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THE EFFECTS OF AGREEMENT, SIMILARITY,
KIND OF INFORMATION AND AMOUNT OF INFORMATION
ON INTERPERSONAL ATTRIBUTION

A Thesis for Master's Degree Presented

by

Grover C. Gentry, Jr.

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

September 1975

Psychology


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September 1975

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ABSTRACT

Groups of subjects judged the academic performances of two hypothetical students, based on written information including interview statements. After making an initial choice and confidence ratings, a comparison between subjects was arranged. Subjects were led to believe that the comparison person either agreed or disagreed with their judgments, and that these comparison persons were either similar or dissimilar in terms of judging individuals. Likewise, subjects were led to believe that these other subjects had either the same kind or different kind of information, and either an equal amount or lesser amount of information. Then subjects re-evaluated their choice and confidence in that choice. A main effect for agreement indicated that a subject's confidence was significantly increased following agreement from another individual. An equal amount of information possessed by the comparison person increased a subject's confidence more than a lesser amount of information. The absence of other hypothesized results are discussed in terms of primacy effects, reactance theory, paradigmatic variables, intra-personal consistency and other personality variables.

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INTRODUCTION

People make judgments about events, objects and persons in their daily encounters with the environment. Judgments are seldom irrevocable, but are typically susceptible to influence and modification, just as any other part of a person's cognitive structure. Numerous factors operate on an individual who is performing a judgmental task. Some factors are influential in affecting the individual's judgment in a particular situation, whereas others are deemed irrelevant.

When the objective qualities of an event, object or person are difficult to ascertain, an individual's judgment of that phenomenon may be influenced by "information" communicated to him by an associate. Studies of attitude change (e.g., Kiesler, Collins, and Miller, 1969) and of conformity behavior (e.g., Kiesler and Kiesler, 1969) have documented the influence of "socially defined reality" on an individual's judgments. But the impact of another person's opinion may be great or small depending on a variety of factors. The present research examines four variables that may mediate such influence: (1) whether the associate's expressed judgment agrees or disagrees with the opinion of the individual; (2) the degree of similarity between the associate and the individual; (3) the kind of information the individual believes the associate to possess; and (4) the amount of relevant information that the individual believes his associate to possess.

The present experiment is an extension of a recent study by Goethals (1972), which was concerned with a judgment regarding performance of two hypothetical college students (target individuals). Initial judgments were followed by either agreement or disagreement from either a similar or dissimilar other person. These manipulations are retained in the present study.

Any personal judgment is accompanied by a concomitant desire to determine its accuracy. Festinger (1954) states as his initial premise:

There exists, in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and his abilities. (p. 117)

There is not merely a tendency, but a drive to evaluate. Likewise, Kelley (1952) describes the comparison function of reference groups as serving to help establish a feeling of correctness regarding a belief. Therefore, it can be expected that individuals are concerned with the accuracy of their judgments.

Judgmental accuracy may be discussed in attribution theory terminology (Heider, 1958; Jones and Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967). Behavior can be perceived as caused by, or attributable to, the person (judge) or to the environment (the entity being perceived). The entity being evaluated may be perceived as having relatively enduring dispositional characteristics. A person may assume his entity attribution to be accurate to the extent that it is characterized by qualities of the entity being evaluated, and not by idiosyncratic traits of the judge himself.

An entity attribution is appropriate when characterized by distinctiveness, consistency over time and modality, and consensus from others (Kelley, 1967). Distinctiveness exists when an impression is uniquely attributed to the entity in its presence, but does not occur in its absence. Consistency over time implies that the individual's reaction to the entity is the same or similar whenever that entity is present. Consistency over modality refers to a same or similar reaction to the entity, regardless of the mode or channel of interaction with that entity. Consensus exists whenever all observers' attributions are in agreement. The dimension of consensus is one concern of the present study.

Once an attribution has been made, it is more susceptible to influence under some conditions than others. Kelly (1967) argues:

Attribution instability (and, hence, susceptibility to influence) will be high for a person who has (a) little social support... and (d) views that have been disconfirmed (p. 200).

This statement posits the importance of consensus from others in maintaining the stability of a judgment, as it also emphasizes the negative impact of disagreement or the lack of consensus.

Individuals tend to conform to the opinions of others (Festinger, 1950) and discrepant opinions tend to induce changes in "one's own position so as to move closer to others in the group" (Festinger, 1954, p. 126). Hence, a main effect for agreement-disagreement is predicted. Agreement from anyone is expected to increase the confidence in one's decision, whereas disagreement from anyone is expected to decrease that confidence. (See also Goethals, 1972).

Consideration of the role of interpersonal similarity (similarity of the evaluator and those who agree or disagree with him) has thus far been neglected. By itself, the similarity-dissimilarity dimension is expected to be relatively meaningless (non-influential). However, this factor provides for potentially important effects when coupled with the agreement-disagreement factor.

Festinger (1950) states that a nonverifiable, subjective judgment is believed accurate to the extent that similar other persons agree with that judgment. In a later, more comprehensive formulation of his theory, Festinger (1954) proposes that whenever objective, non-social means are unavailable, people compare their opinions with those of others. "Given a range of possible persons for comparison, someone close to one's own ability or opinion will be chosen for comparison" (p. 126). Given a choice, subjects prefer comparison individuals who are most similar to themselves.

Numerous research studies over the years have supported Festinger's theory of social comparison processes (e.g., Schachter and Singer, 1962; Bleda and Castore, 1973). Subjects have reportedly been more motivated to perform when promised an opportunity to engage in social comparison (Evans, 1974).

Some research, however, contradicts the predictions and results of social comparison theory (e.g., Good and Good, 1973; Goethals, 1972), at least under specific situational constraints. Of relevance presently is Goethals' reasoning:

...the similar other may share the characteristic which generates the inaccurate judgment. Thus, by comparing with similar others, the person runs the risk of discovering an agreeing consensus which will lead him confidently to make an entity attribution when in fact the consensus combines a number of person-caused judgments. If a dissimilar other agrees, there is a correction for bias, he is less likely to share the error-producing characteristic. Thus, his agreement helps to rule out the possibility that the judgment is person caused (p. 85).

