The Alpha and the Omega:

Testing the Strength of Persuasion

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Acknowledgement Page

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Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between Alpha strategies of persuasion, Omega strategies of persuasion, and different levels of threat to attitudinal freedom (reactance) on agreement with a communicator. Specifically, the Alpha strategy of similarity, the Omega strategy of depersonalization, and high/low threat levels were studied to test the hypothesis that agreement could be significantly higher in the similar, depersonalized, and high threat condition compared to the other conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions: high threat/similar/depersonalized, high threat/similar/personalized, high threat/non-similar/depersonalized, high threat/non-similar/personalized, low threat/similar/depersonalized, low threat/similar/personalized, low threat/non-similar/depersonalized, and low threat/non-similar/personalized. Participants were told that they were either similar or non-similar to a paragraph author, read an opinionated paragraph containing differing levels of threats and personalization, and then answered a questionnaire to measure agreement. Although the expected 2 (Alpha strategy of similarity: high vs. low) _ 2 (Threat to attitudinal freedom: high vs. low) _ 2 (Omega strategy of depersonalization: personalized vs. depersonalized) three-way interaction was not found, results did demonstrate that both similarity and depersonalization were significant predictors of agreement with the communicator across all conditions.
The Alpha and the Omega: Testing the Strength of Persuasion

For centuries, scholars have studied persuasion, viewing it as an important and practical art form. Many scholars cite Aristotle’s principles of persuasion, laid down in his work *Rhetoric*, as the first systematic attempt to define behavior that will result in social influence (Arnhart, 1981).

Today, social psychologists are still interested in understanding persuasion, defining it as the attempt to induce another to undertake a course of action or embrace a point of view by means of argument, reasoning, or entreaty (Arnhart, 1981). Social psychologists became interested in persuasion during the Second World War with the work of the social psychologist Carl Hovland. At the time, President Roosevelt was concerned that Americans would lose the will to fight the Japanese after winning the war against Germany (Hovland, Lumsdaine, & Sheffield, 1949). Hovland et al.’s task was to bolster the morale of soldiers in order to motivate soldiers to continue fighting against Japan. To do this, Hovland et al. focused their attitude change and persuasion research towards the success of propaganda campaigns. For example, Hovland et al. had US soldiers watch the Frank Capra World War II film series, *Why We Fight* (Capra, 1945). He found that when the soldiers perceived the source of information as uncredible, they tended to discount it. However, after an amount of time soldiers would forget where a given message originated, yet they would retain memories of the message itself. The result was information from a low-credible source could result in an increase in persuasion. Hovland et al. (1949) termed this hidden result the “sleeper effect”, and it became one of the first methods of understanding cognitive routes to persuasion.

Later, Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) worked to discover the sequences of information processing states that were imperative to the success of persuasive communication.
Their research demonstrated that the source (i.e., the person making the communication) is more likely to be effective if that person is seen as trustworthy, or as an expert in that field. This finding sparked a debate over which was more influential in persuasion: the source of the message or the content.

Theories in support of the importance of message content focused on comprehension, learning, and retention of issue-relevant information (McGuire, 1969) as well as "the nature of a person’s idiosyncratic cognitive responses to issue-relevant information" (Brock, 1967, p. 299). These theories were instrumental in the furthering of research and interest in persuasion by social psychologists.

Cognitive Response Theory

One theory in support of message content is the cognitive response theory (Greenwald, 1968). A cognitive response is a thought that is generated in response to persuasive communication which triggers an attitude change. The way in which a cognitive response effects attitude, after being exposed to persuasive communication, has to do with the way the recipient of the communication manipulates, elaborates and integrates the information (Greenwald). When exposed to information, people relate it to pre-existing thoughts, or schemas, that they already have on the subject. People are more likely to be persuaded by messages to which they have already assigned positive associations. The cognitive response theory attempts to understand the link between the initial response to communication and the attitude change that results.

Reception-and-Yielding Theory

McGuire’s (1968) reception-and-yielding theory also supported message content as the most influential factor in persuasion. McGuire suggested that the impact of persuasive communications could be understood in terms of three information-processing phases: a)
attention to the message, b) comprehension of its contents, and c) acceptance of its conclusions. He transformed this idea into the two part reception-and-yielding theory. This model is often used to predict the effects of different manipulations on persuasion. The immediate attitude change is the product of reception (i.e., attention and comprehension) of the message and yielding (i.e., agreement with message and change in behavior). This involves predicting how any independent variable in the communication situation will be related to attitude change by analyzing that variable’s potential impact on learning the message contents. This multi-stage "reception-yielding" framework is seen as an antecedent of contemporary dual-process models of social cognition (Chaiken, 2001).

