**You Had Me At Hello:**

**Strategies and Attraction in Pursuer/Target Dynamics**

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It’s a warm, spring, Friday night in Newark, DE.  Each bar on Main Street is giving off a different vibe. However, there is one thing in common--people are on the prowl.  You walk into Klondike Kate’s, look to your left, and see two people standing intimately close to one another, their eyes locked, huge grins drawn across their faces. You look to your right and see a pack of guys coaching their buddy in his pursuit of the cute girl from algebra class sitting with her friends at the bar. The cute girl notices the looks from across the bar and is flattered by the attention with thoughts racing through her mind. It may not be apparent, but each of these strategies in finding a mate is carefully planned out and even the subject of scientific study. From emotional disclosure to acting passively, pursuant strategies can range drastically, but the intention to leave a positive first impression are a common denominator.

In this study, we aim to uncover the mystery behind what draws one person to another upon first meeting. In the following paragraphs, we explore the nature of why people are attracted to a potential partner, the different strategies people employ to entice the other, impression management during the interaction, and the first impressions that results. Following this, we describe a study we conducted examining these issues.

**A Pursuer’s Decision to Act**

Pursuers are initiators that employ active strategies to attract a potential partner; on the other hand, targets take a reactive or passive approach in response to the pursuer. Some research attempts to explain why pursuers approach targets in the first place.  Research has shown that men care more about the physical attractiveness of the women when deciding to approach a partner (Finkel & Eastwick, 2008, p. 195).  However, both men and women prize physical fitness, body shape and size, as an outward sign of health and fertility (Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2011, p. 61-62).  These prized factors present a possible explanation for the way women dress.  According to Clark, Shaver, and Abrahams (2009), “Because males need fertile and maternally competent females, preferably ones who will be sexually faithful, females have evolved strategies to make themselves appear young, healthy, and inviting” (p.710).  In another speed dating study, researchers garnered evidence that beauty was the strongest predictor for attraction (Zhang & Luo, 2009, p. 933).  In certain situations, a less physically attractive person may entice more pursuers because of the assimilation effect.  This states that less physically attractive people may be rated as more desirable when with comparatively more attractive individuals than when alone (Guerrero et al., 2011, p. 63).

Other research attempts to explain the driving forces of attraction during interaction.  The halo effect which occurs during initial interactions derives from beauty.  The halo effect triggers an individual to positively view the counterpart’s other attributes just by virtue of their physical appeal.  For instance, if the person embodies alluring qualities, the other may believe that the person is more social, popular, intelligent, etc.; therefore, the person is seen as more attractive (Guerrero et al., 2011, p. 61). On the other hand, people’s personality traits can stimulate others to view them as more attractive.  Interaction appearance theory states that people will perceive others as more attractive when that person creates a warm positive interaction (Guerrero et al., 2011, p. 62).  Moreover, during interaction, people desire to date someone and to stay romantically focused on that person if they thought he or she liked them (Bower & Wolinsky, 2009, p. 24).  Luo and Zhang’s (2009) observations supported this reciprocity in which “attraction breeds attraction” (p.993, 935).  Therefore, one could note that if there is a lack of interest attraction decreases.  In general, people are the least attracted to others when they feel the person is too easy or too difficult to obtain.  Instead, the people who are moderately difficult tend to be viewed as most attractive (Guerrero et al., 2011, p. 65).

Overall, evidence supports the notion that women are more selective than men in choosing a potential partner.  According to a speed dating study by Bower and Wolinsky (2009), men would have wanted to see almost all the women participants that they interacted with for a future date while women only wanted a future encounter with about 1 in 3 men after interaction (p. 24).  Clark et al. (2009) provides an explanation by Buss that females are motivated to hold out for males with resources.  Due to this, males have evolved strategies to demonstrate, and sometimes exaggerate, their resources, including strength, power, and wealth (p. 710). Although women tend to be more selective than men, other factors can affect how discerning people are in choosing a romantic partner.  The sex of the target and pursuer affect how selective the target and pursuer are.  Research states, “Men initiators were viewed more positively than female initiators” (Clark et al., 2009, p. 710). In addition to this, in general, people are more selective when they are approached.  Although evidence shows that men are typically less selective than women, when women are the pursuers men become more discerning.  In a speed dating study by Finkel and Eastwick (2009), men became the “sitters” and women became “rotators” with the result of men having a stricter selection process (p. 1290).  Moreover, this same study supports the idea that the mere act of physically approaching makes that person (the pursuer) more strongly desire the target/sitter (Finkel & Eastwick, 2009, p. 1290).