In conjunction with Goethals, it is therefore hypothesized that confidence will be increased more when agreement comes from a dissimilar other than from a similar other. Agreement from a similar other is likely to increase confidence on the basis of the agreement. However, agreement from a dissimilar other should increase confidence much more. This person has a different perspective on the situation, and still evaluates the entity in the same way. Possible error-producing biases are thus counterbalanced.

However, disagreement from a similar other is expected to decrease confidence more than disagreement from a dissimilar other. A dissimilar disagreeing judgment can be easily disregarded on the basis of the other's dissimilarity. Individuals generally believe that their own responses are true representations of the state of affairs of the environment, whereas those of others; when not in agreement with their own, are idiosyncratic (Heider, 1958). On the other hand, disagreement from a similar other, who shares one's viewpoints and biases, should have a devastating effect on one's confidence. This predicted Agreement x Similarity interaction parallels that of Goethals and contrasts with that of social

comparison theory.

Goethals (1972) also supposedly manipulated the modality of information concerning the target individuals. His interpretation of Kelley's (1967) modality dimension was defined as a matter of perceived information similarity-dissimilarity. Subject's perception that he and the other person possessed the same information represented same modality, whereas perception of different information represented different modality. It is argued that Goethals' manipulation of perceived information-similarity was not a manipulation of modality at all, but rather a variation of the kind of information. Information and modality are related, yet quite distinct, concepts. Information represents those bits of data which describe persons and other aspects of the environment. Modality is the channel through which information is communicated and/or received (Kelley, 1973).

The present study will systematically vary information within a single modality. Information is comprised of at least two variable dimensions--kind and amount. Kind of information, rather than being equated to modality, may be defined as descriptions of different aspects of the target individuals. For example, descriptions of past performance and descriptions of presently-held aspirations for the future would constitute different kinds of information. Each kind of information provides a bit of data about the target person, but each is a different bit of data contributing to an overall description.

Kinds of information which are available in making attributions is an essential variable, especially in combination with the agreement variable. An Agreement x Kind of Information interaction is predicted. Given agreement, confidence is expected to be increased more when based on another's exposure to a different kind of information than for the same kind of information. Following the reasoning outlined above (see also Goethals, 1972), this different kind of information possessed by the comparison other provides for a counter-balancing of potential error-producing biases. It provides for a different perspective, and when accompanied by agreement, it is predicted to produce a greater confidence increase. Conversely, it is expected that disagreement will be more harmful to judgmental confidence when the comparison other has the same kind of information. Two persons with the same information should reach similar judgments. When they do not, one or both will re-evaluate their conclusions. If the other person has different information, however, the disagreement is expected to only mildly reduce confidence. The judge may reason that if both had the same information, they would probably agree.

Another dimension of information is the amount of available data at one's disposal in a decision-making task. Amount represents the actual numerical bits of data. Kind and amount of information are separate entities, thus permitting independent manipulation of each component.

Amount of information has been manipulated in several recent studies, with conflicting results. Singh, Byrne, Gutpa, and Clouser (1974) and Sloan and Ostrom (1974) reported no significant effects

of amount of information on either a judgment or confidence, respectively. Set sizes included 1, 2, 4, 8, 16 and 32 bits of data in the form of word lists. Instead of this typical procedure, Ekehammar and Magnusson (1972) utilized written statements. Their transcribed interview statements were varied in length, thereby manipulating the amount of information. Results indicated direct relationships between: (1) a judge's subjective confidence and the amount of information he possessed; and (2) interjudge agreement and amount of information.

This result and reasoning leads to the prediction of an Agreement x Amount of Information interaction. Given agreement, the percentage of confidence increase will be a direct function of the amount of information available to the other person. Agreement from someone with less information is expected to increase confidence on the basis of the agreement. Agreement based on possession of an equal amount of information is expected to increase confidence much more substantially.

Conversely, disagreement is expected to decrease confidence much more when it comes from someone with an equal amount of information, than from someone with less information. If someone has less information, the judge can regard the disagreement as stemming from the incompleteness of his information. With equal information, however, no such simple explanation exists.

This reasoning may be extended further to incorporate three, and even all four, variables. Considering agreement, kind of

information, and amount of information, it is predicted that the greatest increase in confidence will occur when a comparison person with an equal amount of a different kind of information agrees. Similarly, the greatest decrease in confidence is expected to occur when someone with an equal amount of the same kind of information disagrees.

Considering all four variables, the overall greatest increase in confidence is expected to occur when a dissimilar person who has an equal amount of a different kind of information agrees. This combination yields a consensual judgment with many potential error-producing biases eliminated. The overall greatest decrease in confidence is expected when a similar person with an equal amount of the same kind of information disagrees.

METHOD

Subjects: A total of 161 female undergraduates at the University of Massachusetts served as subjects. One subject was randomly eliminated, leaving 160 subjects, with 10 subjects per cell. Subjects were recruited from psychology classes, and by way of sign-up sheets placed in the psychology building. The experiment was advertised as a study dealing with the "Evaluation of College Admissions Applicants." In return for their participation, subjects received one experimental credit hour which entitled them to a 2% increase in their final grade for one psychology course.

Design: Four independent variables were manipulated in the present study: agreement, similarity, kind of information and amount of information. The resultant design was a 2 (agree-disagree) x 2 (similar-dissimilar) x 2 (different kind-same kind) x 2 (equal amount-lesser amount) factorial.

Procedure: Subjects were scheduled and run in groups of three to nine. If less than three subjects reported at any one time, the session was not run, and subjects were rescheduled or given credit for reporting.

When the subjects arrived, they chose to sit at any of a number of desks, which were several feet apart and arranged in the shape of a horseshoe in the large rectangular experimental room. At the open end of the horseshoe, the experimenter sat at a small desk, allowing him to face all of the subjects. Once all of the subjects arrived, the experimenter closed the door, seated himself and

and began with the description of the study (See Appendix A for the verbatim script).

The experimenter introduced himself by name and as a graduate student in psychology. He described the study as an evaluation of college admissions applicants, the decisions which are made regarding college admissions, and the processes underlying these decisions. Subjects were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate how committees made these types of decisions, and that the committee situation would be simulated. Reasons for this type of investigation were given to the subjects, providing a rationale for their participation. The researcher, they were told, hoped to elicit the student viewpoint which was noticeably lacking in this kind of decision-making.