The polemic between researchers advocating for source importance and those supporting content importance resulted in an entirely new framework for examining persuasion in the 1980s. *Elaboration Likelihood Model*

The new approach utilized a cognitive framework and was named the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1986). This research synthesized the influence of both source and content variables into a useful model to describe how persuasion affects decision-making.

Elaboration refers to the process of working out in detail by labor and study. The goal of Petty and Cacioppo’s (1986) model is to understand when people are likely to elaborate on information presented to them versus under what conditions people are likely to just take the information at face value. The ELM proposes two routes through which a listener processes a message: the central route and the peripheral route. Usage of the central route occurs when listeners attend to the information and processes the content of the message, while the peripheral route is activated when listeners process external cues of the message (Petty & Cacioppo). For
example, distraction and attention-getting techniques favor peripheral route processing of messages, while central route processing occurs with in-depth information from a knowledgeable source. Researchers often find that central route processing causes more effective and lasting persuasion (Petty, 1977; Cook & Flay, 1978) because the audience must elaborate on and encode the information. Nevertheless, the majority of advertisements and other persuasive messaging tactics people experience daily tend to use the peripheral route to gain attention and attitude change. This is because peripheral route messaging is quicker and easier to present in an engaging, interesting manner than central route processing. However, since peripheral messaging has less information available for elaboration and encoding, the persuasion is not as long-lasting as the central route messaging.

Although the content of the message versus the source of the message has been in the forefront of persuasion research, it is not the only area of dual-route interest. Another area of vast interest and research has been that of examining the persuasive factors that make a choice desirable or undesirable. Lewin (1947) developed a model based on the tug and pull of these two qualitative thought choice factors known as the approach-avoidance model.

**Approach-Avoidance Model**

A fundamental assumption of the approach-avoidance model (Lewin, 1947) is that situations and messages are complex events, engaging many meanings and motives in the audience. People have objectives that they attempt to reach, but there are forces that inhibit their movement toward these objectives. Lewin’s best known teaching example of this is about the child and the beach. A child lost his toy at the water’s edge. When the child went to retrieve the toy, the waves scared him away. The child’s desire for the toy would propel him forward, but
the fear of the waves would scare him back. The child was stuck between approach and avoidance.

Motives that promote a person’s movement toward an end result are considered approach motives, such as incentives or other associations that make the action more rewarding or pleasurable. Those that inhibit movement are deemed avoidance motives, such as punishments or other associated consequences that would make an action undesirable. Dollard and Miller (1950) developed this model further by stating that when one was far from the objective, approach motives were stronger than the avoidance motives. However, when one comes closer to the objective, the avoidance motives gained strength. If these forces equalize then movement toward and away from the objective will stop. This is called an equilibrium point, sometimes referred to as a crossover point. This point is where the strength of approach motives is equal to the avoidance motives. In order to foster continued movement toward an objective, a change agent needs to be employed either to increase approach motives or to decrease avoidance motives (Knowles, Butler, & Linn, 2001).

As stated by the approach-avoidance model, there are two fundamentally opposite tactics to fostering change in a persuasive situation. To increase persuasion, one can either make a situation more desirable by increasing desired qualities, labeled by researchers as Alpha strategies, or one can lessen the undesirable qualities of the decision, labeled as Omega strategies. Alpha strategies promote change in audiences by strengthening approach forces that increase the motivation to move toward the goal. Conversely, Omega strategies promote change by minimizing the avoidance forces experienced by people, thus reducing the motivation to move away from the goal (Knowles & Linn, 2004).
In recent years, Alpha strategies have received the most attention by researchers, with the focus being to research messages that increase desirable goals, and motivate movement toward these goals by participants. Adding incentives has proved effective in increasing persuasion, whether the incentives are apparent free items (Burger, 1986) or increased respect (Cialdini, 2001). Researchers have also found messages to be more persuasive when delivered by a trustworthy source (Hovland & Weiss, 1951), when the source of the message is perceived as similar by the target (Byrne, 1971), and when the source is perceived as attractive (Chaiken, 1979). Further, getting people to commit to an opinion or action is an effective way to increase compliance with a later request (Dillard, 1991, Festinger, 1957).

