



Articles

A New Era of Courtship

Let me Contemplate our Speed-Date to Determine the Interconnectedness of Conversation and Physical Attraction

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Abstract

The central purpose of this study was to determine whether a single interpersonal communication event could influence perceptions of physical attractiveness in a dating environment. A total of 104 undergraduate students at a large United States university engaged in speed-dating in order to examine the effects of both positive communication and negative communication. Speed-dating was incorporated into the present research because this round-robin method of dating offered an efficient means for investigating attraction and analyzing the effects of a single conversation. It was upon arrival at the event that participants completed a pre-test measure, engaged in a series of three minute speed-dates, and then completed a post-test measure. Results produced evidence of an interaction. Perceptions of physical attractiveness increased from pre-test to post-test in the positive communication condition while perceptions of physical attractiveness decreased from pre-test to post-test in the negative communication condition. Additional findings illustrated that three minutes of non-neutral social interaction had differing effects on women and men. One of the central conclusions from the present research was that females can strategically use interpersonal communication as a tool for enhancing their physical appearance. The results from this study also yielded practical implications that are relevant to casual dating as well as theoretical implications that are germane to communication theory.

Keywords: attraction, perception, interpersonal communication, relationships, speed-dating

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It has been more than 2,000 years since Aristotle (translated in 1932) famously proclaimed:

And they are friends who have come to regard the same things as good and the same things as evil, they who are friends of the same people, and they who are enemies of the same people . . . we like those who resemble us, and are engaged in the same pursuits. We like those who desire the same things as we. (pp. 103-105)

The aforementioned words of the Greek philosopher illustrate that liking and similarity are intertwined variables. Contemporary scholarship has further developed the observations of Aristotle and hence launched a theoretical foundation known as the similarity-attraction hypothesis (Byrne, 1961). As founder Byrne (1971) suggests of his archetypal paradigm: “several different kinds of evidence indicate that interpersonal attraction is related to similarity and dissimilarity of attitudes” (p. 47). Indeed, the correlation between similarity and attraction has been

thoroughly documented via meta-analytic reviews (Montoya & Horton, 2013; Montoya, Horton, & Kirchner, 2008) but lesser amounts of scholarship have explored the relationship between attraction and other social constructs.

The present investigation explored interpersonal communication and physical attraction. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to analyze perceptions of physical attractiveness after a single communication event. An examination of previous literature devoted to physical attraction, the effects of a single positive stimulus, and the effects of a single negative stimulus was undertaken because of their relevance to the present research. A contemporary method of dating was employed as a methodological tool for analyzing perceptions. In short, this study was completed to explore the effects of a single social interaction in an attraction relevant venue.

Physical Attractiveness in the Social Sciences

Physical attraction can be broadly conceptualized as liking for another individual “based on dress and physical features” (McCroskey & McCain, 1974, p. 266). Initial research on the aforesaid construct posited that physical attractiveness represented one dimension of what McCroskey and McCain (1972) deemed interpersonal attraction. The specific component of physical attraction measured criteria such as the handsomeness, sexiness, and grooming of a fellow interlocutor (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). For example, extant literature has demonstrated that individuals normally experience physical attraction for individuals who possess a symmetrical facial appearance and/or a fit body physique (Huston, 1974). At the same time, social psychological research by Bardack and McAndrew (1985) has illustrated that manner of dress and physical attractiveness both positively influence the perceptions of another individual. It was along a more general line that Byrne, London, and Reeves (1968) examined participant gender and concluded that interpersonal attraction was “greater toward physically attractive strangers regardless of sex” (p. 269). In other words, both males and females have an affinity for physically attractive others (Byrne et al., 1968). When taken together, the aforementioned physical attractiveness findings support the classic “what is beautiful is good” (p. 285) aphorism that was originally reported by Dion, Berscheid, and Walster (1972). Although these well-known investigations have thoroughly demonstrated that physical attraction is positively regarded, other research has employed advanced methodological designs in order to analyze physical attractiveness.