Subjects were told that they would be evaluating the admissions decisions of a certain private college in the state of Massachusetts, which would remain nameless for the purposes of the study. Before receiving any additional information, all subjects were given the "Eriksen-Reynolds Inventory of Interpersonal Judgment" to fill out. This scale, actually devised by the experimenter, was described as a measure of how an individual looks at people in general. Subjects were instructed that the various ways of looking at people were unique and personal and, barring prejudices, were neither right nor wrong, per se. Subjects were to answer all items on a first impression basis. (The form was then administered to them. It bore a professional appearance, with a copyright to increase its

credibility. A copy of the form is included in Appendix B).

After the subjects completed the forms, the experimenter collected them, told the subjects that he would score them later, and proceeded with details of their participation.

Subjects were to read some portion of an interview with each of the two hypothetical applicants (Barbara and Carol), which was supposedly taped nearly two years ago when they first applied for admission to the college. The interviews were supposedly transcribed into written form, and subjects believed that they would read either one or two segments of each interview. Subjects believed that the first two segments represented information about the applicants' high school careers (past), and that the second two segments represented information about their college goals (future). The applicants, as well as their interview responses, were concoctions of the experimenter. However, the written responses were made to resemble the typical response of a college applicant. The attempt was to portray the applicants to be as similar as possible, thus rendering the decision-making process more difficult. In this way, it was hoped that initial confidence ratings would be of such a magnitude that they could increase or decrease over a wide enough range for the final rating. (See Appendix D for the applicants' interview statements. See Results Section for data on applicant similarity and the mid-range initial confidence ratings).

Subjects believed that the one or two segments that they would read would be the same segment(s) for each applicant, such that they would have comparable information on which to base their decision.

However, her information might be different in kind (past vs. future) and/or amount (1 segment vs. 2 segments) from others on the committee. In fact, all subjects read the same information: the responses to questions three and four of the interview (See Appendix C)-- i.e., regarding the future goals of the applicants. Thus, the actual information provided to each subject was constant.

Subjects were instructed to read the information carefully, but not to dwell on it, as if they were doing an initial screening of the applications. Afterwards, each subject made an independent judgment as to which student, in her opinion, had done better academically thus far. Along with this choice, each subject rated how confident she was about her choice. The rationale for the initially private decision was the accurate simulation of the committee situation regarding decision-making. Each committee member makes a decision in his office prior to the joint meeting of the committee.

While the subjects were reading and making their decisions, the experimenter was "scoring" the "Inventory of Interpersonal Judgment" forms, thus manipulating the variable of similarity. After detailed instructions for determining their interpersonal difference scores (See Subsequent Discussion of Similarity Manipulation), subjects knew how similar or dissimilar they were to one other member of their "committee" with regard to their manner of judging others. The rationale for providing this type of information was the further simulation of the committee situation--i.e., committee members know one another's personality, values, likes and dislikes.

Subjects then reviewed the application materials a second time. During this time, the experimenter filled out a sheet for each subject, entitled "Information About Another Member of My Committee." The form contained bogus information, supposedly concerning the same other committee member about whom interpersonal similarity ratings were provided earlier. The information on this form contained the remaining three independent variables--agreement, kind of information and amount of information, regarding the other committee member.

When the subjects finished their second reading, these forms were given to each of them. Each subject then became aware of the other's supposed agreement or disagreement with her choice, as well as the kind (past vs. future) and amount (1 vs. 2 segments) of information which the other member supposedly received relative to herself. To check on these manipulations, subjects were convinced of the importance of putting all of the information that they had about the other committee member into one central location. To accomplish this, they checked the appropriate statement which applied to them, concerning the other committee member--i.e., whether she agreed or disagreed with her, whether she was similar or dissimilar as determined by the personality inventory, whether she had different or same kind of information, and whether she had an equal or lesser amount of information.

At this point, the subjects made their final choice of which applicant had done better academically thus far, along with a final confidence rating. They also gave open-ended reasons for their final decision and confidence level. Finally, subjects filled out a

questionnaire rating the personal importance of nine factors on their final decision and confidence level.

After all of the forms were collected, subjects were given credit and thanks for their participation and were debriefed, along with a request not to discuss the experiment with anyone else.

The major dependent variable was the change of confidence from the initial rating to the final rating. The other dependent variables were the self-ratings of the importance of the various factors in decision-making which were provided on the final questionnaire.

Similarity Manipulation: The "Eriksen-Reynolds Inventory of Interpersonal Judgment" was used to provide subjects with apparently objective information concerning the extent of similarity between themselves and the other subject. After the experimenter "scored" the forms filled out by the subjects earlier in the experimental session, each subject was given her own profile and that of one other subject with whom she was to compare herself. The profile consisted of a set of four scores, related to four hypothetical personality measures, for self and other. Subjects were given explicit verbal instructions for finding the differences between their own scores and those of the comparison person, on each of the four dimensions. The sum of these four difference scores was to indicate the amount of similarity or dissimilarity between the two subjects, only on the relevant dimension of interpersonal judgment styles. The reason for subjects calculating their own score was to increase the salience of

this manipulation.

Subjects in the similar conditions found that their summed differences equaled 27, whereas subjects in the dissimilar conditions found a total difference score of 88. Once all of the subjects were finished calculating their difference scores, the experimenter explained what the scores meant, saying:

"A score of 48 or less means that you both view people in very much the same manner. You like the same characteristics and dislike basically the same characteristics in other people. If you two got to know each other, you would probably have a number of common friends. You would probably be quite close friends yourselves."

"A score of 49-120 means that the two of you look at people in quite different ways. These characteristics which are liked by one of you are basically those characteristics which are disliked by the other. If the two of you got to know each other, you would probably not become best of friends, but most likely would be able to tolerate one another. It is somewhat likely that you would be distant, but speaking, acquaintances. You may or not have friends in common. You two would be different but not antagonistic."

"A score of 121 or greater indicates a tremendous difference in how the two of you view other individuals. Those characteristics which are liked and respected by one of you would probably be disliked and even despised by the other. If the two of you got to know each other, you would almost definitely not even become speaking acquaintances. Chances are that your differences of opinion would be

severe enough to cause you to be totally antagonistic toward one another."

(The intermediate category, rather than the extreme difference category, was used for dissimilar conditions in hopes of minimizing or even eliminating the amount of derogation of the other which may accompany the perception of an extreme difference. "Dissimilar" is intended to mean difference, and not intolerance or derogation).

