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Why We Cannot Resist Talking To The Cute Girl? Effects of Physical Attractiveness on Relation
Initiation

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Why We Cannot Resist Talking To The Cute Girl? Effects of Physical Attractiveness on Relation Formation

Jesse comes back from the bar and informs his male roommate Tim that he met a girl. What is the first question that Tim will ask him? We most likely can all answer that Tim will ask Jesse if the girl he met was cute (or “hot”). The next question then becomes, *why* can we so easily answer this question? The current paper will attempt to partially answer this question by examining the role physical attractiveness plays on the initiation of interactions with others.

When we are in social situations where we have an opportunity to initiate a casual relation with an unacquainted other, what are the factors involved in increasing the probabilities that we will break the void that exists between us and a stranger? Daily, we are placed in social situations where we must make decisions in how we will interact with others. These others may include friends, family members, acquaintances, or complete strangers. The decision to initiate an interaction with any of these individuals undoubtedly depends on numerous internal factors (e.g., personality or mood) and external factors (e.g., time constraints, physical nature of environment, or past interactional experience with the person). Some of these factors require much effortful cognitive processing that require time, which we sometimes do not have. For example, assume you notice an opposite-sex acquaintance (that you have not seen in a while) walking into the library as you are walking out. What would determine, in the few seconds you have, whether or not you will catch her attention and have an interaction with her? In a situation like this, physical attractiveness may be more important than other factors, which would require more processing time. In many other situations (e.g., noticing a family member or same-sex friend), however, the role of physical attractiveness may be less important. However, in circumstances where you do not know much (or nothing) about the person, physical attractiveness may be *very* important. Furthermore, whether you have little or much time to

decide to initiate an interaction with another, physical attractiveness *will* likely play a role in your decision. Physical attractiveness is a very salient human characteristic, and although other factors undeniably affect our decisions, it would be naïve to think that the physical composite of a person is *not* an important variable in social interactions.

The current research program thus investigates the effects of physical beauty on the initiation of casual relations with unacquainted individuals. Operationally, the study investigates the effects of physical attractiveness on the initiation of conversations with others. However, a person's own physical attractiveness may also play a role in social interactions, hence, the physical attractiveness of the perceiver *and* the perceived will be examined. Altogether, we are interested in whether individuals of varying physical attractiveness will differentially initiate a conversation with a physically attractive other as opposed to an unattractive other. In other words, perhaps individuals of varying physical attractiveness have different preferences in whom they prefer to initiate interactions with. Ultimately, it is hoped that a causal link between physical attractiveness and initiation of interaction is found.

Theoretical and Empirical Precedents

Numerous previous studies have demonstrated the importance of physical attractiveness in different social situations (Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottmann, 1966; Dion & Berscheid, 1974; Adams & Huston, 1975). In their famous "computer dance" study, Walster et al. (1966) found that the only predictor of interaction quality was the physical attractiveness of a person's date. Soon after, a "what-is-beautiful-is-good" stereotype of physical attractiveness was discovered to be operating in social situations (Berscheid & Walster, 1974). Many further studies replicated these findings and the phenomenon has been shown to be quite robust (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Feingold, 1992). These studies demonstrated that individuals automatically

ascribe more positive qualities to persons that are attractive (whether the person is consciously aware or not that they are perceiving the person as being attractive). Further studies attempting to understand more precisely how physical attractiveness operates pointed to the fact that favourable social realities are created for physically attractive individuals (Langlois, 1981; Snyder, Tanke & Berscheid, 1997). That is, individuals may behave differently (e.g., more friendly) when interacting with attractive individuals and in turn the attractive person will reciprocate and strengthen the individual's notion that this attractive person is pleasant to interact with. This phenomenon has even been shown to operate when people are led to *think* that they are interacting with a physically attractive other (Snyder et al., 1997).

Physical attractiveness has been judged to be more important for the initiation than for the maintenance of a relation with another (Sprecher, 1998) and physical attractiveness attributes have been judged to be more important for opposite-sex friends than same-sex friends (Sprecher & Regan, 2002). However, in general, people tend to underreport the impact of physical attractiveness in dating and social contexts (Hadjistavropoulos & Genest, 1994; Sprecher, 1989b). This implies that studies using self-reported importance and effects of physical attractiveness may be difficult to interpret.