Diverse methodologies have been employed by a separate era of social scientists dedicated to understanding physical attraction. Survey research by Greitemeyer (2010) found that individuals felt a strong need for reciprocation if their dating partner was viewed as very physically attractive. Interview research conducted by Albada, Knapp, and Theune (2002) revealed that: “physical attractiveness emerged as a quality that is thought about, valued in a relational partner, and important for relationship satisfaction” (p. 17). Shackelford and Larsen (1997) employed photographs of subjects as well as a diary methodology and found that individuals who displayed facial asymmetry were viewed by others as less physically attractive. Perhaps most germane to the current study was speed-dating research by Finkel and Eastwick (2008) who found evidence of gender differences whereby males preferred physical attractiveness in a potential romantic partner more than their female counterparts. A separate speed-dating study by Houser, Horan, and Furler (2008) noted that while physical attraction was partially pre-determined by biology that speed-daters could enhance their chances of securing a second date via nice clothes, maintaining eye contact, and through using a pleasant tone of voice. While the current study employed a methodological design that featured both photographs and speed-dating in order to study the relatively distinct conceptualization of physical attractiveness, it is necessary to first unpack the literature devoted to the effects of a single stimulus before addressing the central methods of the present research.

Exposure to a Single Negative Stimulus and a Single Positive Stimulus

The effect of being exposed to a single positive or a single negative stimulus has produced consistent results in most previous research. For example, [Zuckerman, Miyake, and Hodgins \(1991\)](#) revealed that exposure to a single flattering vocal cue resulted in participants perceiving another individual as more physically attractive. A separate study by [Paunonen \(2006\)](#) uncovered evidence of an interaction whereby individuals who were regarded as honest were viewed as more attractive than a condition in which dishonesty was prevalent. It was along a related line that [Lewandowski, Aron, and Gee \(2007\)](#) found that desirable personality information about another individual resulted in participants perceiving another person as more physically attractive while less desirable personality information about another individual resulted in participants perceiving another person as less physically attractive. Communication scholarship courtesy of [Afifi and Burgoon \(2000\)](#) discovered that positive violations of expected behavior lead to an increase in the attractiveness of an expectancy violator while negative violations of expected behavior lead to a decrease in the attractiveness of an expectancy violator. Therefore, there is reason to believe that a positive stimulus will produce an increase in perceptions of attractiveness while a negative stimulus will produce a decrease in perceptions of attractiveness.

Background on Speed-Dating

The present research used speed-dating to examine physical attraction after a single interpersonal communication. Speed-dating is a romantic dating process in which individuals go on several dates to efficiently assess feelings of interpersonal attraction for a possible romantic partner. The standard speed-dating procedure requires participants to go on multiple brief dates that normally range between 3 to 9 minutes in length. It is after the pre-determined amount of time has passed (generally 3 to 9 minutes per date) that the event organizer rings a bell which cues participants to rotate to their next potential mate. It is at the end of the evening that speed-dating participants then identify which participants (if any) they desire to see again in the future.

The rationale for using a speed-dating methodology is also discussion worthy. One reason for using this methodology is because it provides an efficient means for assessing individual perceptions. As [Finkel, Eastwick, and Matthews \(2007\)](#) suggest:

Speed-dating provides a promising methodological paradigm for studying initial romantic attraction and early relationship development because it enables investigators to assess a large battery of background information about individuals before they meet one another, to introduce them to one another in a controlled laboratory setting (the speed-dating event), and to follow them after the laboratory session to examine relationship dynamics over the ensuing days, weeks, and beyond. (p. 151)

Indeed, speed-dating was appropriate for the current research because it offered an effective method for manipulating the variables of interest and comparing pre-test versus post-test effects. In sum, speed-dating nicely aligned with the thesis, variables, and goals of the present research.

The Current Research

The rationale for the current research was two-fold. The first rationale for this study was to learn more about the theoretical underpinnings of attraction within the arena of interpersonal communication. While the Interaction Appearance Theory of communication ([Albada, Knapp, & Theune, 2002](#)) claims that individuals evaluate the physical appearance of a romantic partner differently based on the results of multiple social interactions over time, lesser amounts of theory-based scholarship have investigated the effects a single conversation can have on interpersonal attractiveness perceptions. A second rationale for this study was to explore potential gender differences. One of

the central findings than can be uncovered via examining a single social interaction in a dating context is whether female or male perceptions are more affected by three minutes of conversation. This type of analysis could yield insight on what females or males might wish to say (or not say) in order to appear more physically attractive. Thus, the present research can produce both theoretical and practical insight.

