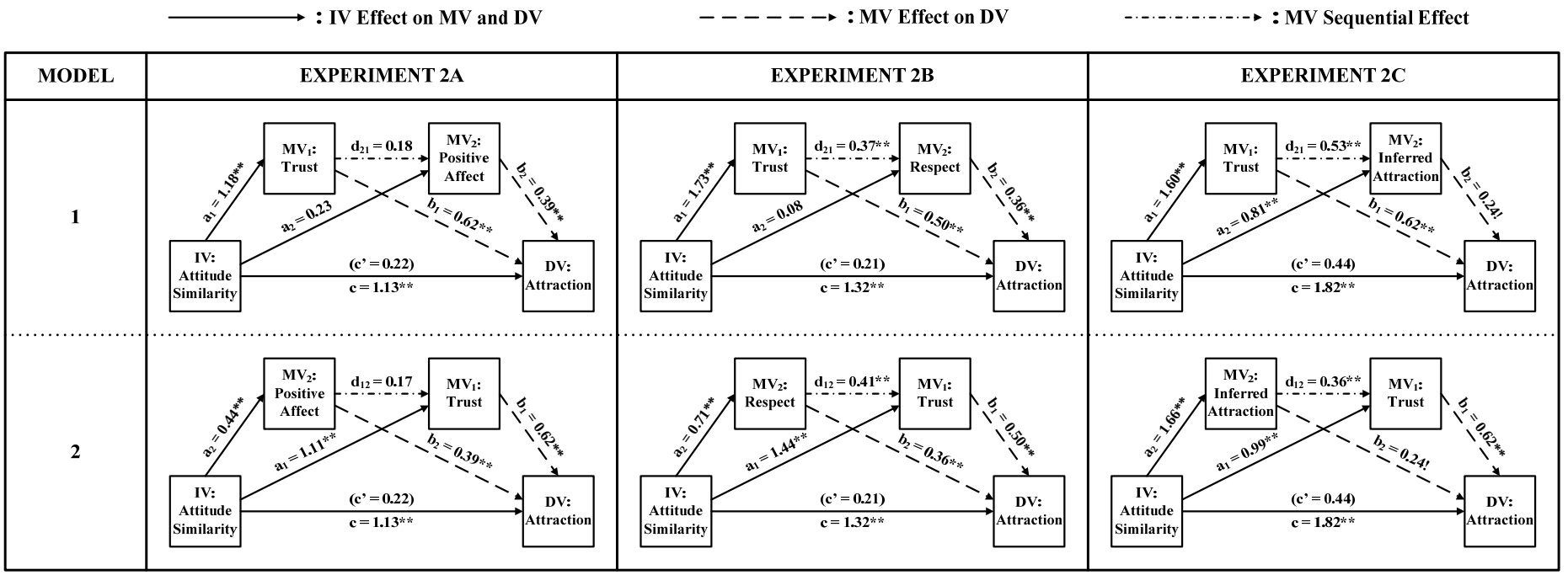

Figure 1. Results from Sequential Mediation Models 1 and 2 analyses of Experiments 2A, 2B, and 2C. In each path diagram, the coefficients a_1 and a_2 and c are the simple (zero-order) effects of the IV on MV_1,MV_2, and the DV, respectively. The coefficient d_{21} represents the sequential effect of MV_1 on MV_2, controlling for the IV, and coefficients b_1, b_2, and c' represent the partialled influences of MV_1, MV_2, and the IV on the DV when the IV and both mediators are used to predict the DV.

! $p = .06$, * $p = .05$; ** $p < .01$.