Due to the many methods used to examine these strategies, Knowles and Linn (2004) developed seven categories in order to better classify Alpha strategies. These categories include making a message more persuasive by means of compelling arguments, adding incentives (e.g., offering a free gift with compliance), increasing source credibility (e.g., making the source appear more attractive, more similarity, or more knowledgeable to the audience), emphasizing scarcity (e.g., stating that there is a limited amount of an item), initiating the norm of reciprocity (e.g., providing a service for the audience and then asking for their compliance in return), and emphasizing consistency and commitment (e.g., reporting on successful operating statistics of an item).

In contrast to Alpha strategies, Omega strategies have received relatively little attention by researchers. Researchers propose that Omega strategies work by reducing resistance to change and minimizing threat to attitudinal freedom, or reactance. Reactance is a motivational state aimed at restoring a threatened freedom (Brehm, 1966). Basically, reactance occurs whenever the pathways to persuasion backfire. For example, when people perceive that
someone is attempting to persuade them, it can threaten their perceived freedom over their decisions and attitudes. When people feel that their freedom is threatened, they experience reactance. Although many experiments find that persuasive communicators are more effective when they avoid threatening persuasion tactics (Brehm & Brehm, 1981), threats will not always cause resistance to persuasion. The theoretical issue for reactance theory is to explain when people do and do not show reactance when confronted with threats to freedom.

The discovery of reactance theory led to a novel way of looking at persuasion through Omega strategies in terms of minimizing reactance, acknowledging it, and consuming (using up) reactance. The foot-in-the-door technique (Freedman & Fraser, 1966) minimizes reactance by employing some incremental changes rather than one large change. Also, reactance can be reduced by offering a comparison that makes the original offer seem more attractive (Burger, 1986). Further, depersonalizing an interaction (i.e., taking the recipient’s self out of the interaction) while still preserving the message reduces resistance by making the request seem smaller and less important (Watzlawick, 1987).

Researchers have identified seven types of Omega strategies that utilize reactance reduction: sidestepping strategies to avoid creation of resistance (e.g., depersonalization or minimizing the request), strategies to address resistance directly (e.g., offering guarantees or counterarguments), strategies that address resistance indirectly by taking away the need to be resistant (e.g., raising self-esteem of audience, recasting audience in the persuasive role), strategies that distract the recipient, strategies that disrupt the message, strategies to consume (use up) resistance, and paradoxical strategies that turn resistance back on itself (Knowles & Linn, 2004). Each of these strategies helps to lessen the undesirable qualities of a choice, thereby making persuasion more likely.
Strategy Effectiveness

Studying resistance to persuasion is important both to people who want to resist persuasive messages as well as to those who want to craft better persuasive messages. By knowing the processes by which a message will be resisted, one can avoid these potential pitfalls of persuasion. Further, when a message allows people the “freedom to resist,” it can actually decrease the desire and ability to resist (Brehm, 1966, p. 27). No longer does research center only on how to make persuasion work. Now, rather, researchers focus on how people resist persuasion and how to modify this resistance. This is why Alpha and Omega strategies have gained importance in current research.

Researchers have begun examining how some persuasive messages may contain aspects of both Alpha and Omega strategies. For example, an important study by Silvia (2005) hypothesized that the Alpha strategy of similarity would affect the approach-avoidance model in a dual manner: similarity would increase the positive force toward compliance by increasing liking (Byrne, 1971, 1997) while also decreasing the negative force toward resistance by influencing perceptions of the degree of the threat.

To investigate this hypothesis, Silvia (2005) conducted a 2 (Similarity: high vs. low) _ 2 (Threat to attitudinal freedom: high vs. low) between-subjects study. He had participants read prewritten essays that were deemed either high or low threat to attitudinal freedom. Threat to attitudinal freedom was manipulated by utilizing “you” statements (e.g. “I know I will persuade you about this”) in high threat conditions while omitting these statements in the low threat conditions. The issue discussed in the essays was “Students Considered Second Class Citizens” at a university. This issue was one that was highly relevant to and endorsed by the participant population, which is important as research has shown that threatening attitudinal freedom creates
more reactance when people agree with the communicator’s position (Worchel & Brehm, 1970; Wright, 1986).