The central purpose of this study was to determine if a single communication could positively or negatively impact initial opinions of physical attractiveness. Two separate conditions were created to accomplish this objective and to systematically test the physical attraction dependent variable. More specifically, this study featured a positive communication condition and a negative communication condition. Each condition was comprised of verbal and nonverbal elements. This study conceptualized a single communication event as being comprised of verbal comments, vocal tonality, and nonverbal communication. Study confederates were employed for this investigation in order to test whether positive and negative communication had an impact on perceptions.

One of the central conclusions that can be drawn based on previous research is that a positive stimulus and a negative stimulus will frequently interact in terms of their influence on attraction. For example, attraction literature has revealed that desirable personality information interacts with undesirable personality (Lewandowski, Aron, & Gee, 2007) and that kind information interacts with unkind information (Hassin & Trope, 2000). Communication related scholarship has discovered that positive expectancy violations interact with negative expectancy violations (Afifi & Burgoon, 2000) on the variable of attractiveness. However, no studies were found to assess whether perceptions of physical attractiveness were affected by a single positive chat in a dating context. Moreover, no studies have assessed whether perceptions of physical attractiveness were affected by a single negative chat in a dating context. Thus, it is based on the interactions of previous research and the gaps in the extant literature that the following hypotheses are being put forth:

H1: Participants who are exposed to a single positive communication will evaluate the physical attractiveness of a dating partner differently from pre-test to post-test than participants who are exposed to single negative communication.

H2: Participants will rate the physical attractiveness of a dating partner significantly higher after positive communication occurs during a single social interaction.

H3: Participants will rate the physical attractiveness of a dating partner significantly lower after negative communication occurs during a single social interaction.

Previous courtship literature has revealed that some gender differences exist between women and men with regard to the significance of physical attractiveness. In fact, the vast majority of extant literature has provided support for the findings of Finkel and Eastwick (2008) who concluded that males are more concerned with securing a physically attractive mate while females favor potential romantic partners who have increased earnings potential. However, a dating study by Asendorpf, Penke, and Back (2011) suggested that women and men had an equal proclivity for desiring a physically attractive potential mate. Similar findings were observed by Luo and Zhang (2009) who reported that physical attractiveness was the strongest predictor of romantic liking for both women and men. Taken together, it appears that males place a greater emphasis on physical attractiveness relative to females. At the same time, it is conceivable that a new era of female daters are placing greater value on the centrality of attraction in burgeoning romantic relationships. Even though some gender differences may exist with regard to the role of

attraction in casual dating, limited amounts of courtship literature have investigated the volatility of attractiveness in the eyes of women relative to men. Therefore, the following research question was proposed:

RQ: What effect will participant gender have on perceptions of physical attractiveness from pre-test to post-test after a single positive or a single negative communication occurs within a dating environment?

Method

Participants

The participants in this study were 104 undergraduate students (53 women, 51 men) at a large southeastern university in the United States. The mean age for participants was 20.97 ($sd = 4.27$) and the age range for participants varied between 18 years old and 48 years of age. The majority of the sample was Caucasian (63.5%), followed by African American (29.8%), Asian (3.8%), and Hispanic (2.9%). The average number of study participants at any one given speed-dating session was 14.85; a total of seven separate speed-dating sessions were conducted. Study participants were randomly assigned to either the positive or negative condition to help control for age and gender differences. Participants were recruited via the student newspaper, campus advertisements, classroom visits, and an information booth located on campus.

Materials

The present study used a modified version of the physical attraction scale of [McCroskey and McCain \(1974\)](#) in order to analyze the dependent variable of physical attractiveness. All items featured a 7-point response continuum (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The 7-item instrument was used to assess pre-test perceptions of physical attractiveness and post-test perceptions of physical attractiveness. The scale was comprised of items that measured perceptions of (1) handsomeness (prettiness), (2) sexy looking, (3) very attractive physically, (4) wears neat clothes, and the like. A series of Cronbach's alpha (reliability) analyses that were conducted for this study revealed that alpha was .87 for the pre-test in the positive condition, was .86 for the post-test in the positive condition, was .84 for the pre-test in the negative condition, and .87 for the post-test in the negative condition. As such, a reliable instrument was utilized.