RESULTS

The written materials representing the responses of the applicants were pretested for subjects' preferences of applicant, initial level of confidence and order effects. These data revealed that 60% of the pilot subjects preferred Barbara ($n_1 = 6$) and that 40% preferred Carol ($n_2 = 4$), suggesting considerable similarity between the two, thus making the task of choosing more difficult. The mean confidence level of the pilot subjects was 68.40%. No order effect was found, thus justifying the procedure of having all subjects read first about Barbara and then about Carol.

Unlike the pilot data, the present data revealed that subjects chose Barbara as the better student considerably more often than they chose Carol. A total of 120 subjects chose Barbara, compared to 40 who chose Carol--a 75% to 25% ratio in favor of Barbara. However, since there was no a priori reason to suspect any differences among subjects as a function of their choice of target person, all subjects, regardless of choice, were analyzed together.

Nearly all of the subjects ($n = 151$) perceived the manipulations in the manner intended by the experimenter, as determined by their written responses. Those few subjects ($n = 9$) who misperceived a manipulation were placed in the cell in which they indicated themselves to be.

The overall mean initial confidence level for all subjects was 59.15%, which is sufficiently neutral to prevent either a ceiling effect or a basement effect for future confidence ratings. In other words,

the average subject's final confidence had a potentially wide range over which to vary. This mid-level initial confidence indicates that the intention of portraying both applicants as extremely similar was successful.

The final overall mean confidence rating for all subjects was 68.09%, indicating a trend of increasing confidence in one's decision over time.¹

The percent of confidence change from initial rating to final rating represents the major dependent variable of the study. For 149 subjects, the initial confidence rating was subtracted from the final confidence rating, resulting in a simple positive, negative or zero confidence change. The remaining 11 subjects not only changed confidence at their final rating, but also changed their choice of target person. For these 11 subjects, change in confidence rating was registered as a net decrease equal to their initial rating. In other words, their final confidence was recorded as zero. This scoring procedure parallels that of Goethals (1972) and allows for comparison of data with the present study.

Major Dependent Variable: Confidence Change

The predicted main effect for agreement was strongly evident ($F = 15.09$, $df = 1, 144$, $p < .001$). Subjects whose supposed "other

¹This finding, along with supporting data and implications, will be discussed in greater detail later in this section and in the discussion.

committee member" agreed with them greatly increased their final confidence ($\bar{X} = + 11.31\%$) whereas subjects who experienced a disagreement remained essentially unchanged in their final confidence ($\bar{X} = - 0.31\%$).

A main effect for amount of information was also found ($F = 3.99, df = 1,144, p < .05$), indicating that subjects who had more information than their supposed partner showed greater gains in confidence ($\bar{X} = + 8.49\%$) than did subjects who had an equal amount of information relative to their partner ($\bar{X} = + 2.51\%$)², regardless of agreement or disagreement.

The predicted interaction between agreement and amount of information, however, did not occur. It was predicted that an equal amount of information would result in more extreme confidence changes, as a function of agreement or disagreement, than would a lesser amount of information. In other words, agreement from someone with an equal amount of information should increase confidence more than agreement based on less information. Similarly, disagreement from someone with an equal amount of information should decrease confidence more than disagreement based on less information. The present data fail to indicate any firm support for this argument. However, it was noted that the only decrease in confidence ($\bar{X} = - 5.42\%$) did occur under conditions of disagreement from someone with an equal amount of information. (See Table 1).

²This finding also demonstrates the tendency for confidence to increase over time, since both conditions showed confidence changes in the upward direction.

TABLE 1

Mean Confidence Change as a Function
of Agreement and Amount of Information

	AMOUNT	
	Other Equal	Other Less
Agree	+ 10.45%	+ 12.18%
Disagree	- 5.42%	+ 4.80%

There was an interaction of borderline significance ($F = 2.71$, $df = 1,144$, $p = .10$) between agreement and kind of information, on the major dependent variable of confidence change. As predicated, subjects whose partner agreed with them after exposure to a different kind of information exhibited the greatest increase in confidence ($\bar{X} = + 13.60\%$). However, contrary to prediction, the only drop in final confidence ($\bar{X} = - 2.95\%$) occurred in the disagree-different information condition. (See Table 2). It had been predicted that a rather large decrease in confidence would result from disagreement from a person with the same kind of information. In such a case, after exposure to the same kind of information, the expectation would be judgments which are in agreement with one another. This proved not to be the case, however, with this group of subjects. Apparently, the interaction is primarily due to the overwhelming effect of agreement, because with agreement the kind of information appeared to make little difference in ratings of final confidence (+ 13.60% vs. + 9.02%) as demonstrated by the Newman-Keuls test-- $q_{.95}(2,144) = 0.08$, ns.

Contrary to prediction, no interaction occurred between agreement and interpersonal similarity, thus failing to support either Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory or Goethals' (1972) hypothesis. It was predicted, along with Goethals, that agreement from a dissimilar other would increase one's confidence more than would agreement from a similar other. Conversely, it was predicted that disagreement from a similar other would decrease

TABLE 2

Mean Confidence Change as a Function
of Agreement and Kind of Information

	Kind	
	Different	Same
Agree	+ 13.60%	+ 9.02%
Disagree	- 2.95%	+ 2.32%

confidence more than would disagreement form a dissimilar other, since the latter situation could be easily disregarded on the basis of the other's dissimilarity. However, no interaction of either sort occurred on this behavioral measure of confidence change.³

The predicted three-way interaction between agreement, kind and amount of information did not occur ($F < 1$). Neither the predicted greatest decrease occurred. (See Table 3).

Likewise, the predicted four-way interaction did not occur ($F < 1$), showing neither the predicted greatest increase nor the predicted greatest decrease. (See Table 4).

The reasoning behind these predictions was based on Goethals' (1972) hypothesis and expanded. If an individual's style of judging people is different from your own (dissimilarity), if his information is a cross-validation of your own (different kind), if his information is as complete as your own (equal amount), and if he then agrees with you, your own level of confidence appears destined to leap dramatically. However, a drastic decline in confidence seems likely if an individual's style of judging people corresponds closely to your own (interpersonal similarity), if his information is still as complete as your own (equal amount), and if his information replicates your own (same kind), yet he disagrees with your judgment. In this situation, you and the other judge are identical in all ways but one--

³Some findings on the secondary, self-report dependent variables, which will be discussed later, lend support to the theory of social comparison.

