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SEX AND THE PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS OF FLIRTATION TECHNIQUES

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ABSTRACT

Three studies were implemented in order to ascertain how men and women flirt with potential partners, and whether or not there are sex differences in which flirtatious actions are considered most effective. Study 1 (n = 40) and Study 2 (n = 60) sought to discover the actions that men and women, respectively, engage in to indicate romantic interest to a partner. Study 3 (n = 126) sought to determine which flirtatious acts from women and men are perceived as most effective. Men were expected to rate women's flirtations that suggest sexual access as most effective and women were expected to rate men's flirtatious actions that suggest emotional commitment and exclusivity as most effective. The results were consistent with the hypotheses and are discussed in terms of prior research.

Key words: *Flirting, sexual access, commitment, exclusivity*

INTRODUCTION

One of the tasks men and women face is attracting mates. How do they solve this task? Evolutionary theory suggests that men and women have evolved adaptations to solve this task. Those adaptations center around mate preferences. Buss and Schmitt (1993) report that men and women have different mate preferences due to their differences in obligatory parental investment (Trivers, 1972). This parental investment is influenced by sexual strategies, i.e., one's preference for long or short-term mating. In short-term mating, men seek a parental investment from women that is primarily physical. Specifically, reproductive fitness concerns for men center on future offspring production. Men were and are faced with finding the best possible mates to bear their offspring (Buss 1989, 2006; Trivers, 1972).

Thus, Buss (1989, 2006) reports that men interested in short-term mating choose mates based on fertility and reproductive potential cues, and sexual access. However, men are not only interested in short-term mating. When men seek long-term mates they seek mates with youthful characteristics and genetic quality who are sexually accessible and will be sexually exclusive (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Reproductive fitness concerns among women center around securing good genes and a strong parental investment at the financial (resources) level (Buss, 1989; Trivers, 1972). Women were and are concerned with finding men that are most willing and best able to genetically invest, and invest resources in their offspring (Buss, 1989). Following Trivers (1972), men can always invest at the genetic level, even though they vary in phenotypic quality. Men can also increase their phenotypic quality via actions like exercising and eating a healthy diet. But, men's genetic quality cannot be volitionally adjusted. However, men's resource investment can be volitionally improved. Therefore, for long-term mating women most often focus on cues indicative of a strong future resource investment (Buss, 1989, 2006). For short-term mate selection women's reproductive fitness concerns primarily center around finding men with good genes (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Gangestad & Simpson, 1990; Gangestad, Thornhill, & Yeo, 1994; Hamilton & Zuk, 1982; Trivers, 1985).

Since sexual access is crucial for male mate selection and securing a commitment is most important for women's mate selection, one might expect a woman's actions that are suggestive of sexual accessibility to be the most effective way to flirt with a man. Conversely, since women typically desire a long-term commitment, a man's actions that are suggestive of a willingness to commit himself may be the most effective way for a man to flirt with a woman.

What is flirting? Flirting involves indicating to potential mates that one is interested in dating/spending time with them (see Downey & Vitulli, 1987; Henningsen, 2004; Moore, 2002; Whitty, 2003). Flirting is considered a universal and essential aspect of human interaction (Eibl-Eibesfeldt & Hass, 1967; Luscombe, 2008). Individuals, both married and single, flirt. Flirtation can be used for either courtship initiation or quasi-courtship purposes. Quasi-courtship refers to instances where flirtatious behaviors are used when one or both parties are not interested in sexual contact (Henningsen, 2004; Schefflen, 1965). Individuals can flirt non-verbally (Crook, 1972; Givens, 1978; Moore, 1985; Renninger, Wade & Grammer 2004), or verbally (Grammer, Kruck, Julette, & Fink, 2000; Whitty, 2004).

Both men and women can use verbal interaction as a way to communicate interest in someone. Women, however, also engage in such acts as a way to elicit information from a man to see if he is potentially a good mate (Grammer, et al., 2000). Thus, Stephens (1963) reports, based on his cross-cultural verbal interaction research, that men are the sexual initiators, but women are the choosers. More recently, Moore (1985), with a US only sample, reports, that it is the women who initiate and control the situation.