Procedures

The procedures for this study involved nine separate activities. The first procedural aspect of this study was the creation of two separate conditions. Specifically, a positive communication condition and a negative communication condition were designed for this investigation. The positive communication condition involved a flirtatious tonality, complimentary verbal comments, and playful nonverbal behaviors. The negative communication condition involved a condescending tonality, standoffish verbal comments, and low immediacy nonverbal behaviors. The aforementioned vocal elements, content, and nonverbal behaviors were incorporated into this study because of their prevalence in the communication based literature devoted to interpersonal attraction.

The second procedural aspect of this investigation was training for study confederates. It was during training that two confederates were given precise instructions regarding tonality, verbal comments, and nonverbal communication. For example, one positive nonverbal communication that confederates were trained to execute during their positive condition speed-dates was to smile persistently. A complimentary verbal comment that confederates were trained to say during their positive communication speed-dates was: "You are too funny and cute. How are you single?" In contrast, an example of a negative nonverbal communication that confederates were to trained to execute

during their negative condition speed-dates was to direct their body posture away from their dating partner. One standoffish verbal comment that confederates were trained to execute during their negative condition speed-dates was: "I don't mean to be rude, but I just don't see us having a real connection." All of the aforesaid communicative behaviors were designed to trigger an emotional response.

The third procedural aspect of this study involved greeting, seating, and numbering both participants and confederates as they arrived at the on-campus speed-dating event. It was upon arrival at the event that females were seated in the speed-dating room. It was at the same time that males were being seated in an adjacent waiting room area. Female and male participants were then assigned a random dating number based on their time of arrival.

The fourth procedure for this study involved taking digital photographs of study participants and confederates. A Polaroid digital camera was used to take full body pictures of participants from a distance of three feet away. It was approximately ten minutes before speed-dating began that the photographs of the female confederates and other female participants were uploaded to a large computer monitor in the male waiting room area. Likewise, the photographs of the male confederates and the male participants were uploaded to a large computer monitor in the female waiting area. It is noteworthy to mention here that the female and male confederates engaged in the exact same process (e.g. being greeted, numbered, individually photographed, etc.) as other study participants. This precaution was taken as a means to ensure that study participants would not become cognizant of the presence of study confederates.

The fifth procedure for this study had participants evaluate their pre-test perceptions of opposite sex confederates and participants. This was the pre-test administration for this study. Large computer monitors were separately used in each room to separately unveil the photographs of opposite sex confederates and participants. Each photograph was individually displayed on the computer monitor one at a time. It was once the individual photograph was displayed in full view that participants were instructed to indicate their attractiveness perceptions of the opposite sex person in the photograph. Participants were told to examine the photograph after completing each item on their physical attractiveness scale. The photographs of the male and female confederates were always included in the unveiled mix in a random order. The other photograph assessments besides those of the confederates were merely distracters.

The sixth procedure for this study involved facilitating the speed-dating interactions. Each individual speed-date lasted for a period of three minutes. It was during the actual three minute speed-dates that study confederates executed the manipulation. It was after each three minute speed-dating interval that the lights in the room were dimmed and the male participants were verbally instructed to rotate to their next individual female speed-date. This process continued until all of the male and female participants had a chance to socially interact with the study confederates. The males were then escorted into a separate room away from the females when speed-dating was completed.

The seventh procedure for this study had participants evaluate their post-test perceptions of opposite sex confederates and participants. This was the post-test administration for this study. The same large computer monitors were separately used in each room to separately unveil the photographs of opposite sex confederates and participants. Each photograph was once again individually displayed on the computer monitor one at a time. It was once the individual photograph was displayed in full view that participants were again instructed to indicate their perceptions of the opposite sex person in the photograph. Participants were again told to examine the photograph

after completing each individual item on their physical attractiveness scale. The photographs of the male and female confederates were again included in the unveiled mix in a random order. The other assessments besides those of the confederates were merely distracters. It was after the post-test assessment that participants were debriefed about the study and subsequently dismissed.