**Pursuit Strategies Influencing the Impression Made**

Impression management is important to dating, especially when first interacting with a potential mate. Originally a concept explored by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), impression management refers to the different things we do in order to influence the perceptions of others about ourselves, situations, or other people. People usually do this by regulating diverse information during their interactions with others. One interesting way to understand impression management is through the two component model proposed in Leary and Kowalski (1990)*.* The two mechanisms in this model of impression management are called “impression motivation”, “the degree to which people are motivated to control how others see them” and “impression construction”, or “the factors involved in forming these desired constructions.” Impression motivation is comprised of three factors: “the goal-relevance of the impressions one creates, the value of desired outcomes, and the discrepancy between current and desired images.” Impression construction is made up of five factors, which often determine what kind of impression someone will try to create. These five factors are: “the self-concept, desired and undesired identity images, role constraints, target’s values, and current social image.” Leary and Kowalski also mention the idea that there are levels to “impression monitoring” or how aware people are of the impression they are making on others. Some situations provoke a state of “subjective self-awareness” in which people are not as self-aware. For example, a fit of an extreme emotion such as overwhelming joy may induce this state. On the other hand, there are situations that are defined by sharp self-awareness in which people are extremely sentient to how they are being viewed by others.

An example of this heightened self-awareness cited by Leary and Kowalski (1990) is a first date or first interaction with a potential date, in which people may “...deliberately search for cues regarding others’ impressions of them and attend selectively to information that is relevant to making the right impression”.  For example, in a study by Larson and Tsitsos (2013), students were asked to play the role of “speed daters” in which they met each other for the first time during short timed “dates” or conversations. They were asked to note the different impression management tactics they unconsciously or consciously used as well as those of their partner. One student explained how he would unconsciously roll up his sleeves to reveal his expensive tattoo whenever he would speak with someone new. This is one example of an action taken during impression management, but there are so many other gestures and bits of information that we can either reveal or choose not to reveal when meeting someone.

Pursuers and targets both employ strategies to attract love interests.  Research has looked at the strategies people use in order to attract a potential love interest for both the pursuer and target, what men and women look for in a potential partner, how selective each sex is, and many other miscellaneous factors.  In a study done by Clark et al. (2009, p. 712), the researchers identified 8 distinct strategies that people employ in order to initiate romantic interactions.  The following includes the strategies along with tactic examples: 1. emotional disclosure (revealing personal information), 2. directly initiation (making physical contact, directly asking the target to start a relationship), 3. signaling indirectly (hinting, talking generally about romance), 4. manipulating the situation (making the setting romantic, maintaining close physical contact), 5. joking (teasing, playfully insulting), 6. demonstrating resources (gift giving, showing off possessions), 7. using third parties to initiate relationship (getting friends or family members to assist), 8. acting passively (waiting for the other person to make the first move).  Survey results concluded that the most proficient strategies were emotional disclosure, direct initiation, and manipulating the setting, while the least proficient were demonstrating resources and passive strategies.  People rated emotional disclosure, manipulating the setting, and acting passively as the most agreeable, whereas demonstrating resources and third-party strategies were seen as the least agreeable.  In addition to this, “The direct strategy was deemed the most potent, open, flirtatious, and uninhibited; the passive strategy was deemed the least potent, open, flirtatious, and inhibited. Demonstrating resources was believed to be the most fake/phony strategy, which may help to explain its perceived lack of proficiency. Emotional disclosure was perceived to be the least fake/phony. The passive strategy was the most inhibited; the direct strategy was the least inhibited” (Clark et al., 2009, p. 713).