Men and women alike can also use nonverbal signals, such as direct glancing, space-maximization movements, and automanipulations, in relevant mate-selection contexts (Renninger, et al., 2004). The nonverbal courtship signaling involved in flirtation serves a

useful purpose. Women use subtle indicators of male interest to help them pace the course of any potential relationship while they assess a man's willingness and ability to donate resources. Therefore, the task for women is to express enough interest to elicit courtship behavior, but not elicit a level of interest that leads a man to skip courtship behavior, while men attempt to display their status, health, strength, and intelligence in a desired, unthreatening way. From an evolutionary perspective flirting can be thought of as a product of our evolved mate acquisition adaptations. However, to date, very few studies have examined flirtation effectiveness from an evolutionary theory perspective, or those that have are limited in scope. The focus has been on single actions such as laughter (Grammer & Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1990), or ambiguous flirtation and its effect on reciprocal flirtation (O'Farrell, Rosenthal, & O'Neal 2003), or solely on nonverbal actions (Moore, 1985; Renninger, et al., 2004). The current research seeks to ascertain which flirtatious acts are perceived as most effective for men and women, using an evolutionary theory perspective, focusing on multiple verbal and nonverbal actions with 3 studies. Studies 1 and 2 ascertained which flirtatious actions are performed by men and women, respectively. Study 3 ascertained which flirtatious acts are commonly perceived as most effective by men and women.

STUDY 1

Methods Study 1

Participants. Participants were 40 men ranging in age from 18 to 22, $M = 19.66$, $SD = 1.42$, from a private University in the Northeastern US. They were recruited from the introductory psychology course and the campus. Participants from the introductory psychology class' involvement were in partial fulfillment of research participation requirements associated with the course. Participants recruited from the campus did not receive any compensation for their involvement.

Procedure. Participants received a questionnaire that included demographic questions regarding: age, sex, race, and sexual orientation. Following standard act nomination methods used in prior research that set out to determine which actions men and women engage in when such actions are not previously known (Buss, 1988a, 1988b; Buss & Craik, 1983; Wade, Auer, & Roth, 2009), the next two pages of the questionnaire contained the following act nomination instructions for a short-term or a long-term mate and 5 numbered blanks on each page for individuals to write in their responses:

Please list below actions that you have done or would do to flirt with a woman for a potential long-term relationship (a long-term mate) (or a potential short-term relationship (a short-term mate)). A long-term mate is someone you would date more than a few times and would definitely consider marrying. (A short-term mate is someone you might date just once, have a one-night stand with, or date a few times but would not consider marrying.) We are interested in specific behaviors. So you

*should be able to answer the following questions about each thing you list below:
Have you ever done this action or would you do this action? If so, how often have
you performed it or would you perform it?*

The order for the long-term and short-term act nomination questions was varied for participants.

Results Study 1

Following methodology used in prior research using act nomination procedure (Buss, 1988a, 1988b; Buss & Craik, 1983; Wade, Auer, & Roth, 2009), the nominated acts were examined by one of the authors and one other individual, a psychology student. Consensus nominated acts by participants were retained. An act was considered consensus if it was nominated multiple times by participants. Consistent with act nomination research methodology, any discrepancies were resolved via discussion. Most acts were nominated 5-20 times. Twenty-six flirtatious acts were identified for men (see Table 1).

Table 1: Flirtatious Acts for Men

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. He makes eye contact with you | 14. He has sex with you |
| 2. He makes body contact with you | 15. He spends time with you |
| 3. He asks you out | 16. He asks for favors from you |
| 4. He converses with you | 17. He asks for your help |
| 5. He smiles at you | 18. He calls you |
| 6. He dances with you | 19. He gives you gifts |
| 7. He acts interested in you | 20. He holds hands with you |
| 8. He compliments you | 21. He kisses you |
| 9. He has dinner with you | 22. He goes to a movie with you |
| 10. He makes you laugh | 23. He makes random comments to you |
| 11. He buys you a drink | 24. He sends you valentines |
| 12. He does favors for you | 25. He tickles you |
| 13. He laughs at your jokes | 26. He gives you flowers |

Table 1 shows acts that range from commitment/exclusivity related behavior to direct sexual behavior. Additionally, the acts nominated for short-term and long-term mates did not differ.