Silvia (2005) further manipulated the similarity level between the “author” of the essay and the participant. Participants could be either highly similar to the “author” due to demographic information (Experiment 1) or value ratings (Experiment 2), or not similar in any of these areas. His findings suggested that that the participant’s similarity to the communicator based on values ratings did increase the level of agreement with the communicator’s viewpoint, and this effect significantly increased when the threat was high. Silvia proposed that this interaction was due to similarity’s joint usage as both an Alpha and an Omega strategy as it simultaneously increased compliance and reduced reactance.

However, Silvia’s reactance mechanism of “you” vs. “non-you” statements is actually a component of the Omega strategy of depersonalizing the interaction, which is a strategy to sidestep resistance. Sidestepping resistance lessens reactance by not raising it in the first place and is therefore considered one of the most effective strategies for successful persuasion (Knowles & Linn, 2004). As stated earlier, depersonalization, works by taking the recipient’s self out of the interaction while still maintaining the message and thus minimizes the impact of the current request (Wazlawick, 1987). Perhaps it is the inadvertent use of this Omega strategy, and not similarity that is accountable for reducing reactance and thereby affecting Silvia’s findings.

In order to make a distinction between the function of both similarity and depersonalization in persuasion, the objective of the present research was to study the effects of how Alpha strategies and Omega strategies affect reactance and attitude change by comparing the success of persuasion in the face of high or low threat in conjunction with either the Alpha
strategy of similarity, the Omega strategy of depersonalization, or both an Alpha and Omega strategy.

The present research sought to extend Silvia’s research by first ascertaining if the Alpha strategy of similarity and the Omega strategy of depersonalization were significant predictors of agreement individually and, secondly, whether a combination of these strategies would lead to significantly more persuasion success in high reactance conditions than in the employment of each strategy alone. It was hypothesized that participants in the high similarity, high threat to attitudinal freedom, and depersonalized condition would demonstrate more agreement with the message, based on Silvia’s findings as well as Knowles and Linn’s (2004) depersonalization research.

Method

Participants

A total of one hundred and twenty undergraduate students (46 men and 74 women) participated in the experiment in partial fulfillment of psychology course requirements. Using a random block design, participants were assigned to one of eight conditions in a 2 (Alpha strategy of similarity: high vs. low) _ 2 (Threat to attitudinal freedom: high vs. low) _ 2 (Omega strategy of depersonalization: personalized vs. depersonalized) design.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were met by the experimenter and asked to read and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix A). Similar to the procedure utilized by Silvia (2005), the researcher presented a cover story to participants explaining that this study was the second part of a two-semester study dealing with personality, reading, and writing. The researcher then stated that the last semester’s research consisted of student participants completing personality
scales and writing essays. Participants were informed that the authors of the essays would be referred to as the “communicators.” The participants were then told that this semester the focus was on personality and reading. Finally, participants were advised that they would be expected to complete several personality scales, read background information on the communicator, read the previous semester’s essays, and give impressions and opinions about the essays by filling out a questionnaire. Participants were assured of their anonymity in order to promote honest responses.

*Similarity (Alpha Strategy) Manipulation*

The similarity manipulation was based on Silvia’s (2005) research that similarity due to values is more significant than similarity due to incidental items (e.g., name, birthday, age). For this reason, participants were asked to rank 10 values in terms of personal importance (see Appendix B). These values were equality, happiness, justice, peace, true friendship, power, exciting life, accomplishment, freedom, and creativity. The experimenter then made a values survey for the fictional communicator while the participant completes filler task personality scales. Participants were then given the ranked value information about the “communicator” to read prior to reading to the essay. The experimenter justified this by stating that “People find it helps to have information about the author when evaluating their writing.” In high similarity conditions, the participants had nearly an identical value ranking with the “communicator”. In the low similarity conditions, the participants had nearly an opposite value ranking to the “communicator”. Participants were then asked to initial at the bottom of the page after reading the information as a way of forcing attention to this information.
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**Threat to Attitudinal Freedom Manipulation**

In order to manipulate attitudinal freedom (i.e., reactance), the topic presented to students was on how universities treat their students. In the low reactance condition, the essay was about how many universities treat their students poorly. In the high reactance condition, the essay was about how Marietta College treats their students poorly. As in Silvia’s (2005) paradigm, this topic was found to be one that was relevant to and endorsed by college students and thus capable of activating low or high levels of threat to attitudinal freedom.