Another important part of impression management is body language (similar to the aforementioned tattoo example). As anyone who’s ever tried to obtain a date with someone else will tell you, it can make or break the situation.  According to Balistreri (2013), “Body language is a means of transmitting information, just like the spoken word, except that it is achieved through facial expressions, gestures, touch, physical movements, posture, embellishments (clothes, hairstyles, tattoos. etc.) and even the tone and volume of one's voice.” Body and facial gestures, which we cannot control, come from the limbic system (comprised of the hypothalamus and hippocampus; Balistreri, 2013). These “gut reactions” often provide insight into someone’s true emotions. For example, although it is not always a telltale sign of disinterest, being physically closed off (i.e. folded arms) can show a “pursuer” (person trying to obtain a date) that the target is not reciprocating their feelings. There are also things people may purposely do to convey interest in another person such as smiling, nodding their head in agreement, or playfully touching them. These are all essential parts of what some call “flirting”. In her review article, DePaulo (1992) explains that hardly any nonverbal behavior is unintentional. Even Goffman found in his analysis of the presentation of self in everyday life, “that the behaviors someone ‘gives off’, expressive behaviors that are taken to be genuinely and unconsciously reflective of something about the person, can be purposefully controlled as to convey particular impressions” (DePaulo, 1992).

**First Impressions Leaving Lasting Effects**

       “You had me at hello,” a popular phrase describing an initial person-to-person interaction, is also a saying directly related to the concept of first impression.  Instantaneous judgments, coming from both vocal first impressions and physical ones are known as “snap judgments,” also described in many publications as dominant aspects of impression formation.  This way of taking in a person upon the first few seconds of confrontation includes static cues, the unchanging, physical traits possessed by the person in question, and qualities of the person that can change such as smiles and bodily posture (Naumann, Vazire, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2009).  Although these first interpretations of a stimulus are most always lasting, central route processes that would be expected in a logical, thought out conclusion are not there. Instead, the perception involves peripheral route processing due to the snap judgments’ lack of consideration for motives, intentions, or causes for target behavior (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Although often wrong or unfinished, snap judgments are useful in terms of awareness of aspects of the person prior to actually meeting and getting to know them (Schneider, Hastorf & Ellsworth, 1979). As humans, this is how we choose who we will pursue and who we will stay away from. In the dating realm, this is especially important and pertinent since this would severely limit or expand the amount of potential targets for the pursuer.

The potential starting points for snap judgments can be split into two spheres, verbal and physical attributes. Regarding those that are verbal,  McAleer, Todorov and Belin (2014)studied how personality impressions sprout out of listening to brief novel voices.  Participants rated recordings of individuals saying the word hello representing one of ten personality traits. The results show consistent judgments within but varying criteria between genders. When valence and dominance resulted in an upward trending combination, male vocal attractiveness also went up. On the other hand, female vocal attractiveness resulted from only higher valence.  “On hearing a novel voice, listeners readily form personality impressions of that speaker. Accurate or not, these impressions are known to affect subsequent interactions…” (McAleer, Todorov & Belin, 2014). As a result, a pursuer has a high chance of retaining the impression made upon hearing the target’s voice, despite other information revealed later on.

Two studies on the importance of the face on first impressions were reported in an article at livescience.com (Pappas, 2014). Research by Cornell University psychologist Vivian Zayas describes participants viewing a photograph and making a snap judgment about how he or she would think of the person if they were to interact face-to-face. Over a month later, the participants actually met the people from the pictures and the predictions stayed true, showing the persistence of snap judgments throughout relationships**.** Another experiment conducted by psychologist Nicholas Rule of the University of Toronto attempted to gauge what occurs when initial information about a person conflicts with new discoveries while getting to know that person on a deeper level.To do so, the participants looked at pictures of heterosexual and homosexual men with some correct and some incorrect labels and following were asked to take a computer quiz labeling the men themselves. Those who only saw the faces for a 20th of a second went with their gut feeling more often, leading to more correct guesses about the sexual orientation of the subject. “Their face is a constant reminder to us of that initial impression,” (Pappas, 2014).

Willis and Todorov (2006) examined the impact of different exposure times looking at the physical features of another.  Judgments made after a 100-ms exposure correlated with those made in the absence of time constraints, implying that this may be a sufficient amount of time for participants to form an impression. Increases in exposure time to 500-ms and 1,000-ms did not significantly change impressions, although impressions became more differentiated and confidence for some of the judgments went up. In the end, snap judgments are often accurate, and heavily influence a relationship, despite new information learned later on.

**Research Questions**

We believe that initial contact between a target and a pursuer generally happens in the following manner.  To start, the pursuer gauges the attractiveness of the potential target.  The pursuer then decides if the target is sufficiently attractive by their own standards.  If no, then contact is not initiated.  If yes, and the pursuer decides to initiate contact,  then the pursuer will choose an impression management strategy.  Once the pursuer employs the strategy, the target develops his/her own strategy in response.  If the target views the pursuer’s strategy as positive then their response will also be positive.  If the target views the pursuer’s strategy as negative then their response will also be negative.