TABLE 3

Mean Confidence Change as a Function of Agreement,
Kind of Information and Amount of Information

	Different Other Equal Amount	Kind Other Less Amount	Same Other Equal Amount	Kind Other Less Amount
Agree	+ 12.10%	+ 15.10%	+ 8.80%	+ 9.25%
Disagree	- 9.35%	+ 3.45%	- 1.50%	+ 6.25%

TABLE 4

Mean Confidence Change as a Function of Agreement,
Interpersonal Similarity, Kind of Information, and
Amount of Information

		Different Other Equal Amount	Kind Other Less Amount	Same Other Equal Amount	Kind Other Less Amount
Agree	Similar	+ 10.00%	+ 11.80%	+ 16.80%	+ 7.50%
	Dissimilar	+ 14.20%	+ 18.40%	+ 0.80%	+11.00%
Disagree	Similar	- 11.00%	+ 4.40%	+ 0.50%	+ 9.50%
	Dissimilar	- 7.70%	+ 2.50%	- 3.50%	+ 2.80%

the decision. The expected result is a dramatic decrease in confidence. However, the present findings fail to support these expectations, thus offering no support for the findings of Goethals (1972).

Thus, a summary of the results for the major dependent variable of confidence change provides an inconclusive statement, apparently failing to support either Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison or the hypothesis of Goethals (1972). The strongest and most consistently reliable finding was that agreement tended to increase one's confidence more than disagreement. The effect of interpersonal similarity was apparently that it had no effect, at least not with this group of subjects in the present experimental situation.

Secondary Dependent Variables, Self-Ratings of Importance

For the following results, a value of "1" indicates very great importance, and a value of "7" indicates very little importance. One of the secondary, self-report dependent variables lends support to the theory of social comparison: the interaction between agreement and similarity on rated importance of the traits of the applicants. The applicants' traits, as reflected by their written statements, were rated as more important when a similar other disagreed or when a dissimilar other agreed, than when either a similar other agreed or dissimilar other disagreed ($F = 5.32$, $df = 1, 144$, $p < .025$). (See Table 5).

This finding may be interpreted as follows: a similar other's

TABLE 5

Rated Importance* of Reviewing the Information, as a
Function of Agreement and Interpersonal Similarity

	Agree	Disagree
Similar	2.225	1.575
Dissimilar	1.525	2.000

*The smaller the number, the more important.
(1 → very important; 7 → very unimportant)

agreement or a dissimilar other's disagreement is logical and expected, according to social comparison theory. Therefore, there is less need to scrutinize the objective statement of the person being judged. There is an appropriate social comparison individual. However, in the absence of an anticipated reaction and of a valid social comparison individual, such as agreement from a dissimilar other or disagreement from a similar other, the subject must revert back to and place greater emphasis upon the objective information at his disposal, i. e., the traits of the applicants themselves.

In fact, the self-reported importance of all nine (9) variables reveals an interesting trend. (See Table 6). These variables rated as most important include two (2) directly concerned with the applicants (objective information) and two (2) dealing with personal qualities of the judges themselves. The four (4) experimentally manipulated variables fared no better than fifth to eighth, only beating out the fact of being involved in a psychology experiment.

These results are mere paper-and-pencil ratings, and may or may not coincide with the behavioral reactions of the subjects during the experimental judgment process. However, the rated importance is interesting in and of itself, because it is at least conceivable that the experimental variables were, in fact, relatively unimportant to these judges.

TABLE 6

Rated Importance of Variables to
Final Choice and Confidence Rating

Variable	Mean
Students' Traits	1.83
Reviewing Information	2.99
Your Own Personality	3.34
A "Gut Feeling"	3.86
Kind of Information	3.93
Amount of Information	4.40
Agreement	4.53
Similarity	4.63
Being in a Psychology Experiment	5.31

DISCUSSION

The present study indicates the overwhelming importance of agreement from another individual on one's own degree of confidence in a decision. Subjects who had someone agree with them increased their confidence by a mean of 11.31%. However, contrary to expectation, a disagreeing judgment induced an insignificant (- 0.31%) decrease in confidence level. In fact, a mere 18% of the subject (n = 28) decreased their confidence from initial to final rating. The fact that 24 of these 28 subjects (85.7%) were in disagree conditions is the sole claim to the importance of disagreement.

Cooper and Thomas (1974) provide a possible explanation for the apparent lack of effectiveness of disagreement. They argue that research predominately views disagreement as a "single homogeneous construct." Their results indicated that the meaning of disagreement varies across individuals. Thus, they proposed a "distinction between disagreement as polarization and disagreement as evenly dispersed opinion." Present subjects may have underemphasized the polarization aspect of disagreement and accepted the diversity of opinion explanation.

The present experimental task required a judgment of academic performance, as reflected by "college grades, faculty evaluations of their performance" (from the experimental script--Appendix A). Although grades represent a quantitative index, both faculty and student evaluations of performance are thoroughly qualitative.

Opinions can and do differ. Disagreement among the present subjects is as probable as disagreement among other academic evaluators. Therefore, disagreement in this type of task may not correspond to a value-laden conclusion of inaccuracy, but may be merely an indication of different standards of judgment.

A trend of increased confidence over time prevailed dramatically. In the agree conditions, 95% of the subjects ($n = 76$ of 80) either increased their final confidence or remained unchanged; in the disagree conditions, a large majority of 70% of the subjects ($n = 56$ of 80) did the same. Overall, 82% of all subjects ($n = 132$ of 160) either increased confidence or remained unchanged. This tendency toward increased confidence may be attributable to two sets of causative factors: (1) paradigmatic variables (a function of this particular experimental design); and (2) subject or personality variables. In the following discussion, it will be obvious that these two factors are not mutually exclusive.

Four paradigmatic variables of interest are the absence of personal consequences to the subject, the opportunity to re-read the entire packet of available objective information, primacy effects, and reactance theory. Subjects were not provided with tangible positive or negative reinforcement for a correct or incorrect judgment, respectively. This lack may well reduce the perceived importance of the judgment. The subjects' decision-making effort is probably likewise reduced in magnitude. The only consequences to the judge, therefore, may be the personal desire to maintain intrapersonal

consistency and to present a positive self-image to peers (Goffman, 1959) or the experimenter (evaluation apprehension). Such consistency is well-demonstrated in the subjects' overall tendency (1) to maintain their original choice of target individual (149 of 160--93.1%); and (2) to increase or at least maintain their level of initial confidence (132 of 160--82%).

