

## Sex Differences in Attributions for Friendly Behavior: Do Males Misperceive Females' Friendliness?

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This investigation tested the hypothesis that friendliness from a member of the opposite sex might be misperceived as a sign of sexual interest. Previous research in the area of acquaintance and date rape suggests that males frequently misunderstand females' intentions. A laboratory experiment was conducted in which a male and female participated in a 5-minute conversation while a hidden male and female observed this interaction. The results indicate that there were sex differences in subjects' rating of the actors. Male actors and observers rated the female actor as being more promiscuous and seductive than female actors and observers rated her. Males were also more sexually attracted to the opposite-sex actor than females were. Furthermore, males also rated the male actor in a more sexualized fashion than females did. These results were interpreted as indicating that men are more likely to perceive the world in sexual terms and to make sexual judgments than women are. Males do seem to perceive friendliness from females as seduction, but this appears to be merely one manifestation of a broader male sexual orientation.

The research described in this article grew out of the observation that females' friendly behavior is frequently misperceived by males as flirtation. Males tend to impute sexual interest to females when it is not intended. For example, one evening the author and a few of her female friends shared a table at a crowded campus bar with two male strangers. During one of the band's breaks, they struck up a friendly conversation with their male table companions. It was soon apparent that their friendliness had been misperceived by these men as a sexual invitation, and they finally had to excuse themselves from the table to avoid an awkward scene. What had been intended as platonic friendliness had been perceived as sexual interest.

After discussions with several other women verified that this experience was not unique, the author began to consider several related, researchable issues. Do women similarly misjudge men's intentions or is this bias lim-

ited to men only? How frequently do these opposite-sex misunderstandings occur? What causes them and what circumstances elicit them?

Research on other subcultural groups indicates that intergroup misperceptions may be common. For example, La France and Mayo (1976, 1978a, 1978b) have examined racial differences in the interpretations of various nonverbal cues. They have found that black and white Americans frequently interpret the same nonverbal cues, such as a direct gaze, quite differently. For example, white listeners gaze at the speaker more than black listeners do. Consequently, interracial encounters may be cumbersome because the participants' signals for yielding the floor or ending the conversation may differ. Because neither individual realizes that their nonverbal vocabularies conflict, they are likely to mistakenly attribute the awkwardness of the conversation to the other's dislike of them.

Although similar research has not been conducted concerning opposite-sex misunderstandings, a great deal has been written about date and acquaintance rape that may be applicable. Although a simple verbal misunderstanding is in no way comparable to rape in either magnitude or consequences, the underlying process that produces these

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two events may be related. Several authors have described how our cultural beliefs about the dating situation might lead to sexual misunderstandings and, in the extreme case, rape (Bernard, 1969; Brodyaga, Gates, Singer, Tucker, & White, 1975; Medea & Thompson, 1974; Russell, 1975; Weis & Borges, 1973; Hendrick, Note 1; Goodchilds, Note 2). These authors argue that women are socialized to flirt and play "hard to get." Even when sexually attracted to a man, a woman is expected to say "no" to his sexual advances, at least at first. And, in a complementary fashion, men are taught to initiate all sexual encounters and to believe that women prefer lovers who are aggressive, forceful, and dominant.

According to this argument these social mores may cause men to unwittingly force sexual relations on their dates, mistaking their true lack of sexual interest for mere coyness. Date and acquaintance rape are prevalent. Researchers estimate that 48–58% of all reported rapes are committed by someone the victim knows (Amir, 1971; Kanin, 1957, 1967; Katz & Mazur, 1979; Kirkpatrick and Kanin, 1957). Kanin and Parcell (1977) found that 50.7% of the 292 female undergraduates they polled had experienced some level of sexual aggression on a date during the previous year. Of these, 23.8% involved forced intercourse (see also Kirkpatrick and Kanin, 1957, and Kanin, 1967). After interviewing college males who had engaged in sexual aggression toward their dates, Kanin (1969) argues that

The typical male enters into heterosexual interaction as an eager recipient of any subtle signs of sexual receptivity broadcasted by his female companion. In some instances, however, these signs are innocently emitted by a female naïve in erotic communication. He perceives erotic encouragement, eagerly solicits further erotic concessions, encounters rebuff, and experiences bewilderment. (pp. 18–19)

Although many authors have speculated about the causes of date rape, little research has been conducted in this area. One notable exception is an experiment designed by Hendrick (Note 1) to examine sex differences in perceptions of the opposite sex. Male and female subjects viewed a videotape of a 12-minute interaction between a male and a female confederate. The tape ended with the

male asking the female for a date and her acceptance. Subjects were also provided with a hypothetical scenario in which the couple went up to the woman's apartment and sexual intercourse occurred although she had said "no."