The eighth procedure of this study was a power analysis. The G-Power program was used (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996) to investigate effect size, sample size, and the like. The power to detect main effects and interactions was 0.998 when the input parameters were set at a total sample size of 104 and an effect size of .25. Thus, a satisfactory level of participants were utilized.

The final procedure that should be noted in this study was a manipulation check. A group of 22 independent observers unobtrusively viewed the confederates enacting both the positive communication condition and the negative communication condition. A 12-item validation measure that featured a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) was then administered to the observer group. The mean for the negative condition items was 1.98 ($sd = .97$) while the mean for the positive condition items was 6.51 ($sd = .68$). A paired-samples t test found a significant difference between the positive communication condition and the negative communication condition ($t(21) = 14.37, p < .001$). This finding provided evidence that the manipulation check was observed and successful.

Results

The first hypothesis for this study proposed that participants who were exposed to a single positive communication would evaluate the physical attractiveness of a dating partner differently than participants who were exposed to a single negative communication. A 2 x 2 x 2 mixed factorial ANOVA was completed on hypothesis one in which participant gender (female or male) and communication condition (positive or negative) were entered as the between subjects factors while administration (pre-test or post-test) was entered as the within subjects factor. Hypothesis one was supported. Findings produced evidence of a two-way interaction (see Table 1) between communication condition and administration on the perceptions of physical attractiveness dependent variable ($F(1, 100) = 7.689, p = .007, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .071$).

Table 1

Means for Interaction Between Communication Condition and Administration on Perceptions of Physical Attractiveness

Condition	Administration	Mean	Std. Error
Positive Communication	Pre-Test	4.757	.156
	Post-Test	4.943	.183
Negative Communication	Pre-Test	5.015	.148
	Post-Test	4.731	.173

Figure 1 further breaks down the findings for this hypothesis. It should be noted that interactions were not discovered between participant gender and communication condition ($F(1, 100) = 3.591, p = .06, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .035$), between participant gender and administration ($F(1, 100) = .096, p = .75, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .001$), and no three-way interaction was observed between participant gender, communication condition, and administration ($F(1, 100) = 3.363, p = .07, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .033$). The main effect for gender was not statistically significant ($F(1, 100) = .150, p = .70, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .001$), neither was the communication condition main effect ($F(1, 100) = .150, p = .70, \text{Partial Eta Squared} = .001$).

(1, 100) = .011, $p = .91$, Partial Eta Squared = .000), and the pre-test and post-test administration main effect did not yield statistically significant results ($F(1, 100) = .331$, $p = .56$, Partial Eta Squared = .003).

Hypothesis two proposed that participants would rate the physical attractiveness of a dating partner significantly higher after positive communication occurred during a single social interaction. The factorial ANOVA that was conducted did not provide support for this hypothesis. Stated differently, results indicated that perceptions of physical attractiveness did not significantly increase in the positive communication condition ($F(1, 47) = 3.363$, $p = .07$, Partial Eta Squared = .067). The mean pre-test rating of the physical attractiveness of study confederates before positive communication occurred was 4.76 ($sd = 1.15$) while the mean post-test rating of the physical attractiveness of study confederates after positive communication occurred was 4.94 ($sd = 1.31$). Despite the fact that a difference was found to exist, the observed increase from pre-test to post-test was not strong enough to be considered statistically significant. That is, three minutes of positive communication are not enough to make another individual appear more physically attractive.

Hypothesis three proposed that participants would rate the physical attractiveness of a dating partner significantly lower after negative communication occurred during a single social interaction. The factorial ANOVA that was conducted offered support for this hypothesis ($F(1, 53) = 4.449$, $p = .03$, Partial Eta Squared = .080). Initial perceptions concerning the physical attractiveness of study confederates before negative communication were a mean of 5.02 ($sd = 1.03$) whereas post-test perceptions of the physical attractiveness of study confederates after negative communication were a mean of 4.73 ($sd = 1.29$). As alluded to previously, this decrease from pre-test to post-test was statistically significant. Put simply, three minutes of negative interpersonal communication can actually make another person appear less physically attractive.