Physical attractiveness in an “everyday” setting has previously been studied in a laboratory paradigm (Garcia, Stinson, Ickes, Bissonnette, & Briggs, 1991; Mulford, Orbell, Shatto, & Stockard, 1998; Berry & Hansen, 2000, 1996). Although some (e.g., Reis et al., 1980, 1982) have emphasized the need to study physical attractiveness in a naturally occurring setting, others posit that a laboratory paradigm is the only way to get at direct effects of physical attractiveness (Berry & Miller, 2001). In natural settings physically attractive people are able to

attract other physically attractive individuals and so it is difficult to pinpoint the true effects of physical attractiveness.

Both Garcia et al.'s (1991) and Berry and Miller's (2001) studies showed that physical attractiveness was the best predictor of quality of interaction for women. That is, higher physical attractiveness scores for women predicted higher quality interactions. For men, personality variables such as agreeableness and extraversion were the best predictor of interaction quality (Berry & Miller, 2001). Thus, it seems as though men may rely more on physical attractiveness cues than women in determining the outcome of an interaction. Berry and Hansen (2000, 1996) tested female same-sex encounter and personality variables such as extraversion and agreeableness emerged as significant predictors of quality of interaction. Finally, Mulford et al. (1998) conducted a study that suggested that subjects were more likely to enter play and to cooperate with others they found attractive.

One important phenomenon related to physical attractiveness has been omitted on purpose up to this point. There has been a matching hypothesis proposed that states that individuals may attempt to choose others that are similar to them on physical attractiveness when choosing dating partners (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971). Indeed, when participants were free to choose their dating partner (as opposed to Walster et al.'s (1966) study where participants did not get to choose) they tended to choose partners that were similar to their physical attractiveness levels (Berscheid et al., 1971).

Murstein (1972) found results to support the notion that individuals of "equitable market-value" are more likely to come together than individuals of "disparate market-value" (p.11). Finally, Folkes (1982) also found support for the matching hypothesis. In her study, mean difference scores for the physical attractiveness of the individuals in a couple steadily decreased

at each step in the formation of a relationship (Folkes, 1982). Using participants from a dating service, the steps she used included interest in the other, telephone contact, and a date. In other words, as individuals became more serious about considering another person for a date, their physical attractiveness scores became increasingly more similar. Other variables, such as age and occupation did *not* increasingly become more similar (Folkes, 1982).

The matching hypothesis has even been found to operate among same-sex friends (Cash & Derlega, 1978). In their study, Cash and Derlega (1978) had independent judges (who were blind to the nature of the study) rate the photographs of each friend. They found that the physical attractiveness of the same-sex friends was significantly less discrepant than one would expect by chance (Cash & Derlega, 1978).

More relevant to this article, however, is that the matching hypothesis may be particularly significant in the early stages of relationship formation (Feingold, 1988) where individuals attempt to find the fairest opposite-sex person they think they can attract based on their own perception of their physical attribute-value.

However, contradictory evidence for the matching hypothesis has been documented. Kalick and Hamilton (1986) have argued that the most attractive male and females pair up and then the most attractive remaining males and females pair up and so on. They propose that matches in attractiveness may be explained purely by attractiveness seeking and that the matching explanation is unnecessary. However, Aron (1988) states that Kalick and Hamilton's (1986) study was seriously flawed in five major ways. Nonetheless, Feingold (1988) mentions that, on the whole, a consistent finding is that most students desire attractive dates, regardless of their own physical attractiveness.

Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to assume that the matching hypothesis *is* operating to a certain extent in naturalistic settings. When we choose whom to interact with, we may be intimidated, either by our perception of our own lack of physical attractiveness or by the perception of the other's high physical attractiveness. However, more research is needed to clarify more precisely which variables are operating in which situations. When rejection may be noticed more (e.g., when many others are present in the proximal environment), the matching hypothesis may be operating more strongly. Additionally, personality variables such as confidence and extraversion may affect the matching process. For example, a very confident individual, although having low physical attractiveness, may nonetheless perceive himself as having high market-value and thus approach females with disparately high levels of physical attractiveness. However, a more likely occurrence is that attractive men will be more confident and assertive and so will approach highly attractive women because they fear rejection less. This is exactly what Reis et al. (1982) found. They also found that unattractive males were less assertive and more fearful of rejection and so pursued less attractive females (Reis et al.).