This process of the initial contact leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: What do pursuers find attractive in a potential target?

RQ2: What strategies does the pursuer use if they find the target attractive?

RQ3: What are the target’s impressions of the pursuer’s strategies?

RQ4: What do the targets find attractive in the pursuers?

RQ5: Which strategies are most and least effective?

RQ6: What strategies would the target use in response of the pursuer? Do these strategies match up with that of the pursuer?

RQ7: Are there gender differences in attributes pursuers find attractive in partners?

We will attempt to answer these questions in the following study.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants were students in a research methods course at the University of Delaware and respondents to social media requests for participation.  Out of a total sample size of 207 participants, only 195 were willing to give their age. 126 (65%) were of ages 18-20, 57 (29%) were of ages 21-23, and 12 (6%) of them were 24 years of age or above. The same number recorded their gender with 52 (27%) of participants being male and a much higher 143 (73%) being female. One hundred ninety eight people recorded a response to the question asking if they are currently enrolled in the research methods course, with 137 (69%) saying yes and 61 (31%) of the group saying no.

**Survey**

Students in a Communication course at the University of Delaware were sent a survey in which they were given the rights to agree or disagree to participate in the study and to withdraw from the survey at any point. Extra credit in the course was offered to those that participated in the survey. Participants were required to be at least 18 years of age, and those that did not meet this requirement were given the opportunity to complete an alternative assignment, not included in the results section.  In addition to the Communication course, other participants included other University of Delaware students as well as non-University of Delaware students all above the age of 18.

The survey administered inquired about initial contact between two potential romantic partners. The survey began by defining the key terms in our study, pursuer and target, in order to provide clarification for the participants. It then asked questions regarding the pursuer role, starting with asking if the participant had ever taken up that role in the past. Following this, the survey asked about attractive traits initially found in a potential target.  The list included the following traits: smile, eyes, height, physique, posture, hair, clothing style, perceived confidence, general demeanor (e.g. calm, vibrant, jovial), and perceived social status.  Next, participants determined the likelihood of the pursuer approaching this target in variable group sizes on six-point Likert scales with labelled endpoints “very likely” and “very unlikely”.  The group sizes included: standing alone, standing with a friend, standing in a small group (3-5 people), and standing in a large group (6+ people).  Participants identified the most important characteristics of the target (general demeanor, appearance of intelligence, physical attributes, race/ethnicity, appearance of wealth, appearance of similarity to self) and then proceeded to address which strategies they had used when approaching this target. The list of strategies included becoming emotionally involved, directly initiating a relationship, signaling indirectly, manipulating the situation, joking, demonstrating resources, using third parties to initiate relationship, and acting passively (Clark et al., 2009, p. 712). The participant was given the opportunity to list any strategies they have used that were not noted in the previous list. After this, the target was asked about criteria used to judge pursuer attractiveness when approached by such and how effective they have found the strategies used by pursuers in the past using a six point Likert scale of “very ineffective” to “very effective” along with the option of “never used”.

The survey then switched over to target experience beginning with questioning the participant about having ever undertaken that role. They were asked what criteria has been used to judge pursuer attractiveness when approached.  The survey identified the following criteria to judge a pursuer: smile, eyes, height, physique, posture, hair, clothing style, perceived confidence, persistence, scent, and speech style. Next, targets were asked how effective they gauged the same strategies they used as the pursuers also using the six point Likert scale previously mentioned. They were asked to include any strategies that the survey did not capture.  Using the same strategies we asked participants to describe each one by checking off as many of the following characteristics as they felt applicable. The trait options offered are effective, agreeable, strong/powerful, open, flirtatious, phony/fake, and reserved. Most of these options were mirrored from Clark et al. (2009) (p. 712).

Then, targets were asked if they have ever found a pursuer attractive in their attempts. If the participant answered no, they were directed to the end of the survey, however those who responded yes were asked to continue the survey by noting which strategies they had used if approached by this attractive pursuer. The strategies listed were the same with an added “other” component for writing in alternative tactics used. Using the same six point Likert scale, targets who found pursuers attractive were asked how likely their strategies were to be influenced by this pursuer’s strategy. Next, targets were also asked on the same scale how likely they were to imitate the strategies used by the attractive pursuers, with the same strategy list given. The same set of questions were given to inquire about unattractive pursuers with the added strategy options of grabbing the attention of a friend and ignoring the pursuer.