The second paradigmatic variable which may account for the basic failure of the experimental variables is the subjects' opportunity to re-read the entire packet of information about the target person. Consistency theories (e.g., Heider, 1958; Newcomb, 1953; Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955; Festinger, 1957) often discuss resolution of inconsistency in the event of exposure to contradictory information.

With the addition of new information...a new light is shed on the relation or situation. A new, somewhat modified interpretation or meaning must now be placed on the phenomenon." (Heider, 1959, p. 52).

The present paradigm provides no new information to the subjects, and therefore no possible contradictions. Complete re-evaluations are not a real possibility. The initial judgment, based on the limited amount of information, is not likely to change. Similarly, confidence in that decision is not likely to be decreased.

Primacy effects are also a possible explanation for the finding that only 18% of all subjects decreased their confidence in their final rating. Several authors (e.g., Anderson, 1965; Luchins, 1957) have demonstrated the existence of primacy effects in impression formation. Anderson's studies used adjective lists as stimulus

material. Luchins, however, demonstrated the same type of primacy effect by using descriptive narrative materials. He was able to destroy these primacy effects by warning the subjects to weigh all information and not to jump to conclusions. In attribution theory terms, Heider (1958) discussed the tendency to make an enduring attribution on the basis of a "single contact" (p. 155-156).

Reactance theory (Brehm, 1966) lends another possible explanation to the absence of expected results, especially concerning disagreement. The theory states that a person will experience reactance whenever any of his free behaviors are either eliminated or threatened with elimination. The reactance will generate efforts to restore that freedom. The existence of an interpersonal disagreement may create social pressure upon an individual to modify his position so as to attain consensus. Brehm states, however: "Where freedom is threatened by social pressure, reactance will lead one to resist that pressure." If, in fact, reactance had been aroused within these subjects, their predicted behavior would be to become more firmly entrenched in their original judgment, thus retaining and exhibiting a reaffirmation of their freedom of choice. The results render this explanation possible.

The second set of causative factors are subject, or personality, variables, including first-impression stability, ego-involvement, and dimensional salience. In this study, subjects were not told only of another's agreement or disagreement. It is then, logical and sensible to maintain one's initial choice. Also, extreme

confidence changes, especially extreme decreases, may be interpreted by others as compensation for an error. First-impression stability (a newly coined term) implies a personal adherence to a position, thus being distinct from the factor of primacy effects. It may indicate self-confidence and self-esteem, or it may be a face-saving maneuver.

Sherif and Hovland (1961) stated that an individual's ego-involvement will be aroused through "the intrinsic importance for him of the issue" (p. 197). It is probable that the present subjects had little ego-involvement in the judgmental issue. The only real personal consequence was presentation and maintenance of internal consistency. Little or no ego-involvement tends to reduce the importance of the issue, and may lead to ineffectuality of the experimental variables.

The present results may also be accounted for in terms of dimensional salience. Eiser and Stroebe (1972) state that individuals see different variables as salient in any given situation. They contend that individuals place greater emphasis upon those dimensions which allow them to achieve consistency in their judgments. Furthermore, "...individuals presented with information that is contradictory in terms of one dimension will engage in a search for new dimensions in terms of which the contradiction can be resolved." (Eiser and Stroebe, 1972, p. 173). Subjects did indeed exhibit consistency in their choice of target person and in their judgmental confidence. Their ratings of the importance of variables indicated

the greater salience (to them) of the personality traits of the target individuals and of themselves as judges. (See Table 6)

These dimensions which may represent contradictory information, i.e., the independent variables, were rated as having less personal salience to this group of subjects. Heider (1958) states:

...behavior can be ascribed primarily to the person or to the environment; that is, behavior can be accounted for by relatively stable traits of the personality or by factors within the environment" (p. 56).

It is apparent that, in this experimental situation, the environmental factors called independent variables were less influential than the ascribed stability of personality traits of the target individuals and of the subjects themselves.

APPENDIX A

The experimental script follows:

"My name is Grover Gentry and I am a graduate student here in psychology. The study that I am doing deals with the evaluation of college admissions applicants, the kinds of decisions that are made regarding who gets into college and who does not, and the kinds of processes that underlie these decisions. Specifically, we are interested in what goes on when a committee makes a decision, and that is the reason for the separate tables and chairs in the room. I'd like to ask you to use a little imagination, in that you should imagine that you are in your own office, at your own desk, about to evaluate the application materials for a couple of students applying for college.

Let me tell you more about exactly what we're doing, why we're doing it, and what we hope to accomplish by this study. There have been many requests by college and university administrations, faculty and students, and sometimes even the general public for investigations into the processes involved in making college admissions decisions. There seem to be two major reasons for this request: 1) complaints that objective indices such as grade point average and test scores are weighted too heavily and other things are more or less ignored; 2) it is just a good idea to periodically evaluate decisions which have been made in the past, to see if they were good ones or not so good ones, to see if it's possible to increase the probability of making a good decision and to try to reduce the tremendous amount of work entailed in going through hundreds or thousands of applications, each one being

many pages long.

These requests seemed reasonable to us, and so we offered our assistance--we being the psych department. So, the psychology department here at U-Mass has been asked to evaluate the admissions decisions for a certain private college in the State of Massachusetts. This college will have to remain nameless for the purposes of this study. But, we can tell you that it is not U-Mass or any of the five-college system. And the reason that it is not any school in the five-college system is that if we evaluated our own system, it is probable that some kind of biased results would occur. It is just very difficult to be totally objective with our own system.

The reason that we are asking you to help us is that we feel that students who themselves have recently undergone a process of evaluation to get into college will be able to provide new and different insights into what goes on in this kind of decision-making. And, like I said before, the reason for having several of you here at one time is to stimulate what happens in a committee. It is very rare, if it happens at all, that one person makes these decisions. It is just too much work and too much responsibility for one person.