The research question for this study asked: What effect will participant gender have on perceptions of physical attractiveness from pre-test to post-test after a single positive or a single negative communication occurs within a dating environment? A series of follow-up paired-samples t tests were completed in order to parcel out specific gender differences because the interaction between participant gender and communication condition ($F(1, 100) = 3.591$, $p = .06$, Partial Eta Squared = .035) was approaching statistical significance. Moreover, an auxiliary examination of gender was deemed appropriate by the principal investigator based on the informal but varying verbal comments of male and female participants post speed-dating. Thus, these extra analyses helped flush out additional data from this investigation.

The first follow-up test analyzed male perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a female dating partner after positive communication ensued during a single social interaction. The results of a paired-samples t test indicated that the mean physical attractiveness rating for a female dater before three minutes of positive interpersonal communication was 4.85 ($sd = 1.10$) on a 7-point response continuum while the mean physical attractiveness rating of a female dater after three minutes of positive interpersonal communication was 5.17 ($sd = 1.29$) on a 7-point response continuum. Statistically speaking, a significant increase was found from pre-test to post-test ($t(23) = -2.358$, $p = .03$). Non-statistically speaking, three minutes of positive communication during a single social interaction leads men to experience more physical attraction for a female dater.

The second follow-up analysis focused on female perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a male dating partner after positive communication ensued during a single social interaction. The paired-samples t test that was calculated for this analysis indicated that pre-test perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a male dater yielded a mean of 4.65 ($sd = 1.21$) on a 7-point continuum whereas post-test perceptions of the physical attractiveness

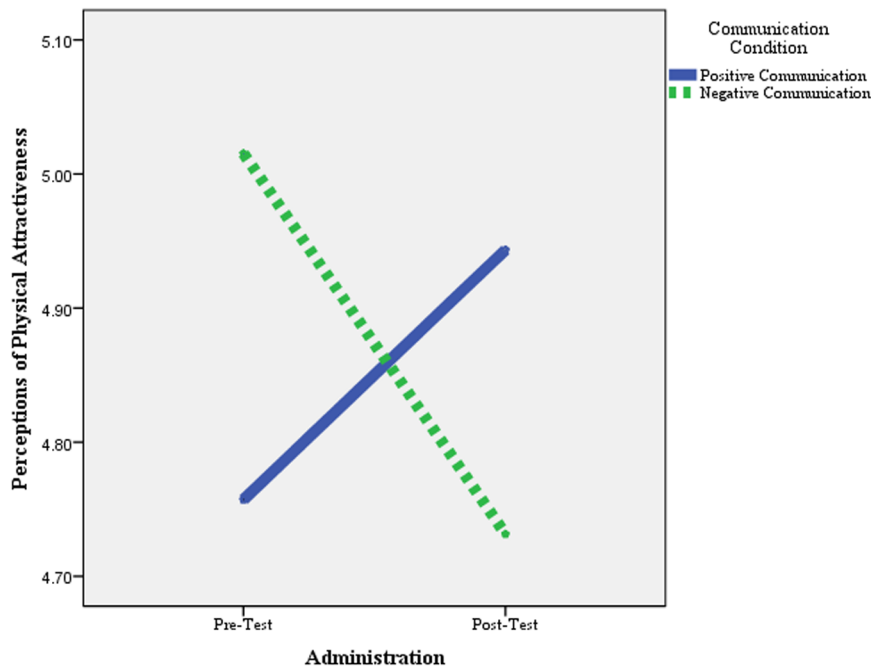


Figure 1. Interaction plot for communication condition and administration on perceptions of physical attractiveness.

of a male dater yielded a mean of 4.71 ($sd = 1.32$) on a 7-point continuum. While a minimal increase occurred from pre-test to post-test, no statistically significant difference was observed ($t(24) = -.376, p = .71$). Put another way, three minutes of positive interpersonal communication will not result in women perceiving a male dater as more attractive physically.

The third follow-up analysis examined male perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a female dating partner after negative communication ensued during a single social interaction. The paired-samples t test that was calculated for this item demonstrated that pre-test perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a female dater were 4.85 ($sd = 1.24$) before negative communication ensued while post-test perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a female dater were 4.39 ($sd = 1.49$) after negative communication ensued. This decrease from pre-test to post-test was statistically significant ($t(26) = 2.107, p = .04$). Therefore, it can be said that men experience less physical attraction for a female dater who engages in negative interpersonal communication during a single social interaction.