To conclude the survey, participants were required to answer demographic questions about gender and age.

**Results**

RQ1: What do pursuers find attractive in a potential target?

When participants were asked if they had ever been a pursuer, out of the 229 total responses, 194 (85%) claimed to have been a pursuer in the past. When asked what they first find attractive about a potential target, out of the 187 responses, the top response was smile with 150 (80%), with general demeanor following at 131 (70%), and physique coming in third at 120 (64%). In response to asking how likely the pursuer is to approach a target standing in different sized groups of people, there were 187 total responses. The highest probability of approaching the target was a mean of 3.98 corresponding to a target standing alone. Next, there was a close mean of 3.71 to approach a target standing with a friend, 3.12 to approach a target standing in a small group of 3-5 people, and a mean of 2.54 to approach a target standing in a large group of 6 or more people. Regarding what was most important to respondents in a potential target, a total of 184 answered the question with 82 (45%) placing general demeanor at the highest rank, 42 (23%) placing appearance of similarities to self in second place, and a closely following 39 (21%) ranking physical attributes in third place.

RQ2: What strategies does the pursuer use if they find the target attractive?

When participants were asked which strategies they have used when approaching the target, out of the 184 total responses, 147 (80%) of the respondents have used joking while a distant 73 (40%) have used signaling indirectly and 71 (39%) have both used a third party and acted passively.

RQ3: What are the target’s impressions of the pursuer’s strategies?

Participants were asked whether or not they have been a target.  Out of the 210 responses 189 replied “Yes” (90%) while 21 answered “No” (10%).  Participants were then asked to evaluate the strategies by checking off whether they thought the strategies were: “Effective,” “Agreeable,” “Strong/Powerful,” “Open,” “Flirtatious,” “Phony/Fake,” and “Reserved.”  In regards to the “Effective” category, Joking came out on top with 95 (52%) participants rating it as so.  Becoming emotionally involved trailed with 62 (34%) participants finding it effective, and using a third party ranked third with 51 (28%) ratings.  In addition to effective, joking was found to be the most agreeable strategy with a count of 69 (38%).  Using a third party followed with a count of 57 (31%).  Signaling indirectly resulted with a count of 48 (26%).  Regarding the strategies being strong/powerful, directly initiating notably exceeded all other strategies with a count of 118 (65%).  Second to directly initiating was manipulating the situation with a count of 70 (38%).  Becoming emotionally involved was just short of half of directly initiating with 57 (31%).  Not surprisingly, participants thought becoming emotionally involved was considered the most open strategy with 132 (73%).  Directly initiating finished with a count of 69 (38%) while joking  followed with a count of 60 (33%).  Results showed that participants found joking to be the most flirtatious strategy with a count of 139 (76%) while signaling indirectly following closely behind with 117 (64%).  Manipulating the situation had a notable count of 97 (53%) as well.  When it came to rating the strategy as phony/fake, demonstrating resources trumped all other strategies with a count of 132 (73%).  The next strategy seen as phony/fake was manipulating the situation with a count of 57 (31%).  Ranked third, only 32 (18%) participants found using a third party as phony/fake.  138 (76%) participants found the strategy of acting passively as reserved.  Using a third party followed with a count of 88 (48%) while signaling indirectly had a count of 65 (36%).

RQ4: What do the targets find attractive in the pursuers?

The survey asked 184 participants what criteria did they use, as a target, to judge the attractiveness of a pursuer.  149 (81%) answered that smile was part of the criteria used to determine whether the pursuer was attractive.  138 (75%) responded that they use perceived confidence as another aspect.  Another condition used to determine attractiveness was physique with a response rate of 69% (129 participants).  The least used criteria to judge pursuer attractiveness are persistence and posture with responses from 62 (34%) and 55 (30%) participants, respectively.

RQ5: Which strategies are most and least effective?