**Depersonalization (Omega Strategy) Manipulation**

Following Silvia’s (2005) model, the manipulation of personalization consisted of inserting “you” statements into four of the condition paragraphs while the depersonalized condition removed these “you” statements in the other four condition paragraphs.

There were four specific paragraphs that participants could be assigned to: High Threat/Personalized (see Appendix C), High Threat/Depersonalized (see Appendix D), Low Threat/Personalized (see Appendix E), and Low Threat/Depersonalized (see Appendix F). In addition to the paragraphs, participants were also assigned to either the high or low similarity condition.

The main dependent measure consisted of having participants read the essay and then marking their level of agreement on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*) (see Appendix G) with the question of: “How much do you agree with the author?” The questionnaire also contained several items that were manipulation checks. These questions check for relevancy and perceived threat (How relevant is this issue to you?), for the difference between personalized and depersonalized essays (How much did you feel that the communicator was trying to influence your decision?), and for the impact of the similarity manipulation
(Overall, how similar are you to the author?). Participants were completely debriefed following all data collection (see Appendix H).

Results

To evaluate that all manipulations of the independent variables (similar/non-similar, personalization/depersonalization, high/low reactance) were successful, separate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were run on the participants’ agreement ratings. For all statistical analyses, the alpha level was set at .05 and either _ or Cohen’s $d$ was used as a measure of effect size. Following Cohen’s guidelines for _ (1988), .01 was considered a small effect, .06 a medium effect, .14 a large effect, and .20+ a very large effect. For Cohen’s $d$, a small effect was defined as .2, a medium effect as .5, and large effect was .8 (Cohen, 1988).

Similarity Manipulation Check

To assess the effectiveness of the similarity manipulation on participants’ perception of similarity to the fictional communicator, a 2 (Alpha strategy of similarity: high vs. low) _ 2 (Threat to attitudinal freedom: high vs. low) _ 2 (Omega strategy of depersonalization: personalized vs. depersonalized) between-subjects ANOVA was performed on subjects responses regarding how similar they rated themselves to the author of the communication. This analysis yielded a main effect for perceived similarity, $F(1, 112) = 38.16, p < .001, _ = .25$. As expected, participants in the high similarity condition reported greater similarity to the communicator ($M = 6.51, SD = 2.30$) than those in the low similarity condition ($M = 3.88, SD = 2.29$). There was no other significant main effect for threat or depersonalization and no significant interactions ($Fs < 1$). These results are supportive of the intended similarity manipulation.
Depersonalization Manipulation Check

The effectiveness of the depersonalization check was also measured by the 2 (Alpha strategy of similarity: high vs. low) _ 2 (Threat to attitudinal freedom: high vs. low) _ 2 (Omega strategy of depersonalization: personalized vs. depersonalized) between-subjects ANOVA with the dependent variable being the participants’ ratings of how much the communicator allowed them to make up their own minds. This analysis yielded a main effect for perceived depersonalization, $F(1, 112) = 68.53, p < .001, \eta^2 = .380$. As expected, participants in the depersonalized condition reported feeling less influenced by the communicator in making a decision ($M = 3.98, SD = 2.42$) than those in the personalized condition ($M = 7.88, SD = 2.66$). There was no other significant main effect for threat or similarity and no significant interactions ($Fs < 1$). These results are supportive of the intended depersonalization manipulation.

Threat to Attitudinal Freedom Manipulation Check

Finally, the effectiveness of the reactance manipulation check was also determined by the 2 (Alpha strategy of similarity: high vs. low) _ 2 (Threat to attitudinal freedom: high vs. low) _ 2 (Omega strategy of depersonalization: personalized vs. depersonalized) between-subjects ANOVA. As in Silvia’s (2005) research, the dependent variable was the participants’ ratings of how relevant the information in the communicative paragraph was to them. This analysis yielded a significant main effect for perceived relevancy, $F(1, 112) = 8.44, p = .004, \eta^2 = .07$, meaning that participants in the high reactance condition reported the informational paragraph to be more relevant to them ($M = 7.05, SD = 2.13$) than in the low reactance condition ($M = 5.88, SD = 2.44$).