The final follow-up analysis looked at female perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a male dating partner after negative communication ensued during a single social interaction. A paired-samples t test revealed that initial perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a male dater were 5.17 ($sd = .774$) before negative communication occurred while post-test perceptions of the physical attractiveness of a male dater were 5.07 ($sd = .972$) after negative communication occurred. The observed decline for this analysis was not strong enough to be classified as statistically significant ($t(27) = .692, p = .49$). In other words, females do not experience less physical attraction for a male dater who engages in negative communication during a single social interaction. In summary, one of the more intriguing findings that emerged from the proposed research question was that three minutes of positive communication by females resulted in men seeing them as more attractive physically.

Discussion

The main focus of this study was to analyze the effects of a single interpersonal communication event. Support was found for the majority of the proposed hypotheses. Some gender differences were observed in this social experiment. The findings from this investigation offered both theoretical and practical implications. Moreover, the present research yielded several interesting points of discussion.

This first hypothesis for this study discovered an interaction whereby three minutes of positive communication resulted in participants increasing their ratings of the physical attractiveness of a dating partner from pre-test to post-test while three minutes of negative communication resulted in participants significantly decreasing their ratings of the physical attractiveness of a dating partner from pre-test to post-test. A close examination of this two-way interaction revealed that the decrease in physical attraction in the negative condition was more pronounced than the negligible increase in physical attraction in the positive condition. This finding was consistent with previous literature by [Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs \(2001\)](#) who reported in their classic investigation of interpersonal relationships that: “bad events have stronger and more lasting consequences than comparable good events” (p. 355). While it may not be surprising that a single negative social interaction leads individuals to evaluate others less favorably, it is at least moderately surprising to see that only three minutes of negative communication would induce such a strong perceptual shift on the physical attractiveness dependent variable.

There are a couple of possible explanations as to why support emerged from this study in relation to the aforementioned work of Baumeister and colleagues. First, it appears that when negative communication is directed to someone within an interpersonal context (which by nature is very personal) that individuals spitefully look for a way to take a fellow dyadic partner down a level. Put differently, individuals look for ways to adversely evaluate persons who execute negative communication behaviors. Second, unflattering evaluations of individuals who engage in negative communication might occur because of a desire to gain passive retribution or it is possible that unflattering evaluations of another person transpire because individuals are vehemently opposed to negative communicative behaviors. It is also conceivable that anger induces an unfavorable characterization of a person who engages in negative communication. Either way, this phenomenon was especially prevalent in the minds of male participants in comparison to the minds of female participants. Study findings demonstrated that the post-test evaluations of males decreased at a much larger rate and to a much lower level relative to their female speed-dating counterparts. Thus, it can be argued that negative communication during a single social interaction in a dating environment has a more detrimental effect on men than women. All things considered, the findings from this hypothesis support the empirical notion that the bad stands out more than the good.

The second hypothesis for this study proposed that a single positive communication would result in participants seeing a dating partner as more physically attractive. The fact that overall perceptions of physical attractiveness did not significantly increase after a single positive interpersonal communication event suggests that in most communicative scenarios it takes time to augment a physical attraction with a fellow dater. Indeed, there are some casual dating circumstances in which a strong physical attraction is experienced at the onset of initial positive communication either because one or both of the daters are highly physically attractive. However, in casual dating scenarios that involve persons who are not extraordinarily attractive by the standards of society it appears that sustained positive conversations must continue into the foreseeable future in order for perceptions of attractiveness to increase. Daters who are desirous of being perceived as more physically attractive in the eyes of a potential suitor must put forth more effort than three minutes of positive communication. Likewise, daters who are desirous

of perceiving a potential mate as more physically attractive must also escape the single positive (yet sometimes banal) initial communication that occurs during initial interaction. As such, it seems that the frequency of positive interpersonal communication events makes a difference in terms of the variability of positive attractiveness perceptions.