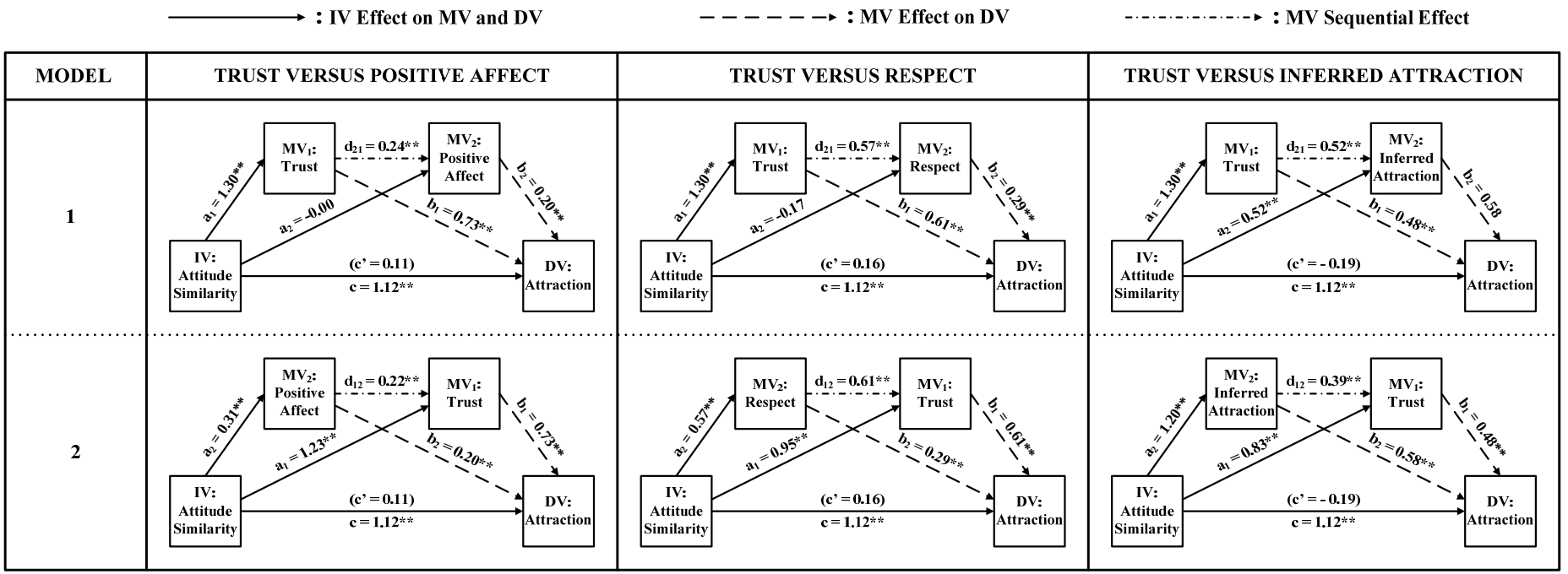

Figure 2. Results from Sequential Models 1 and 2 analyses of trust with positive affect, respect, or inferred attraction of Experiment 3. The coefficients are interpretable in the same ways as in Figure 1.

** $p < .01$.

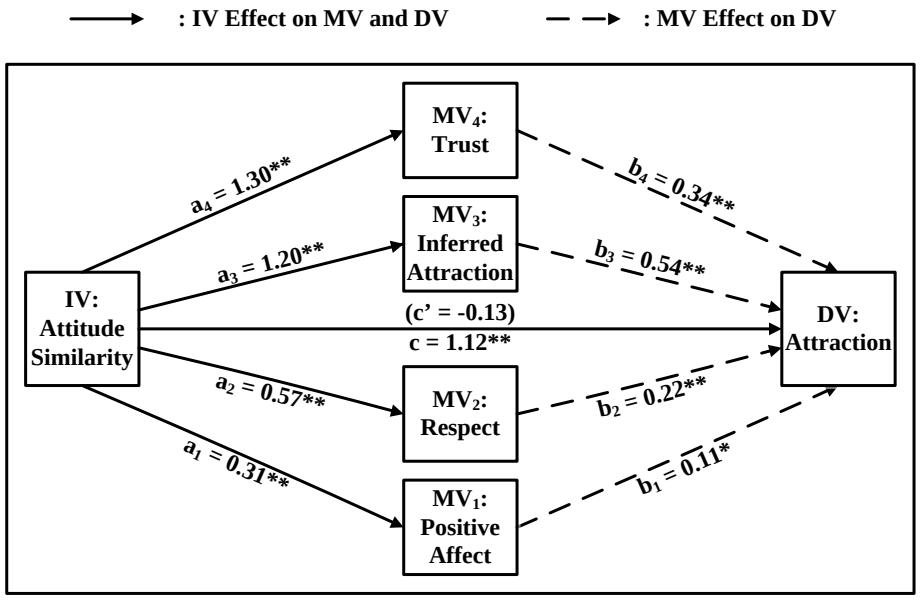

Figure 3. Results from a four-MV parallel model analysis of Experiment 3. The IV effects on all the four MVs (a_1, a_2, a_3, and a_4) are independent of each other. As in the previous figures, the c coefficient represents the zero-order relation between the IV and DV, whereas the c' path coefficient represents the relation between the IV and DV controlling for the four mediating variables. * $p = .05$; ** $p < .01$.