However, this main effect for reactance on participants’ ratings of perceived relevance of information was mediated by a significant interaction between similarity and personalization,
The Alpha and Omega (1, 112) = 9.95, p = .002, __ = .08. Further examination of this interaction found that in the participants in the similar and depersonalized condition (M = 7.53, SD = 2.05) rated the paragraph as significantly more relevant than those in the similar and personalized condition (M = 5.66, SD = 2.06), t(58) = 3.54, p = .001, d = .92, whereas there was no significant difference between participants in the non-similar and depersonalized condition (M = 6.00, SD = 2.33) and those in the non-similar and personalized condition (M = 6.67, SD = 2.62, t(58) = -1.04, p = .302, d = .27.

Combined and Individual Effects of Alpha and Omega Strategies

The primary prediction of this study was that agreement would be significantly higher in the similar, depersonalized, and high threat condition compared to all other conditions. Participants’ ratings of agreement on the Likert scale (1 being not at all to 10 being very much) served as the dependent measure in a 2 (Alpha strategy of similarity: high vs. low) _ 2 (Threat to attitudinal freedom: high vs. low) _ 2 (Omega strategy of depersonalization: personalized vs. depersonalized) between-subjects ANOVA. See Table 1 for an overview of the mean agreement ratings for the different conditions.

In support of the hypothesis, there was a significant main effect for depersonalization on agreement with the communicator, F(1, 112) = 10.47, p = .002, __ = .09. Participants in the depersonalized condition (M = 6.40, SD = 2.46) agreed significantly more with the communicator than subjects in the personalized condition (M = 5.07, SD = 2.44).

There was also a significant main effect for similarity on agreement with the communicator, F(1, 112) = 21.26, p < .001, __ = .16. As expected, participants in the high similarity condition (M = 6.68, SD = 2.26) demonstrated significantly more agreement with the communicator than subjects in the non-similar condition (M = 4.78, SD = 2.44).
Threat to attitudinal freedom, however, was not found to have a significant effect on agreement with the communicator, \( F(1, 112) = 0.79, p = .375, \_ = .01 \).

The expected three-way interaction was not found to be significant, \( F(1, 112) = 0.24, p = .628, \_ = .002 \). Also, no significant effect was found for the two-way interaction between similarity and depersonalization, \( F(1, 112) = 0.32, p = .572, \_ = .003 \), between similarity and reactance, \( F(1, 112) = 0.94, p = .334, \_ = .008 \), or between depersonalization and reactance, \( F(1, 112) = 3.46, p = .065, \_ = .03 \).

Discussion

Previous research by Silvia (2005) suggested that similarity and reactance interact in such a way that as perceived similarity to the communicator increases, so does the level of agreement with the communicator’s viewpoint in high threat conditions.

However, it is possible that Silvia’s (2005) threat to attitudinal freedom mechanism of “you” statements and “non-you” statements actually employed the Omega strategy of depersonalization. For this reason, the present study sought to replicate and improve upon Silvia’s research by examining if an unaccounted Omega strategy in Silvia’s methodology may have influenced his results. To accomplish this, the present research examined the effects of changes to the source of the message, content of the message, and the approach and avoidance mechanisms applied to the message. This was accomplished by determining if the Alpha strategy of similarity or the Omega strategy of depersonalization, either individually or through an interaction, significantly improved persuasion in the face of high threats to attitudinal freedom.

The expected 2 (Alpha strategy of similarity: high vs. low) – 2 (Threat to attitudinal freedom: high vs. low) – 2 (Omega strategy of depersonalization: personalized vs.
depersonalized) between-subjects ANOVA interaction, in which high similarity, depersonalization, and high threat to attitudinal freedom were predicted to produce greater agreement with the communicator compared to all other conditions, was not found to be significant. However, there were several notable findings. First, as expected, similarity was found to have a significant main effect on agreement with the communicator in which participants in the similar conditions agreed significantly more than those in the non-similar conditions. This finding validates the research of Byrne (1971) as well as Silvia (2005). Secondly, depersonalization also experienced a significant main effect in which participants in the depersonalized condition agreed significantly more with the communicator than those in the personalized condition. This finding lends credence to the validity of Knowles and Linn’s (2004) research on sidestepping reactance strategies and more specifically to Watzlawick’s (1987) work on depersonalization.

Whereas the main effects of similarity do support Silvia’s (2005) initial results, Silvia’s findings of an interaction between similarity and reactance were not replicated. There are several potential reasons for the inconsistencies in comparison to the present study. One major limitation of both the current study and Silvia’s is the small nature of the sample size. In the future, researchers should utilize a larger sample size in order to increase statistical power so as to better investigate this potential relationship.