STUDY 2

Methods Study 2

Participants. Participants were 60 women ranging in age from 18 to 23, $M = 19.45$, $SD = 1.48$, from a private University in the Northeastern US. They were recruited from the introductory psychology course and the campus. Participants from the introductory psychology class' contribution were in partial fulfillment of research participation

requirements associated with the course. Participants recruited from the campus did not receive any compensation for their contribution.

Procedure. As in Study 1, participants received a questionnaire that included demographic questions regarding: age, sex, race, and sexual orientation. Similarly, following standard act nomination methods used in prior research that set out to determine which actions men and women engage in when such actions are not previously known (Buss, 1988a, 1988b; Buss & Craik, 1983; Wade, Auer, & Roth, 2009), the next two pages of the questionnaire contained the following act nomination instructions for a long-term or a short-term mate and 5 numbered blanks on each page for individuals to write in their responses:

Please list below actions that you have done or would do to flirt with a man for a potential long-term relationship (a long-term mate) (or a potential short-term relationship (a short-term mate)). A long-term mate is someone you would date more than a few times and would definitely consider marrying. (A short-term mate is someone you might date just once, have a one-night stand with, or date a few times but would not consider marrying.) We are interested in specific behaviors. So you should be able to answer the following questions about each thing you list below: Have you ever done this action or would you do this action? If so, how often have you performed it or would you perform it?

Once again, the order for the long-term and short-term act nomination questions was varied for participants.

Results Study 2

As in Study 1, following methodology used in prior research using act nomination procedures (Buss, 1988a, 1988b; Buss & Craik, 1983; Wade, Auer, & Roth, 2009), the nominated acts were examined by one of the authors and one other individual, a psychology student. Once again consensus nominated acts were kept. An act was considered consensus if it was nominated multiple times by participants. Consistent with act nomination research methodology, any discrepancies were resolved via discussion. Most acts were nominated from 13-70 times. Fourteen flirtatious acts were identified for women (see Table 2).

Table 2 shows acts that range from showing interest, i.e., she makes eye contact with you”, to behaviors that are more physical, and suggestive of sex such as “she rubs against you”. As in Study 1, the acts nominated for short-term and long-term mates did not differ.

STUDY 3

Hypotheses. Sex differences were expected. Specifically, men were expected to rate women’s flirtations that suggest sexual access as most effective and women were expected to rate men’s flirtatious actions that suggest emotional commitment and exclusivity as most effective.

Table 2: Flirtatious Acts for Women

1. She smiles at you
 2. She makes eye contact with you
 3. She laughs at your jokes
 4. She shows interest in you during a conversation (she asks about your interests).
 5. She teases and jokes around with you
 6. She engages in light conversation/chats with you
 7. She touches your arm
 8. She touches you in general
 9. She engages in deep conversation with you
 10. She dresses revealingly
 11. She rubs against you
 12. She dances with you
 13. She kisses you on the cheek
 14. She moves closer to you
-

Methods Study 3

Participants. Participants were 126 individuals (90 women, 36 men) ranging in age from 18 to 61 years, $M = 23.80$ $SD = 8.17$. They were recruited online via the campus electronic bulletin board at a private University in the Northeastern US and via a private psychology survey posting group on Facebook. Participants did not receive any compensation for their contribution.

Procedure. Participants received an online questionnaire with: demographic questions (age, race, sexual orientation, relationship experience, sexual relationship experience, current relationship status), a short form of the Marlowe Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972) to be able to rule out/control for socially biased responding, and with the two sets of flirtatious actions from Studies 1 and 2. The instructions that preceded the female flirtatious actions were as follows:

Below are listed acts that a woman might perform to flirt with a man (indicate to a man she is interested in him). We are interested in how effective you think each act would be at achieving this goal. Please read each action carefully and rate it in terms of how successful it would be in attracting an opposite sex partner (indicating to a man that she is interested in him). Use the 7-point scale below each action to indicate the effectiveness of the action. A 7 means it is highly effective. A 4 means it is moderately effective and a 1 means it is ineffective. Please answer truthfully and do not discuss your responses with others answering the questionnaire.