So, in a couple minutes you'll each receive some information about each of two students who presently are second-quarter sophomores at the school that we're looking at. But first, I'd like to give you all a form to fill out. This form has a fancy name; it is called the "Inventory of Interpersonal Judgment," and was devised by a couple of psychologists to give us information about how we, as individuals,

look at other people in general. I'll pass these out to all of you along with response sheets, but before you start filling them out, let me tell you something about them. Whenever any of us looks at other people, no matter who we are and no matter what our purpose, we do so in our own unique and personal ways. And as long as these ways are not racial, religious, or nationalistic prejudices, no one is any better or any worse, any more right or more wrong, than any other way. These ways of looking at people are merely different, and reflect the different perspectives of people in our society. So, when you fill out the form, just be as honest and accurate as you can. And it's usually true that on forms of this sort, your first impressions are probably more accurate indications of what your true feelings are. So, please go through the form quickly and indicate your first impressions for each item. Some items may be difficult to answer for some of you, but do put something down for each question. If it poses a problem, put down which way you are leaning or make a guess, but do answer each item.

The only kind of identification I want on the response form only is a number. If you'll (experimenter points to the subject on his far left) put the number 1, you (experimenter points to the subject to the left of subject 1) number 2, number 3, ... (until all subjects have a number). Just put the number somewhere on the top of the response form. And keep that number for all the forms that you turn in to me, so that we can keep everyone's forms together. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them at any time. If you

have no questions at this time, go ahead and fill out the inventory. It probably should take you about 3 or 4 minutes.

(After the inventory is administered and collected, the experimenter will continue with the following instructions).

I'll score these while you're reading the information about the two students, but now I'd like to tell you more about exactly what you'll be doing in the next few minutes. In evaluating the college admissions applicants that you'll be reading about, we're going to try to pay attention to the complaints that we talked about earlier. That is, you'll get some information about their high school grades and S.A.T. scores, but we're not going to focus on that. Our primary focus will be on one of the more subjective means of evaluation, and that is the interview situation. Now, as far as I know, U-Mass does not have an interview for any department at either the graduate or undergraduate level. But, many private schools do have interviews, probably because they are smaller and can afford the time to do it. And the school that we're looking at does have an interview as part of the application procedure.

So all of you will read in written form a part or parts of an interview with each of the two students which was taped nearly two years ago when they first applied for admission. We have obtained written permission from both girls to use this material which is usually confidential material.

The interview itself was composed of four questions. You will read both of the applicants answers to some subset of these questions.

In other words, you will receive the answers to one or two questions, for both girls, but not all four. And the answers will be for the same question or questions for each girl, so that you have comparable information on each of them. Is everything clear so far? (If questions were raised at this point, the appropriate part of the script was merely reiterated in order to insure full comprehension of the instructions).

The four questions which were asked are the following:

- 1) Tell me about the kinds of courses that turned you on in high school and why?
- 2) Tell me about the kinds of courses that turned you off in high school and why?
- 3) What kinds of academic goals do you have for college?
- 4) What kinds of non-academic goals do you have while you're in college?

These four questions were designed for a purpose. It was hoped that the first two questions would provide information about their past--their high school career and their interests and dis-interests in high school. It was hoped that the second two questions would provide information about their future--their goals, both career and otherwise.

You will each read the information about the first student, whom we've named Barbara, and then the same information about the second student whom we've named Carol, neither of which are their real names. I'd like to ask you to read it somewhat carefully, but

not to dwell on it, as if you were doing the initial screening of the application. After you have read the material, you'll be asked to give your judgment, independently and privately, as to which student you think has performed better academically thus far. Academically means in terms of college grades, faculty evaluations of their performance, and other students' evaluations of their performance--a composite of a number of indices. Along with your choice, you'll be asked to indicate how confident you are of that choice. The reason that we're asking you to make your judgment independently at first is, again, to simulate what goes on in a committee. What typically happens is that the first member of the committee will read the application, make his or her judgment, and pass the materials but not the judgment to the second member of the committee, who will read the materials, make his or her judgment, and pass the material but not the judgment to the third member of the committee, and so forth until all members have made their judgments. And a usual size committee is about 6, 7, or 8 members.

What usually happens in committees is that you know the personalities of the other members of the committee. And that was the reason for taking the inventories. I'll be scoring the inventories while you're reading. And after you finish making your choice, you'll get some information back as to how you and one other member of your committee look at people in general. You'll find out similar or dissimilar you are to one other member of your committee, or in other words, to one other person in the room.

Then, you'll get a chance to review the information about the students, as if you were doing a second reading of the applications. Because decisions of this magnitude are not made on a once-over reading. At that point, you'll get some information back as to what this same other member of your committee decided--who she chose, and the information she read on which she based her decision. At that point, you'll have a chance to make your final choice or recommendation as to who you think has done better academically so far.

Do you have any questions at all? Does everything make sense to you?"

APPENDIX B

Eriksen - Reynolds Inventory
of Interpersonal Judgment
(Short Form A)

General Instructions: On the following few pages are a series of questions, divided into two sections. Each section is slightly different. In Section I, you will be asked to give a "yes" or "no" answer to each item. In Section II, you will be asked to choose one of four answers.

In both sections, your responses should be based on how you personally feel about that item. There are no right or wrong answers. Please proceed quickly through the form, giving your first impression for each item.

Please do not mark on this test booklet. Answer all items on the answer sheet provided.

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PART I: Answer "yes" or "no" to each item. On the answer sheet, mark "1" for "yes" or "2" for "no."

1. I like people who can feel at ease at any social gathering.
2. I like people who are warm and pleasant to everyone, whether they like them or not.
3. I think that a person's political views tell a lot about his or her personality.
4. I think everyone should have a commitment to some religious viewpoint, regardless of what it is.
5. I prefer my friends to be party-goers, rather than people who prefer to sit around at home and talk.
6. I like people who are a little unkempt, but not to the point of being offensive.
7. I prefer my friends to have the same political attitudes as I do.
8. I prefer my friends to be of the same religious conviction as me.
9. I prefer going out (to dinner, movies, etc.) with a group of people more than with just my date.
10. I respect people who fight for their point of view, even when all hope of someone else accepting it is gone.
11. I don't like people who are too early or too late for social functions.
12. I prefer someone more who has chosen his profession because of status or earnings rather than because of interest.

PART II: For each item, choose only one answer and mark the appropriate space on the answer sheet.