Secondly, though all manipulation checks were found to be significant, the threat to attitudinal freedom manipulation main effect was mediated by an unexpected interaction between similarity and personalization. In this interaction, participants in the similar and depersonalized condition rated the paragraph as significantly more relevant than those in the similar and personalized condition, however, there was no difference between the non-similar
and personalized condition and the non-similar and depersonalized condition. This suggests that assessing the level of relevance to participants may not have been effective in measuring the levels of threat to attitudinal freedom. This may account for the study’s inability to replicate Silvia’s (2005) finding of an interaction between similarity and threat to attitudinal freedom, as well as explain the lack of a significant main effect for threat to attitudinal freedom. More effective manipulations need to be developed in the future so as to ensure an accurate measure of levels of threat to attitudinal freedom.

Finally, the order of the questions on the final questionnaire may have influenced the participants. Since the manipulation check questions were asked first and the main agreement question asked last, participants may have been biased when responding to the last question.

In conclusion, similarity and depersonalization appear to be two important elements in crafting persuasive message. Although these factors did not significantly interact with each other, nor with threat to attitudinal freedom, the data pattern was generally consistent with the predicted three-way interaction. Due to these findings, it would be worthwhile for future researchers to replicate this study as well as Silvia’s (2005) with a larger sample size. This would allow for any relationships between similarity, personalization, and threat to attitudinal freedom levels to be both clarified and solidified. Future research should also continue to examine the dynamics of Alpha and Omega strategies. It is possible that the results of similarity and depersonalization could represent standard patterns of Alpha and Omega strategy effectiveness which would have significant impact on the study of persuasion. By examining the persuasive success of other specific Alpha and Omega strategies, more detailed applications for each of these strategies could be ascertained.
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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

You are about to participate in an experiment that is the second part of a two-semester study dealing with personality, reading, and writing. Last semester’s research consisted of student participants completing personality scales and writing essays. This semester, the focus will be on personality and reading. You will be expected to complete several personality scales, read the previous semester’s essays, and give impressions and opinions about the essays. All of your responses will remain confidential. You will be debriefed fully following completion of the experiment.

Please read the informed consent statement below:

I understand that at any time I can withdraw from the experiment without any penalty. I am also aware that all information and results will remain confidential and will only be used by the researchers for scientific and professional purposes. At this time, I have no questions. If I have any questions at any time, I understand that I can contact Dr. Sibicky, Dept. of Psychology (ext. 4762) or Valerie Tharp (ext. 3503).

I agree to participate in this study.

Name (please print): __________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________
Date: ___________
Campus Telephone Extension: _______________
Campus Box: ___________
College Major: ___________
Appendix B

Values Scale

Personality Study Value Ranking

**Directions:** Please rate the following list of values in the order of personal importance to you. Rate them from 1 to 10, with 1 being “the most important” and 10 being “the least important”. Please turn this form in to experimenter when you have finished.

—— Equality

—— Happiness

—— Justice

—— Peace

—— True friendship

—— Power

—— Exciting life

—— Accomplishment

—— Freedom

—— Creativity
Appendix C

High Threat/Personalized Paragraph

Well, for my first opinion essay, I want to write about the attitude that Marietta College has about the students. *I know I will persuade you about this.* In their rush to satisfy the faculty, staff, alumni, and other businesses, MC has forgotten about an important group, the students. Sometimes it seems as if students are second class citizens here. Who gets the worst parking spots? When faculty and administration demand higher salaries or they decide to build a new building, who foots the bill? Also, MC certainly benefits from partnerships with corporations like Pepsi Co. which allows Pepsi to market and sell to the students, but what do the students gain? I think that MC needs to remember its primary purpose: promoting excellent education. *I know you agree with my opinion. In fact, you really have to agree because MC students can’t have differing opinions on this issue.*

*The changes in each paragraph due to the different variable manipulations are shown by underlining threat changes and italicizing changes in personalization (these changes were not made apparent in the study).*
Appendix D
High Threat/Depersonalized

Well, for my first opinion essay, I want to write about the attitude that Marietta College has about the students. In their rush to satisfy the faculty, staff, alumni, and other businesses, MC has forgotten about an important group, the students. Sometimes it seems as if students are second class citizens here. Who gets the worst parking spots? When faculty and administration demand higher salaries or they decide to build a new building, who foots the bill? Also, MC certainly benefits from partnerships with corporations like Pepsi Co. which allows Pepsi to market and sell to the students, but what do the students gain? I think that MC needs to remember its primary purpose: promoting excellent education.