The instructions that preceded the male flirtatious acts were as follows:

Below are listed acts that a man might perform to flirt with a woman (indicate to a woman he is interested in her). We are interested in how effective you think each act would be at achieving this goal. Please read each action carefully and rate it in terms of how successful it would be in attracting an opposite sex partner (indicating to a woman that he is interested in her). Use the 7-point scale below each action to indicate the effectiveness of the action. A 7 means it is highly effective. A 4 means it is moderately effective and a 1 means it is ineffective. Please answer truthfully and do not discuss your responses with others answering the questionnaire.

The order in which participants received the 2 sets of flirtatious actions was randomized.

Results Study 3

Cronbach's alpha (1951) revealed that the flirtatious acts were reliable, $\alpha = .91$. The items for the social desirability scale were summed to create a social desirability sumscore, and a series of Mixed Model Repeated Measures ANOVAs with the social desirability score included as a covariate was computed.

A 2(sex of participant) x 40(flirtations) Mixed Model Repeated Measures ANCOVA (the Social Desirability score was included as a covariate) was computed. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated, $X^2(779) = 1951.07, p < .0001$. Therefore, the degrees of freedom were corrected using Greenhouse-Geisser estimates of sphericity, $\epsilon = .41$. The ANCOVA revealed a significant interaction of participant sex and flirtations, $F(16.091, 197.228) = 2.28, p < .003$, see Table 3. Independent samples T-tests with Bonferroni corrections revealed that men rated the flirtations: "He has sex with her", "she rubs against him", and "she dances with him" as more effective than women did, and women rated the flirtations: "he asks her out", "he acts interested in her", "he compliments her", "he does favors for her", "he spends time with her", "he asks for her help", "he calls her" and "he gives her flowers" as more effective than men did. The social desirability covariate was not significant.

The ANCOVA also revealed a significant effect for flirtations, $F(16.091, 1979.228) = 5.36, p < .0001$, see Table 4. Pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni corrections based on the number of comparisons computed indicated that the items: "he asks her out", "he spends time with her", "he kisses her" "he holds hands with her" "he acts interested in her", and "he makes her laugh" were rated as most effective. The social desirability covariate was not significant.

Mixed Model Repeated Measures ANCOVAs did not find significant effects for relationship experience, current relationship status, sexual experience, sexual orientation, and birth control status (for women).

Since the age range in Study 3 was broader than the age ranges in Studies 1 and 2, an additional Mixed Model Repeated Measures ANCOVA across age (18-22, and 23 to 61) was computed. No significant effects for age occurred.

Table 3: Mean Perceived Effectiveness of Flirtatious Actions Across Sex of Participant