1. Would you most prefer a friend who was educated through:
 - (1) a college or university
 - (2) a trade school
 - (3) "the school of hard knocks"
 - (4) an art school or music conservatory
2. As a group, which authors would you most prefer to read?
 - (1) Ray Bradbury, Robert Heinlein, Arthur Clark, Isaac Asimov
 - (2) Agatha Christie, Erle Stanley Gardner, Mickey Spillane
 - (3) Art Buchwald, Philip Roth, Gore Vidal
 - (4) John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, Hermann Hesse
3. Which type of person do you think has had the greatest influence on the making of American society?
 - (1) politicians
 - (2) physical scientists
 - (3) social scientists and philosophers
 - (4) artists, including sculptors, painters, writers, etc.
4. Which of the following persons do you think has been most influential in making human society what it is today?
 - (1) Jesus Christ
 - (2) Plato
 - (3) Einstein
 - (4) Michelangelo

5. In looking at a member of the opposite sex as a potential mate, what is most important?
- (1) physical appearance
 - (2) intelligence
 - (3) sexual attitude compatibility
 - (4) personality complementarity
6. In looking at a member of the opposite sex as a friend or fellow employee, what is most important?
- (1) honesty and sincerity
 - (2) availability in time of need
 - (3) personal values and beliefs
 - (4) personal appearance
7. Which of the following dimensions is most honorable for a political leader?
- (1) secrecy in diplomatic negotiations
 - (2) a healthy physical and facial appearance
 - (3) a successful history of work for the public good
 - (4) personal friendships with influential people of the society
8. Which of the following people do you admire most?
- (1) Richard Nixon
 - (2) Timothy Leary
 - (3) Steve McQueen
 - (4) B. F. Skinner

9. Which of the following people do you admire most?

- (1) Gloria Steinem
- (2) Julie Andrews
- (3) Indira Gandhi
- (4) Dr. Joyce Brothers

APPENDIX C

The four questions asked in the interview:

1. Tell me about the kinds of courses that turned you on in high school. Why?
2. Tell me about the kinds of courses that turned you off in high school. Why?
3. What kinds of academic goals do you have for college?
4. What kinds of non-academic goals do you have while in college?

APPENDIX D

Before you read the girls' answers to the interview questions, here's some background information on both girls.

Throughout high school, both girls were exceptional students, graduating with honors, with both of their grade point averages exceeding 3.7 on a 4.0 scale.

Likewise, both girls scored extremely well on their SAT exams. They each scored in the neighborhood of 1300 out of a possible 1600. This puts them roughly at the 95th percentile.

BARBARA

3. What kinds of academic goals do you have for college?

My academic goals, as I now see them, are quite definite. I intend to become an English major. In high school, I had a very influential English teacher during my junior year. She was very enthusiastic and I think that some of it rubbed off on me. We discussed issues many times after school. So, during my junior and senior years, I read a lot of novels and plays. The more I read, the more interested I became. I like reading and I expect to do a lot of it. I especially enjoy authors like Melville and many British authors of the 19th century. My all-time favorite, though, is definitely William Shakespeare.

When I get my bachelor's degree, I want very much to teach high school English and literature. Although my major interest is literature, I also feel that teaching the language is very important. Things like grammar, syntax, and linguistic structure are crucial to an understanding of the written works of a novelist. And with Shakespeare, the understanding of meter, like iambic pentameter, is essential.

So, I'd like to teach both English and literature classes at the high school level. It sounds very appealing to me and I'm sure I'll be qualified to do it when I graduate.

BARBARA

4. What kinds of non-academic goals do you have while in college?

I have several non-academic goals. One of my high school experiences was my participation on the newspaper staff. Being a writer for the paper forced me to use correct grammar and sentence structure. It made me appreciate the difficulty in writing down my ideas or even in describing some simple school activity like the junior class play. I feel that your college newspaper is of high quality. My good experiences on my high school paper make me want to try my hand at reporting and writing for the college newspaper.

Secondly, one of my reasons for applying to _____ (name of college omitted) is my love of the New England area. Geographically and culturally it is my favorite region of the country. To me, the location of the college is as equally important as is its educational quality. If I'm not happy where I am living, I'm probably not going to do as well in school.

What I'm getting at is that I intend to take advantage of cultural offerings of the five college system in the western part of the state, as well as those available in the Boston area. My interest, but lack of in-depth knowledge, in drama makes me want to increase both my knowledge and appreciation of the stage. I am certain that this area will provide ample opportunity for me to accomplish this goal.

CAROL

3. What kinds of academic goals do you have for college?

I want to major in psychology and education. I am sure of my interest in psychology because I have done a lot of reading on my own, even though I took only one high school course.

When I get my degree, I would like to be a guidance counselor at the high school level. My cousin graduated from college two years ago and is working as a guiding counselor. We have been pretty close since we were in junior high school. Many people have said that we are very similar. She loves her job and has gotten good ratings from her principal and the other teachers.

I strongly believe that high school is a critical period in anyone's life. The changes accompanying adolescence and the pressures exerted by peer groups can sometimes be too much to handle. I realize that I may be dealing with a variety of individual problems, ranging from mild disciplinary problems to depression to mild or severe drug abuse. But I just find the whole idea of guidance counseling exciting and challenging and I have the desire to do a good job. I believe that an education from this school will provide me with the knowledge to perform well at such a job.

CAROL

4. What kinds of non-academic goals do you have while in college?

I guess I have two main non-academic goals. First of all, I feel that the chance to live in relatively small housing units should provide me with many opportunities to get to know other people quite well. I consider myself a sociable person, and I think that this is a good way to be able to participate in many social activities. I intend to take part in the social activities of the house as well as the social affairs of various clubs on campus. I especially want to participate in the planning and execution of some campus social activity. These things provide great opportunities for bringing people together.

Second of all, the location of the school is also important to me. I feel that the entire state of Massachusetts has a lot to offer me. It has physical beauty, various cultural offerings and many hospitals and schools in which I could do some practical work while taking courses. The most important non-academic of these, for me, are the cultural offerings. I have heard the Boston Symphony Orchestra perform several times. Each time I have enjoyed it more. I feel that my appreciation for classical music is also improving. But, one of my goals is to learn more about classical music in all its aspects. And even though it's totally unrelated to my major, I think it is a very realizable goal.

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