* The changes in each paragraph due to the different variable manipulations are shown by underlining threat changes and italicizing changes in personalization (these changes were not made apparent in the study).
Well, for my first opinion essay, I want to write about the attitude that some universities have about the students. *I know I will persuade you about this.* In their rush to satisfy the faculty, staff, alumni, sports programs, and other businesses, universities seem to have forgotten about an important group, the students. Sometimes it seems as if students are second class citizens. Who gets the worst parking spots? When faculty and administration demand higher salaries or they decide to build a new building, who foots the bill? Also, universities certainly benefit from partnerships with corporations that allow them to market and sell to the students, but what do the students gain? I think that the nation’s universities need to remember their primary purpose: promoting excellent education. *I know you agree with my opinion. In fact, you really have to agree because higher education students can’t have differing opinions on this issue.*

*The changes in each paragraph due to the different variable manipulations are shown by underlining threat changes and italicizing changes in personalization (these changes were not made apparent in the study).*
Appendix F
Low Threat/Depersonalized

Well, for my first opinion essay, I want to write about the attitude that some universities have about the students. In their rush to satisfy the faculty, staff, alumni, sports programs, and other businesses, universities seem to have forgotten about an important group, the students. Sometimes it seems as if students are second class citizens. Who gets the worst parking spots? When faculty and administration demand higher salaries or they decide to build a new building, who foots the bill? Also, universities certainly benefit from partnerships with corporations that allow them to market and sell to the students, but what do the students gain? I think that the nation’s universities need to remember their primary purpose: promoting excellent education.

* The changes in each paragraph due to the different variable manipulations are shown by underlining threat changes and italicizing changes in personalization (these changes were not made apparent in the study).
Appendix G

Agreement Questionnaire

Personality Essay Assessment Questionnaire

**Directions:** On a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 being “not at all” and 7 being very much”, please answer the following questions in regards to the essay that you have just read by circling the number that best fits your response.

1. How relevant is this issue to you?
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

2. How much did you feel that the communicator was trying to influence your decision?
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

3. Overall, how similar are you to the communicator?
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

4. How much do you agree with the communicator?
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Thank you for your time and responses. Please turn all materials in to the experimenter when finished.
Appendix H

Debriefing Letter

Dear Student,

You have recently participated in a research study titled “Personality and Reading”. Now that the data collection has ended, you can be fully debriefed on the nature of the experiment.

The purpose of this experiment was to determine the effects of three variables on the strength of agreement with an author. These variables were similarity (whether participant and paragraph author had similar values or not), reactance (whether the author discussed Marietta College in specific or just universities in general), and depersonalization (whether or not the author specified that the reader in the paragraph, such as by using the word “you”).

Since this experiment dealt with persuasion, some deception of participants was necessary so as not to contaminate results. All parts of this experiment were approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee of Marietta College. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact either:

Valerie Tharp, Experimenter x3503 tharpv@marietta.edu
Dr. Mark Sibicky, Advisor x4762 sibickym@marietta.edu

Thank you again for your participation. The data is currently being analyzed. If you would like a copy of the results, please contact the individuals listed above.

Sincerely,

Valerie Tharp
Table 1

*Mean Agreement Responses by Similarity, Personalization, and Threat to Attitudinal Freedom*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personalization</th>
<th>Threat to Attitudinal Freedom</th>
<th>Similar</th>
<th>Non-Similar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depersonalized</td>
<td>Low Reactance</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td>5.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(M = 6.40, SD = 2.46)</em></td>
<td><em>(SD = 2.05)</em></td>
<td><em>(SD = 2.99)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High Reactance</td>
<td>7.73</td>
<td>5.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(SD = 2.28)</em></td>
<td><em>(SD = 1.88)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized</td>
<td>Low Reactance</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(M = 5.07, SD = 2.44)</em></td>
<td><em>(SD = 2.47)</em></td>
<td><em>(SD = 2.09)</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High Reactance</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(SD = 1.91)</em></td>
<td><em>(SD = 2.16)</em></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
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<td>6.68</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(SD = 2.26)</em></td>
<td><em>(SD = 2.44)</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Agreement responses were scored on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*).