This study extends prior research related to physical attractiveness and will aim to replicate (or challenge) previous findings on physical attractiveness and the matching hypothesis. For example, the study will determine whether physical attractiveness is more important for opposite-sex dyads than same-sex dyads and whether matching effects are operating. Additionally, this project aims to study more precisely the role of physical attractiveness in the *initiation* of relations with a female person using a powerful laboratory paradigm. As noted, previous studies have looked at the consequences of interpersonal attractiveness, but none to my knowledge have looked precisely at the role physical attractiveness and its matching effects in the *initiation* of a casual interaction.

This paper will attempt to investigate the role of physical attractiveness in social interactions. I provide an experimental procedure that will allow physical attractiveness to be tested in a waiting room paradigm. More specifically, the paradigm allows us to look at the role physical attractiveness plays in the initiation of casual encounters with others. Additionally, matching effects that may occur in social situations will be investigated. Expected results and trends will then be discussed. Finally, a discussion of the anticipated results' implications and how they fit in the broader context of the extant literature will be offered.

Building on the existing "attractiveness halo effect" phenomenon, it is predicted that individuals will more likely want to initiate a conversation with a physically attractive versus physically unattractive other. The current laboratory paradigm will avoid the disadvantages that Berry and Miller (2001) suggest, whereby attractive others may simply have better individuals to interact with. To this end, I predict matching effects will prove to be significant although the environment will be slightly different than ones used in previous studies. Because participants do not in effect get to choose the person they are interacting with, the matching effect may be attenuated. However, the matching effect should nonetheless occur for individuals high in attractiveness whereby they would be expected to initiate a conversation more often with the attractive confederate as compared to the unattractive confederate. On the other hand, unattractive participants would be expected to initiate a conversation no more often with the unattractive confederate as compared to the attractive confederate. This result is predicted because of the unnatural environment that the participants are placed in. In naturalistic setting, males low in physical attractiveness were found to pursue females of lesser physical attractiveness because of fear of rejection (Reis et al., 1982). However, in this situation, this threat is much reduced, because the participant and the confederate will be the only individuals

in the waiting room. As Berry and Miller (2001) suggest, people in naturalistic settings are constrained in their choices of whom they wish to interact with. When constraints are low (e.g., in an artificial setting), behaviours may more closely correspond with actual preference (Berry & Miller, 2001). Thus, because participants will not be very constrained in the waiting room setting, it is expected that participants low in attractiveness will initiate a conversation with the attractive and unattractive confederate with approximately equal probability.

Conceptually, it is predicted that individuals on the whole will more likely initiate a casual relation with a physically attractive other versus a physically unattractive other. Additionally, it is predicted that attractive individuals will more often initiate a casual relation with an attractive person whereas unattractive individuals will equally initiate a casual relation with an unattractive and attractive other. The independent variable will be operationalized by the use of a physically attractive or unattractive female confederate (manipulated by changing her appearance) for the respective condition. The dependent variable will be operationalized by the presence or absence of the initiation of a conversation with the confederate.

Method

Participants

Eighty undergraduate students will be recruited from class or from the Psychology 101 subject pool. Both females and males will be recruited for the study and no special attention will be paid to ethnicity or age in the recruitment process.

Confederate

One Caucasian female will be recruited and well compensated for her participation in the study. The Caucasian ethnicity is used as it is a primary ethnic race on campus at the University of Waterloo. Although ethnic influences are not expected to greatly affect the results, in general,

it is perhaps the case that one may be more attracted to a person from their own race than from another race. Thus, by choosing a Caucasian confederate and assuming there will be more Caucasian participants run in the study, a larger effect size may be found.