The third hypothesis for this study proposed that a single negative communication would result in participants seeing a dating partner as less physically attractive. The support that emerged for this hypothesis should be noted in the context of a theoretical framework. The Interaction Appearance Theory of communication (IAT) is predicated on the axiom that individuals negatively alter their perceptions of the physical attractiveness of another person as a direct result of ongoing negative social interactions over an extended period of time (Albada, Knapp, & Theune, 2002). Instead, this study illustrates that a single negative chat can make another person appear less physically attractive regardless of gender. That is, IAT contends that multiple social interactions are required for a decrease in attractiveness perceptions to occur whereas this study found that a single negative social interaction was enough for a decrease in attractiveness perceptions to occur. This finding thereby broadens the empirical parameters of IAT. This finding also highlights that a single negative interpersonal communication and that perceptions of physical attractiveness are interconnected upon the first meeting of strangers. While prior scholarship has found that favorable or unfavorable perceptions of another person are made based on relatively thin slices of behavior (e.g. Ambady, Hallahan, & Connor, 1999; Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993), lesser amounts of scholarship have documented the amount of communicative behavior that is required for initial perceptions to be cognitively altered within a dating environment. The results from this study suggest a thin slice of negative communicative behavior is enough for another person to be seen as less attractive physically.

The research question for this study examined the role of gender in terms of perceptions of physical attractiveness from pre-test to post-test after a single positive or a single negative communication occurred in a dating environment. Although some gender differences emerged in the statistical data, the most notable finding that materialized from this gender-focused inquiry was that three minutes of positive interpersonal communication could make a female dater appear more physically attractive in the eyes of a male suitor. One possible reason why this result surfaced is because some males who are non-relationship oriented are prone to become physically aroused by the positive communication of a female. That is, cavalier males who are open to casual romantic trysts respond favorably to positive messages during the initial stages of courtship because they believe it moves them one step closer to a sexual encounter. On the other hand, females (who by nature are very relationship oriented) might categorize positive messages from males during the initial stages of courtship as unwholesome, insincere, or tied to precipitating a romantic rendezvous with little or no emotional attachment. While the aforementioned discussion focused on the possible reasons why the men in this study were more responsive to the nature of conversation, it is also imperative to discuss how the results of this study can be applied to a non-scientific arena.

The finding from this study that men experience more physical attraction for a female dating partner who engages in three minutes of positive communication is fascinating beyond the confines of academia. This result has practical implications as it illustrates the immense power that single females possess in the dating arena. It is in a variety of different social contexts that females rely on eye shadow, foundation, and lipstick as their weapon of choice for increasing physical attractiveness. However, it appears that interpersonal communication is an equally powerful tool that females have at their immediate disposal for enhancing their overall aesthetic appearance. Female daters can strategically use three minutes of positive communication to increase their desirability as a potential mate because extant literature has demonstrated that men have a proclivity towards physically attractive female

partners (Asendorpf, Penke, & Back, 2011; Finkel & Eastwick, 2008). In short, the finding that male daters are responsive to and experience more attraction for females who engage in three minutes of positive communication provides female daters a unique advantage in this new era of courtship.

Limitations and Future Research

This empirical study featured methodological limitations and uncovered directions for future research. One limitation of this study was that only quantitative methods were used to examine the post-test effects of a single positive and a single negative communication. Employing a mixed methods design in which participants completed focus groups interviews after speed-dating would have produced rich data on what specific communicative behaviors lead to a sharp increase or decrease in physical attraction. A second limitation of this investigation was that the sample was comprised of only heterosexual participants. Thus, it is not clear whether the observed effects are applicable to members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. It should also be noted that the sample was relatively youthful, small, and restricted to students at an American university. Future research should examine whether three minutes of communication amongst the LGBT demographic and other communities can also produce an increase or decrease in physical attractiveness perceptions. Another area for future research would be to examine the role of touch in a courtship or speed-dating environment. Scholarship by Ebesu Hubbard, Tsuji, Williams, and Seatriz (2003) found that a light shoulder tap induced a positive reaction in the form of higher gratuities for restaurant servers. It would be interesting to note whether the psychological effects of a delicate touch at the onset of courtship would have a positive, neutral, or negative impact on attraction. Put another way, it would be interesting to determine whether a subtle touch adds a nice touch to the extant speed-dating literature devoted to physical attraction.

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