| Flirtatious Act | Females (Mean ± Stdv.) | Males (Mean ± Stdv.) |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| He makes eye contact with her | 4.88 (1.57) | 5.00(1.27) |
| He makes body contact with her | 5.02 (1.37) | 5.25(1.23) |
| He asks her out | 6.37 (.85)* | 5.72 (1.03)* |
| He converses with her | 4.70 (1.73) | 5.19 (1.45) |
| He smiles at her | 5.08 (1.46) | 4.89 (1.21) |
| He dances with her | 4.90 (1.34) | 5.19 (1.91) |
| He acts interested in her | 5.80 (1.36)* | 5.14 (1.59)* |
| He compliments her | 5.48 (1.10)* | 5.14 (1.44)* |
| He has dinner with her | 5.38 (1.29) | 5.31 (.98) |
| He makes her laugh | 5.42 (1.47) | 5.67 (1.20) |
| He buys her a drink | 4.23 (1.49) | 4.17 (1.21) |
| He does favors for her | 5.18 (1.20)* | 4.58 (1.75)* |
| He laughs at her jokes | 4.67 (1.48) | 4.92 (1.34) |
| He has sex with her | 4.53 (1.89)* | 5.11 (2.05)* |
| He asks for favors from her | 3.04 (1.24) | 3.28 (1.56) |
| He asks for her help | 4.26 (1.46)* | 3.89 (1.60)* |
| He calls her | 5.27 (1.36)* | 4.92 (1.13)* |
| He gives her gifts | 5.07 (1.26) | 4.81 (1.39) |
| He holds hands with her | 5.74 (1.23) | 5.47 (1.23) |
| He kisses her | 5.73 (1.33) | 5.75 (1.16) |
| He goes to a movie with her | 5.06 (1.31) | 4.69 (1.19) |
| He makes random comments to her | 3.60 (1.68) | 3.86 (1.22) |
| He sends her valentines | 5.39 (1.45) | 5.22 (1.38) |
| He tickles her | 4.53 (1.58) | 4.31 (1.26) |
| He gives her flowers | 5.58 (1.27)* | 4.89 (1.53)* |
| She makes eye contact | 4.90 (1.47) | 5.19 (1.12) |
| She laughs at his jokes | 4.96 (1.31) | 5.00 (1.20) |
| She shows interest in him | 5.17 (1.26) | 5.22 (1.05) |
| She teases and jokes around | 4.98 (1.28) | 5.08 (1.13) |
| She engages in light conversation/chats | 3.87 (1.46) | 3.97 (1.52) |
| She touches his arm | 4.98 (1.29) | 5.25 (1.03) |
| She touches him, in general | 5.01 (1.32) | 5.42 (.87) |
| She engages in deep conversation with him | 4.88 (1.27) | 5.14 (1.38) |
| She dresses revealingly | 3.92 (1.62) | 3.81 (1.64) |
| She rubs against him | 4.94 (1.47)* | 5.50 (1.48)* |
| She dances with him | 4.86 (1.26)* | 5.53 (1.11)* |
| She kisses him on the cheek | 5.16 (1.21) | 5.39 (1.11) |
| She moves closer to him | 5.21 (1.21) | 5.47 (.81) |
| He spends time with her | 5.90 (1.10)* | 5.64 (1.22)* |

Note: Higher numbers mean the flirtation was perceived as more effective, standard deviations are in parentheses. * = means are significantly different, $p < .05$.

Table : Mean Perceived Effectiveness of Flirtatious Acts

| Flirtatious Act | Mean (± Stdv.) |
|--|-------------------------------|
| (a) He asks her out | 6.18 (.95) |
| (b) He spends time with her | 5.83 (1.14) |
| (c) He kisses her | 5.74 (1.28) |
| (d) He holds hands with her | 5.67 (1.23) |
| (e) He acts interested in her | 5.61 (1.31) |
| (f) He makes her laugh | 5.49 (1.40) |
| He gives her flowers | 5.38 ^a (1.38) |
| He compliments her | 5.38 ^a (1.21) |
| He has dinner with her | 5.36 ^a (1.20) |
| He sends her valentines | 5.34 ^a (1.42) |
| She moves closer to him | 5.29 ^a (1.12) |
| She kisses him on the cheek | 5.22 ^a (1.18) |
| She shows interest in him during a conversation | 5.18 ^{ab} (1.20) |
| He calls her | 5.17 ^{ab} (1.30) |
| She touches him, in general | 5.13 ^{ab} (1.22) |
| She rubs against him | 5.10 ^a (1.49) |
| He makes body contact with her | 5.09 ^a (1.33) |
| She touches his arm | 5.06 ^{ab} (1.22) |
| She dances with him | 5.05 ^{ab} (1.25) |
| He smiles at her | 5.02 ^{ab} (1.39) |
| He does favors for her | 5.01 ^{abcd} (1.39) |
| She teases and jokes around with him | 5.01 ^{ab} (1.24) |
| He gives her gifts | 4.99 ^{abcd} (1.30) |
| He dances with her | 4.98 ^{abc} (1.30) |
| She makes eye contact with him | 4.98 ^{abc} (1.38) |
| She laughs at his jokes | 4.97 ^{abf} (1.27) |
| She engages in deep conversation with him | 4.95 ^{abc} (1.30) |
| She smiles at him | 4.95 ^{abc} (1.26) |
| He goes to a movie with her | 4.95 ^{abcd} (1.28) |
| He makes eye contact with her | 4.91 ^{abf} (1.49) |
| He converses with her | 4.84 ^{ab} (1.67) |
| He laughs at her jokes | 4.74 ^{abcdef} (1.44) |
| He has sex with her | 4.70 ^{ac} (1.95) |
| He tickles her | 4.47 ^{abcdef} (1.50) |
| He buys her a drink | 4.21 ^{abcdef} (1.41) |
| He asks for her help | 4.15 ^{abcdef} (1.50) |
| She engages in light conversation/chats with him | 3.90 ^{abcdef} (1.47) |
| She dresses revealingly | 3.89 ^{abcdef} (1.62) |
| He makes random comments to her | 3.67 ^{abcdef} (1.61) |
| He asks for favors from her | 3.11 ^{abcdef} (1.34) |