The female confederate will be either dressed up or dressed down depending on the experimental condition. For example, if she is posing as an attractive individual, she will have more elegant clothing, sexier make-up, and have her hair styled beautifully. In the unattractive condition, on the other hand, she will have more conservative comfortable clothing (e.g., sweat pants), no make-up, and a conservative hairstyle (e.g., tied up). This manipulation is chosen for ethical, practical, and methodological purposes. It is perhaps unethical to recruit an unattractive female and ask her to participate in experimental sessions. Undue emotional harm may be experienced. Practically, finding one confederate is much less time consuming than having to run a separate mini-study that requires choosing two female confederates from a set of attractive and unattractive females. Finally, it is thought that perhaps the two different confederates may exert confounding influences on the participants. Attractive females may sit and communicate more confidently, thus sending different nonverbal behaviours to participants as compared to the unattractive confederate. Thus, by using the same confederate, these confounding influences can be controlled for and we can assume that she will exhibit the same nonverbal behaviours in both conditions (although one could still argue that she may change her nonverbal behaviours depending on the attractiveness of the participant). For the sake of this preliminary experiment, we will assume that such will not be the case. Additionally, the confederate will be explained the purpose of the experiment and informed to try to keep her nonverbal communications constant between experimental sessions. Thus, the confederate manipulation (dressed up or dressed down)

is expected to have sufficient impact on the participants' perceptual awareness of the confederate's physical attractiveness in the respective conditions.

Procedure

The participants will be contacted and asked to participate in a study investigating the effects of mood on learning tasks. Upon agreement, they will be scheduled to come into the lab and randomly assigned to either the physically attractive or physically unattractive condition. The experimenter will greet them, explain that they will be participating in a learning task activity and have them sign the informed consent form. The experimenter will then lead them to another waiting room (which is not actually a real waiting room) and explain to the participant that he must fetch something and will be back momentarily.

As mentioned, the study will use a waiting room paradigm, where the entire experiment will take place (see Figure 1). The female confederate will always be placed in seat 3 and instructed not to speak to the participant before they initiate a conversation. With the confederate in place in seat 3, the participant will enter the waiting room and seat themselves in seat 4 or 5, because the confederate will have her backpack on seat 2. Any of these two seats (4 or 5) will easily allow for the initiation of a conversation with the confederate because the two individuals will be at 90 degrees of each other. When individuals sit side-by-side, it may be more intimidating to initiate a conversation because one has to turn completely to a side to initiate the conversation. At 90 degrees, one only has to turn slightly towards the other person to initiate a conversation.

The waiting room will have a two-way mirror placed on the opposite side of the room where the participant and confederate will be sitting (see Figure 1). This will allow for two

independent judges to rate the physical attractiveness of the participant. These attractiveness ratings will be used to test matching effects.

Ten minutes after the arrival of the participant, the female confederate will leave to inform the experimenter that the session is over. The experimenter will then bring the participant into the lab room, and interview them. The experimenter will inform the participants that in fact they were deceived in thinking that they were going to participate in a learning task experiment. They will then be told that only a short questionnaire must be completed. The questionnaire will ask the participant to specify their race and gender, to rate their own physical attractiveness, to rate the physical attractiveness of the girl in the waiting room (manipulation check), how much they wanted to initiate a conversation with her, if they initiated a conversation with her, whether they would enjoy another casual encounter with her, and whether they felt uncomfortable at any point during the experiment (see Appendix A for the full questionnaire). After having fully debriefed them and having explained the true purpose of the study, they will be thanked and let go.

Independent Judges

Two independent judges will be rating the physical attractiveness of the participants as they walk into the waiting room. The two judges will be of female gender, because there are usually more females that participate in psychological studies. Additionally, females may have a tendency to more openly rate physical attractiveness of both males and females as compared to males who may be uncomfortable or be less accurate in judging the physical attractiveness of same-sex individuals. They will be rating the physical attractiveness of the participants on one item on a scale from 1 (not attractive) to 9 (very attractive). Inter-judge reliability will be calculated to ensure that the two judges made somewhat consistent ratings for each participant.