When participants who identified as pursuers were asked how effective the various strategies they have used have been in the past, the top response was “Joking” with the notably high mean of 5.50. The second highest answer was “Using a third party to initiate a relationship” with a mean 4.79. The lowest scoring strategy to this question was “Demonstrating resources” with a mean of 3.28. The following table shows the means for every strategy mentioned in the survey:

Table 1 – Most and Least Effective Strategies

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Statistic | Becoming emotionally involved | Directly initiating a relationship | Signaling indirectly | Manipulating the situation | Joking | Demonstrating resources | Using a third party to initiate a relationship | Acting passively |
| Min Value | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Max Value | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| Mean | 4.21 | 3.96 | 4.44 | 4.21 | 5.50 | 3.28 | 4.79 | 3.79 |
| Variance | 2.71 | 3.40 | 2.01 | 2.93 | 1.36 | 2.55 | 2.05 | 2.14 |
| Standard Deviation | 1.65 | 1.84 | 1.42 | 1.71 | 1.17 | 1.60 | 1.43 | 1.46 |
| Total Responses | 174 | 174 | 174 | 175 | 174 | 174 | 174 | 174 |

Additionally, targets were asked about their perspective on the effectiveness of these strategies, which proved to match the pursuer perspective. Most targets identified “Joking” as the most effective strategy with a mean of 5.65. However, the second highest rated strategy among targets was different than that of pursuers. Targets felt that “Signalling Indirectly” was the second best strategy.  The lowest scoring strategy according to targets was, like pursuers, “Demonstrating resources” with a mean of 3.52.

RQ6: What strategies would the target use in response of the pursuer? Do these strategies match up with that of the pursuer?

Out of 186 participants, 173 (93%) claimed to have been approached by an attractive pursuer in a romantic context at some point in their lives. When targets were asked which strategies they use when approached by an attractive pursuer, following the data pattern of the previous research questions, “ Joking (e.g. teasing, playfully insulting)” was exceedingly the most popular strategy with 148 participants (87%) claiming to use it. “Signaling indirectly (e.g. hinting, talking generally about romance)” was the second most used strategy in response to an attractive pursuer with 93 (54%) responses. Most targets (49%) were “likely” to allow their strategy to be influenced by that of an attractive pursuer. In fact, most targets of an attractive pursuer we’re likely to imitate the pursuer’s strategy especially in the case of the joking strategy. Targets answered that they would likely imitate a pursuer’s joking with a mean of 5.16.

Out of 182 participants, 171 (94%) claimed that they have been the target of an unattractive pursuer who tries to initiate romantic contact.  When approached by an unattractive pursuer 135 out of 170 participants (79%) reported that they use the strategy of grabbing the attention of a friend.  In addition to this, 110 participants (65%) claimed to ignore the pursuer as their strategy.  89 participants (52%) used acting passively as their strategy when approached by the unattractive pursuer.

When participants were asked how likely their strategy was to be influenced by the strategy of the unattractive pursuer on a 6 point scale from “Very Unlikely” (1) to “Very Likely” (6), the mean was almost exactly in the middle with 3.5.  The results were highly distributed with a variance of 3.07; therefore, a consensus did not exist.

Using the same scale just described participants were asked how likely they were to imitate the eight possible strategies of an unattractive pursuer.  All of the means favored towards the unlikely side of the spectrum with the highest mean of 3.49 for “Acting passively”.  This is not surprising since most participants had already said that they usually grab a friend or simply ignore the pursuer.

RQ7: Are there gender differences in attributes pursuers find attractive in partners?

As Table 2 shows, there were gender differences in ratings of the most important attributes for pursuers, chi square (3) = 8.51, *p* = .037.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 2 - Gender Differences in Attractive Attributes** | | | | |
|  | | | | |
|  | | Gender | | Total |
| Male | Female |
|  | Demeanor | 18 | 59 | 77 |
| Intelligence | 6 | 10 | 16 |
| Physical Attributes | 16 | 18 | 34 |
| Similarity to Self | 8 | 31 | 39 |
| Total | | 48 | 118 | 166 |

Although demeanor was valued the most important for men and women, the attributes differed in the extent to which males (37.5%) and females (50%) chose it.  In contrast, physical appearance was 33% versus 15.25% for men and women respectively.

**Discussion**

To reiterate our purpose, this study was conducted in order to examine tendencies of pursuers and targets within initial romantic contact. To analyze these occurrences during first impressions, we aimed to answer seven specific research questions through our administered survey. For the pursuer, we wanted to know what they find attractive in potential targets as well as what strategies they use. For the target, we wanted to know about their impressions of the pursuer’s strategies, what they find attractive in the pursuers, which strategies they find most and least effective, as well as which strategies they use in response. Another question we wanted to answer was whether there are gender differences in what pursuers find attractive.