Note: Higher numbers mean flirtation was perceived as more effective. Superscripts denote significant differences, $p < .05$, e.g. mean for row a, “he asks her out”, is significantly different from means for rows that have an ‘a’ in their superscript, etc.. Comparisons were Bonferroni corrected based on the number of comparisons computed, standard deviations are in parentheses.

DISCUSSION

The results were consistent with the hypotheses. Men rated flirtations from women that suggest sexual access as more effective while women rated flirtations from men that suggest exclusivity, commitment, and caring as the most effective flirtations. These actions were rated as most effective because they are related to the characteristics that men and women prefer for their partners. Buss (1989, 2006) and Buss and Schmitt (1993) report that men prefer women that are sexually accessible and women prefer men who suggest that they are emotionally accessible and willing to make a commitment.

The actions that were perceived to be most effective by men were the following: “He has sex with her,” “she rubs against him,” and “she dances with him.” Men may rate the action he has sex with her as highly effective because it indicates the woman is willing to give the man sexual access, and sexual access is paramount for male mate selection (Buss, 1989, 2006; Wade & Culver, 2012). Men may perceive a woman rubbing against them as a more effective act of flirtation than women do because this act involves touching. Guéguen (2010) reports that touching may be interpreted by men as an indication of sexual interest. Men may rate the flirtatious act “she dances with him” as more effective than women do because women’s body movements indicate their ovulatory status (Fink, Hugill, & Lange, 2012), and men rate women who can dance as more sexually attractive than women who cannot dance (Wade, Weinstein, Dalal, & Salerno, 2015).

Women perceived the following actions to be most effective: “he asks her out,” “he acts interested in her,” “he compliments her,” “he does favors for her,” “he spends time with her,” “he asks for her help,” “he calls her,” and “he gives her flowers.” A man asking a woman out may be an effective flirtatious act because it signifies self-confidence which can be related to dominance, and men’s status and dominance are attributes that women pay attention to for mate selection (Buss, 1989, 2006). Spending time with a woman, and calling her are rated as very effective by women because these actions are signs of continued interest and/or emotional involvement which could be suggestive of a willingness to commit. Women typically desire a long-term commitment and a commitment is a product of emotional involvement (Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992). Complimenting a woman, doing favors for her, and giving her flowers may be rated as very effective flirtatious acts by women because these actions indicate a man’s willingness to share his feelings and share his resources. Since women desire a high parental investment in a mate and men with high resources are more attractive potential mates for women, sharing of resources may be an indication that the man is willing to invest. Additionally, these items may be rated as more effective by women because they suggest altruistic traits on the part of the man. Phillips, Ferguson, and Rijdsdijk (2010) report that women place greater importance on altruistic traits than men do and find altruistic individuals more sexually attractive because altruistic traits may indicate commitment/long-term parenting potential. Additionally, complimenting a woman may suggest that the man is emotionally accessible, and emotional accessibility is the key factor in a woman’s decision of whether to expel or retain a mate

(Wade & Brown, 2012). These items together reflect a high level of commitment/exclusivity, and interest on the part of the man.