Results

Physical Attractiveness of the Participants

Using the independent judges' ratings, a mean physical attractiveness score (calculated by taking the average of the two judges) will be given to each participant. The participants will then be rank ordered using these means and a median split will be performed on the data. Thus, approximately half of the participants will be deemed "attractive participants" (the participants that have higher attractiveness scores than the median) and the other will be deemed "unattractive participants" (the participants that have lower attractiveness scores than the median).¹

Additionally, self-reported physical attractiveness scores will be compared to the judges objective ratings of the participants' physical attractiveness. If some of these scores are significantly different, then it could mean that certain individuals have higher (or lower) general confidence that may bias their self-perceived attractiveness scores. These scores could be analyzed to see whether they affect the results. In other words, I would examine whether self-perceived attractiveness affects the probability that one would initiate a conversation with the confederate. If these effects are found, it may mean that personality variables such as general confidence or social competence may be moderating the link between attractiveness and likeliness to initiate a relation with another person.

Item 5 on the questionnaire (see Appendix A) pertains to the desire of the participant to initiate a conversation with the confederate. This question is asked to examine whether certain individuals indeed *wanted* to initiate a conversation but just did not have the nerve to do so. If it is found that significantly more of the participants (that did not initiate a conversation) *wanted* to

¹ If need be, only the top and bottom 25 percent of the participants will be used in the analysis as to increase the effect size. Thus, only the bottom 25 percent (very unattractive) and top 25 percent (very attractive) would be used.

initiate a conversation with the attractive confederate as compared to the unattractive confederate, than it could be that other personality factors such as shyness and social anxiety are operating in this situation.

Physical Attractiveness of the Confederate

I will be performing two separate chi-square analyses on the data. The first will be for participants that interacted with the attractive confederate and the second will be for participants that interacted with the unattractive confederate. For participants that interacted with the attractive confederate, a significant chi-square test (e.g., $\chi^2(1)=7.3, p<.05$) is expected such that significantly more attractive participants will initiate a conversation with the attractive confederate as compared to unattractive participants (see Table 1). For participants that interacted with the unattractive confederate, a significant chi-square test is expected such that significantly more unattractive participants will initiate a conversation with the unattractive confederate as compared to the attractive participants. Then, I will conduct another chi-square analysis to test the interaction between the attractiveness of the participant and the attractiveness of the confederate. A significant chi-square test for the interaction is expected such that the effects of the attractiveness of the confederate depend on the attractiveness of the participant. More specifically, it is expected that the attractive participants will initiate most often a conversation with the attractive confederate. Additionally, the unattractive participants will equally often initiate a conversation with both attractive and unattractive confederates.

My main hypothesis is that indeed an interaction will be found between the attractiveness of the participant and the attractiveness of the confederate, supporting to a certain degree the matching hypothesis. More specifically, I am expecting an ordinal interaction, thus, I expect three simple effects to be significant. I expect that attractive participants will more often initiate a

conversation with the attractive confederate as compared to unattractive participants (see Table 1). I expect that attractive participants will less often initiate a conversation with the unattractive confederate as compared to unattractive participants. I expect the attractive participants to speak more often to the attractive confederate as compared to the unattractive confederate. And finally, I expect unattractive participants to equally often speak to both attractive and unattractive confederates. These results, then, would show that participants on the whole prefer to initiate a conversation with the attractive confederate, but that this trend depends on the attractiveness of the participant. Attractive participants will more likely initiate a conversation with the attractive confederate, whereas unattractive participants will equally likely initiate a conversation with the attractive or unattractive confederate.

Gender Effects

An additional analysis will be performed to examine if gender differences had any effect on the results. Specifically, I want to see if males show a stronger preference to interact with the attractive confederate as compared to females. Thus, another chi-square analysis will be performed on the data.

Race Effects

A final analysis will examine whether race may have influenced the results. Specifically, I will look at whether Caucasians significantly more often initiate a conversation with the confederate as compared with non-Caucasians. If this is found, then I will look at whether non-Caucasians show a preference for whom they prefer to initiate an interaction with.