As a result of a sufficient amount of people participating in the survey, we were able to find clear-cut answers to all of these questions. Pursuers find smile, general demeanor, and physique most attractive in potential targets. Their top used strategies are joking and signaling indirectly when they find the target attractive. In terms of their impressions of the pursuer’s strategies, targets perceive joking as the most effective, agreeable, and flirtatious, directly initiating as the most powerful, becoming emotionally involved as the most open, demonstrating resources as the most phony, and acting passively as the most reserved. Again, joking is the most effective strategy in the eyes of the target and demonstrating resources is the least effective.  Targets find smiles, perceived confidence, and physique to be the top most attractive qualities in the pursuers. In response to pursuer strategies, targets are more likely to imitate the strategies of those they find attractive, especially when it comes to joking.  Finally, female pursuers rated demeanor as their most attractive attribute while proportionally, male pursuers rated physical attributes as such.

One interesting fact we found in our survey is that most participants answered that “resources” or status symbols were unimportant in their assessment of attractiveness in a potential mate. These results are inconsistent with some of the information mentioned in our literature review (Clark et al., 2009). The sample we studied predominantly was comprised of college age students (65% were between 18-20 years of age and 29% were between 21-23 years of age). We believe that at this stage of life, social status and monetary value might be generally less important factors since most college students have not found a steady career path yet. Also, many college students may be still receiving financial support from their parents. Therefore, the status symbols that students display or do not display have less bearing on their true financial position. More or less, most college students have similar financial situations.

Another explanation for the disinterest in “displaying resources” has to do with a societal change that has taken place over the last 30-40 years. There has been an increase in the number of women attending college, postgraduate studies, and professional school and accordingly achieving high levels of professional and economic success. Therefore, since women have more control over their financial success on their own, the importance of finding a financially capable mate decreases. We thought this may be a possible explanation because of the large percentage of females who participated in the survey (73% of participants identified as female).

           Concerning strategies, many differences were found in the current study than with previous research (Clark et al., 2009).  Previous research found the most effective strategies to be emotional disclosure, direct initiation, and manipulating the setting while this study found joking, becoming emotionally involved, and using a third party the most effective. There were also differences in impressions each strategy leaves.  In the previous study, participants rated emotional disclosure, manipulating the setting, and acting passively as the most agreeable, while the current study showed joking, using a third party, and signaling indirectly to be rated the most agreeable. In regards to the most open strategy, Clark et al. found the direct strategy to be rated as so while this study resulted with emotional disclosure as being the most open.  In the current study, joking was found to be the most flirtatious while the previous research found the directly initiating a relationship to be the most flirtatious.  We believe that one possible reason for the varying findings was that there were differing methodologies between the two studies for measuring the strategies.  More research should be done in order to explain these differences further.

This study contains limitations.  The majority of participants were college-aged students from the University of Delaware.  Only a small number were non University of Delaware students and/or above 23 years of age.  In addition to this, the participants were mainly female with only about a quarter of respondents being male.  There was also a flaw within our survey in which participants were able to skip questions.  However, these skips in questions were minimal, if not negligible.  Moreover, the survey failed to ask questions that captured how selective men and women were concerning targets and pursuers.  Our results can only draw inferences from the questions included in the survey.

After completing this study and having an adequate set of results, future researchers might be interested in “live research and observation in the field,” such as observing how these dating strategies may play out in a real life setting such as a bar or a club. It may also be worthwhile to look at these issues from different demographic points of view. Concerning geography, it may be beneficial to look at dating strategies and factors that dictate attractiveness in different regions of the United States, as well as other countries in the world. Different age groups and various socioeconomic statuses may also facilitate future subsets of interest in research. Also, as previously mentioned as a limitation of our study, future studies should ask questions concerning the selectivity of men and women. Moreover, in general, future surveys may benefit from asking more gender difference questions since our survey focused more on the population as whole.

**Conclusion**

It’s that same warm, spring, Friday night, but this time, you are not an observer, you are in on the action. After the study of strategies and reactions you now know how to successfully attract the attention of your desired counterpart. You ask a friend for good wishes, your joke is ready in the back of your mind, and you walk confidently in the direction of the girl from freshman year who you could never work up the courage to talk to--until now.

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