The findings from the present research indicate that men overestimated the effectiveness of higher intensity actions and underestimated the effectiveness of lower intensity actions, compared to women. This is most likely due to the different sexual strategies that men and women employ which leads them to prefer different attributes in a partner (personal communication from an anonymous reviewer). This sex difference may also be a product of error management theory (Hastleton & Buss, 2000) where men do not want to miss out on a possible opportunity to have sexual relations with a woman while women do not want to act too hastily and choose a man who is not likely to be a good partner which is consistent with LaFrance, Henningsen, Oates, and Shaw's (2009) findings that men perceive more flirtatiousness, seductiveness, and promiscuousness in evaluating the behavior of female targets than women did. Additionally, this difference may also occur because men are not as subtle as women, and because women are better at sending and receiving nonverbal signals (Hall, 1984).

It was surprising that the flirtatious actions nominated by each sex in studies 1 and 2 did not differ for short or long-term mating. However, the same actions may have been nominated for each context because flirtation serves to allow one to gain access to potential mates. The flirtatious actions that are considered most effective give an indication of parental investment potential which is important for both long and short-term mate selection (Trivers, 1972). Individuals interested in short-term mating and individuals interested in long-term mating can both benefit from selecting mates based on factors that give some indication of how likely the other is to be a good mate. Furthermore, due to intrasexual competition men and women may have to compromise in order to interact well. Specifically, women may have to consent to sex earlier than they prefer because men want sexual access sooner than women do (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), and men may have to offer more resources than they prefer to offer because women prefer long-term mating and resources carry more importance for long-term mating (Buss & Schmitt, 1993). This compromise leads to a blurring of short-term and long-term strategies. Consequently, similar flirtatious actions are nominated for short and long-term mate acquisition

Limitations

The present research examined the perceived effectiveness of men and women's flirtations rather than the actual effectiveness. Therefore, additional research is warranted. Using observational methods, future research should examine, if possible, how effective the actions actually are in attracting men and women. The present research cannot answer the question of which sex is better at judging flirtatious actions as that was not the focus of the research. But, based on prior research one would expect women to be better at judging the effectiveness of flirtatious actions since women have more at stake reproductively than men do should they make an incorrect decision (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994). To verify this, future research should examine which sex is more accurate with respect to

judging the effectiveness of flirtatious actions. The present research also did not include a culturally diverse sample. However, Eibl-Eibesfeldt and Hass (1967), and Luscombe (2008) report that flirtation is universal. So, one might not expect a different pattern of responses with individuals of different cultures. But, future research with a culturally diverse sample should be conducted to empirically verify whether the same actions rated as most effective in the present research are perceived as effective across different cultures. Lastly, the flirtatious items were worded in a combination of third person and second person which may have had some influence on the findings. Thus, further research with the same actions worded as “You do ‘X’ to her” or “You do ‘Y’ to him” should be conducted to see if that makes a difference.

Conclusion

This research suggests that individuals can attract mates effectively via verbal means. This is consistent with Kirkendall’s (1961) work on negotiating sexual access. Kirkendall (1961) reports that men and women engage in a type of interaction that one could consider indirect verbal flirtation where the women sometimes test men. That testing involves the woman’s refusal of an initial invitation/offer for interaction from a man followed by observing whether or not that man gives up or counters with an additional different offer for a more engaging interaction. Kirkendall (1961) reports that those initially rejected men who persist and counter with a second more engaging offer of interaction are successful.

The current research further shows that verbal flirtation has an evolutionary basis just as nonverbal flirtation does. Also, following Hall (1984), the present research suggests that men are not as subtle as women with respect to sending and receiving communicative behaviors. These findings are consistent with evolutionary theory based research showing that men and women’s selection of mates is rooted in reproductive fitness and parental investment concerns. Thus, one can conclude that flirtation is a product of our evolved mate acquisition adaptations. These findings add to the evolutionary theory based literature on mate attraction and mate preferences.

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