Quality of Interaction

Item 7 on the questionnaire (see Appendix A) attempts to capture the quality of the interaction between the participant and the confederate, given a verbal interaction occurs. This

question will aid in examining whether the quality of interaction differs between attractive and unattractive confederates. In doing so, I hope to test whether results from Garcia et al. (1991) will be replicated. In their study, it was found that physical attractiveness was the best predictor of the quality of interaction for women, but not for men. Thus, it is expected that higher quality interactions will be had with the attractive confederate as compared to the unattractive confederate.

Discussion

I anticipate that participants in general (attractive, unattractive, male, or female) will initiate a conversation more often with the attractive as compared to the unattractive confederate. More specifically, I expect that attractive individuals will initiate a conversation more often with the attractive confederate whereas unattractive individuals will show no preference. I also predict that both males and females will more often initiate a relation with the attractive confederate. It is anticipated that race may attenuate the predicted results (thus, non-Caucasians may not perceive as strongly the attractiveness of the Caucasian confederate). Finally, I predict that the quality of interaction will be significantly higher for the attractive confederate.

On the whole, the study hopes to show that we prefer to interact with physically attractive individuals. However, it is hoped that this preference will be manifested in objective observable behaviour. Many previous studies have been difficult to interpret because self-report methodologies were used (Sprecher, 1998; Sprecher & Regan, 2002). It would be rewarding (but at the same time perhaps morose) to objectively find that humans more often initiate a conversation with a very cute girl than an average looking girl. To somewhat appease the reader, however, it is anticipated that many individuals may not show this preference. People may

unconsciously “match” their levels of attractiveness when deciding whom they wish to interact with.

The results of the current research program will contribute to the existing literature on physical attractiveness. No studies to date have looked at the role of physical attractiveness and matching effects in the initial stages of interactions. More generally, the role of physical attractiveness in a behavioural sense has not been examined in the initiation of relations with others. This study, will thus contribute greatly to the literature in using more powerful methodologies than that of earlier research.

Other results will assist in replicating or disconfirming earlier findings. For example, the results may disconfirm that of Sprecher and Regan (2002) whereby individuals judged that physical attractiveness was more important for opposite-sex friends than same-sex friends. The current findings may replicate both Garcia et al. (1991) and Berry and Miller’s (2001) studies whereby physical attractiveness was found to be the best predictor of the quality of interaction for women. The results may lend further support (or counter-support) for the matching hypothesis, which would replicate Berscheid et al.’s (1971) findings.

It is important to note some strengths and limitations of the current study. As mentioned, one major strength is that the study overcomes the limitations of earlier self-report studies. Another strength is that of high control. Using a waiting room paradigm, many of the numerous variables operating in naturalistic settings are controlled, allowing for a more precise look at the variables of interest. Although some researchers may object to using artificial laboratories to study physical attractiveness (e.g., Reis et al., 1982), I argue that the direct effects of physical attractiveness must be examined and understood in isolation before they can be analyzed in the context of everyday settings.

However, no study is exempt from certain limitations or weaknesses. Evidently the results are not very generalizable, in that they were extracted from an artificial environment. However, one may argue that the design exploits a very common occurrence in our everyday life: the fact that we are all very familiar with waiting rooms. Thus, although the situation is controlled in that it only has one other person in the waiting room, and constrains the participant's seating choice, it nonetheless has high experimental realism. That is, the participant is engaged in the task of waiting (however silly this sounds) and is acting naturally.

A second limitation is that of the operationalization of the dependent variable. It would seem as though individuals may use other means to initiate relations with others. The act of speaking is used by many as an overt method of communicating interest in having an interaction with another. However, some individuals may prefer to use non-verbal behaviours instead and await the speech of the other in order to commence a relation with them. The constraint that the confederate is instructed *not* to converse with the participant before they initiate, thus limits the results of my study.

Another general limitation is that the contrived situation of the study may not be representative of the interactions we have on a daily basis. For example, maybe only a small portion of our relation initiations with unacquainted others are completed by means of conversation. Perhaps it is the case that most individuals meet new persons through friends or recreational clubs. However, self-initiated relations are nonetheless a common human behaviour and are thus worthy of investigation.

A final limitation is that results can only be generalized to interactions with females, as only a female confederate was used in the study.

