

Why do haters have to hate? Newly identified personality trait holds clues

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New research has uncovered the reason why some people seem to dislike everything while others seem to like everything. Apparently, it's all part of our individual personality – a dimension that researchers have coined "dispositional attitude."

People with a positive dispositional attitude have a strong tendency to like things, whereas people with a negative dispositional attitude have a strong tendency to dislike things, according to research published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. The journal article, "Attitudes without objects: Evidence for a dispositional attitude, its measurement, and its consequences," was written by Justin Hepler, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Dolores Albarracín, Ph.D., the Martin Fishbein Chair of Communication and Professor of Psychology at Penn.

"The dispositional attitude construct represents a new perspective in which attitudes are not simply a function of the properties of the stimuli under consideration, but are also a function of the properties of the evaluator," wrote the authors. "[For example], at first glance, it may not seem useful to know someone's feelings about architecture when assessing their feelings about health care. After all, health care and architecture are independent stimuli with unique sets of properties, so attitudes toward these objects should also be independent." However, they note, there is still one critical factor that an individual's attitudes will have in common: the individual who formed the attitudes. "Some people may simply be more prone to focusing on positive features and

others on negative features," Hepler said.

To discover whether people differ in the tendency to like or dislike things, Hepler and Albarracín created a scale that requires people to report their attitudes toward a wide variety of unrelated stimuli, such as architecture, cold showers, politics, and soccer. Upon knowing how much people (dis)like these specific things, the responses were then averaged together to calculate their dispositional attitude (i.e., to calculate how much they tend to like or dislike things in general). The theory is that if individuals differ in the general [tendency](#) to like versus dislike objects, attitudes toward independent objects may actually be related. Throughout the studies the researchers found that people with generally positive dispositional attitudes are more open than people with generally negative dispositional attitudes. In day-to-day practice, this means that people with positive dispositional [attitudes](#) may be more prone to actually buy new products, get vaccine shots, follow regular positive actions (recycling, driving carefully, etc.)

"This surprising and novel discovery expands attitude theory by demonstrating that an attitude is not simply a function of an object's properties, but it is also a function of the properties of the individual who evaluates the object," concluded Hepler and Albarracín. "Overall, the present research provides clear support for the dispositional attitude as a meaningful construct that has important implications for attitude theory and research."

Provided by University of Pennsylvania

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