Another issue worthy of mention involves a potential weakness of the manipulation check embedded in the questionnaire (item 4, see Appendix A). If an interaction does ensue between the participant and the confederate, the attractiveness ratings will be somewhat biased. As Albada (2003) found, physical attractiveness ratings of a person increases after positive interactions and decreases after negative interactions. Thus, a person having a positive interaction with the confederate may have an upward bias rating of physical attractiveness as compared to a person that did *not* have an interaction (or had a negative interaction). However, if need be, I could potentially run an additional analysis and see whether the quality of interaction scores significantly affected the physical attractiveness ratings. Conversely, I could only look at the cases where an interaction did *not* ensue and verify whether the manipulation was successful.

A possible alternative explanation for the current results is that extraverted individuals are more likely to initiate a conversation with the confederate. However, because it is assumed (given a large enough N) that random assignment would equally distribute extravertedness across the two conditions, this alternative explanation becomes very unlikely.

Future studies could perhaps look at the role of the big five factor model in the initiation process of relations. This would mirror what Berry and Miller (2001) did, but instead of focusing on the consequences of the interaction between individuals, it would focus on the initiation of the interaction *and* the interaction itself. Additionally, closer attention could be paid at the role of cross-cultural differences in the perception of physical attractiveness. It is perhaps the case that other ethnic groups are not (or less) affected by superficial characteristics of a person in the initiation process of an interaction. Due to different upbringings and traditions, perhaps these cultures are less vulnerable to the attractiveness biases that have plagued Western culture. Finally, investigating the role of male attractiveness in the initiation of relations is definitely an

avenue of future research. It would be interesting to see whether the same principles apply when males and females must decide to initiate an interaction with a male confederate.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of physical attractiveness in the initiation of interactions between unacquainted individuals. It is expected that in general, individuals (both males and females) will more likely initiate an interaction with an attractive versus unattractive other. However, it is anticipated that less attractive individuals will not show this preference and initiate an interaction equally among others varying in physical attractiveness. Finally, race differences may attenuate these predictions and quality of interaction will be higher in general with an attractive other. These data potentially have important ramifications for possible further applications. In a time where egalitarianism is promoted by many, it becomes important to educate the populace about our natural human biases. By applying the main findings of this study, individuals may be made more aware of these biases and hopefully be less biased in whom they interact with on a daily basis. This would then mean that people would be more “fair” when deciding whom to interact with. When one thinks a bit more carefully about the problem at hand, it becomes clear that this preference may in fact be maladaptive. Firstly, every human being that is born did not choose to be born. Furthermore, that new born did not choose their genes and they did not choose the environment they were raised in. When I see a person on a street, why should my judgement of whether I should interact with that person be based on characteristics they did not choose to begin with? Thus, it is hoped in the future that we may learn that every individual has the right and need to be interacted with and this can only increase the quality of life on Earth.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire to be filled out by participant after 10-minute session in waiting room.

Please take a moment to fill in the following questionnaire. Please read all questions carefully and answer to the best of your knowledge. Additionally, once you have answered a question, you can longer change that answer after moving on to the next question.

1. Please specify your race: _____.
2. Please specify your gender: _____.
3. On the following scale, please rate your own physical attractiveness where (1) = *not at all attractive* and (9) = *very attractive*. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
4. On the following scale, please rate the physical attractiveness of the girl you were just sitting with, where (1) = *not at all attractive* and (9) = *very attractive*. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
5. On the following scale, please rate how much you desired to have a conversation with the girl you were just sitting with, where (1) = *not at all desired* and (9) = *desired very much*. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
6. Please specify if you engaged in a conversation with the girl you were just sitting with: ____.
7. If you answered “yes” to the last question, please rate, on the following scale, the pleasantness of your interaction with the girl, where (1) = *unpleasant* and (9) = *pleasant*.² 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
8. Please specify if at any moment during this study you felt uncomfortable: _____.

² This item was adopted from Reis et al.'s (1982) interaction record form.

Tables and Figures

Figure 1:

Table 1:

	attractive confederate	unattractive confederate	
attractive participant	15 (75%)	7 (35%)	22/40
unattractive participant	9 (45%)	11 (55%)	20/40
	24/40	18/40	