The results yielded several interesting findings. Male subjects rated the female actor as more physically attractive and sexually promiscuous than did female subjects. Surprisingly, males also rated the male actor as more physically attractive, sexually promiscuous, and provocative than females did. Males were less likely than females to believe that the female had really meant no. In fact, males were more likely than females to state that even if the female actor had meant no, the occurrence of sexual intercourse was her fault. The external validity of these findings is limited by the artificiality of the situation the observers rated and by the fact that they were passively watching rather than actively engaging in the interaction. Nonetheless, these results provide fairly strong preliminary support for the hypothesis that men and women perceive each others' sexual intentions differently.

In sum, the available literature on date and acquaintance rape suggests that males are unable to distinguish females' friendly behavior from their seductive behavior because of the differential meaning that the relevant cues have for the two sexes. Men may have been socialized to view any form of friendly behavior from a woman as an indication of sexual interest.

In order to test empirically the hypothesis that men misperceive women's intentions, an experiment was designed in which a male and a female would interact with each other while another male and female would observe this interaction. Hence, unlike Hendrick's (Note 1) experiment in which subjects reacted to the behavior of confederates on a videotape, in this case half of the subjects were participants in the interaction. This paradigm also permits examination of both actors' reactions to their partners. If the results do indicate that males misperceive females' intentions, such results would be difficult to interpret without knowing if females similarly misperceive males' intentions.

The observers were included in the design to provide greater insight into this phenomenon. Although it was hypothesized that males are unable to distinguish females' friendly behavior from their seductive behavior because of the differential meaning that the relevant cues have for the two sexes, other explanations of this effect are tenable. For instance, it could be argued that males mistakenly perceive sexual interest in females for ego-enhancing motives; it makes them feel good to think that a woman is sexually attracted to them. However, if male observers as well as male actors perceive the female as being sexually attracted to the male actor, then this lends support to the notion of a general male bias. By comparing the male actors' ratings of the female actor to the male observers' ratings of her, one can assess the extent to which these ratings are due to ego-enhancing motives as opposed to a more general masculine orientation toward female behavior.

The inclusion of female observers provides additional information about the boundaries of this effect. Again, because it was proposed that the hypothesized effect is due to differences in sex role socialization, one would expect the female observers' ratings to be similar to the female actors' ratings and unlike the males' ratings. However, alternatively, one could argue that this phenomenon is due to some kind of actor-observer difference. It may be that all outsiders, regardless of sex, misperceive the female actor's intentions. By comparing the female observers' ratings to the male observers' ratings, we can test these competing explanations.

Although it was predicted that male subjects would misperceive the female actor, it was less clear as to how female subjects would rate the male actor. The evidence in the nonverbal-cues literature, which indicates that women are better at interpreting nonverbal cues than men are (Buck, Miller, & Caul, 1974; Hall, 1978; Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, & Archer, 1979), suggests that women may be capable of correctly distinguishing men's friendly behavior from their seductive behavior. However, the pervasiveness of the cultural myth that men are primarily interested in women for sexual

reasons may lead one to predict that women may also mistake a man's friendly behavior as a sign of sexual interest. Therefore, no predictions were made as to how the male actor would be judged by the female subjects.

## Method

### *Subjects*

Subjects were 144 white Northwestern University undergraduates who received credit toward a course requirement of research participation.<sup>1</sup> Subjects were scheduled in groups of four such that none of the students scheduled for the same session knew each other. In all, 36 complete sessions were run (72 males, 72 females).

### *Procedure*

Subjects reported to a large anteroom with five connecting cubicles. Subjects were reminded by the experimenter that the study concerned the acquaintance process and were told that the purpose of the experiment was to determine the ways in which the topic of conversation affects the smoothness of initial interactions. Pairs of subjects would each be assigned a different topic, which they would discuss for 5 minutes. Then they would fill out a questionnaire that would assess their opinion of the conversation. Finally, they would engage in a second conversation about a different topic either with the same or a different partner and fill out a second questionnaire. Subjects were told that the experimenter wanted a male and a female in each pair, and they drew pieces of paper to determine who would interact with whom. (Unbeknown to the subjects, this random draw was also used to determine their role assignment.) Although subjects were told by the experimenter that each pair would have a slightly different task, they were led to believe that both pairs would be engaging in conversations. This was done to keep the actors from correctly guessing that they were being observed.

After the draw the experimenter asked the subjects to fill out a brief questionnaire "before the actual study begins." Subjects were placed in individual cubicles to complete this questionnaire. They were given this questionnaire solely to provide the experimenter with the opportunity to give the observers their instructions. After waiting 3 minutes, the experimenter placed both observers in the same room and explained their task to them. Then they were asked to wait quietly and avoid talking while the actors were prepared.

<sup>1</sup> It seemed unlikely that subjects would rate friendly behavior from opposite-sex individuals of a different race in the same manner as they would rate similar behavior from a member of the same race. Therefore, because it was desirable to have all four participants in a session be of the same race (and because the great majority of the students in the subject pool were white), the subject population was limited to white students.

The experimenter then escorted the actors into the "conversation" room in which the one-way mirror through which the observers were watching was hidden by sheer pastel curtains. The actors were seated in chairs facing each other about 4 ft. (1.2 m) apart. They were instructed to talk for 5 minutes about their experiences of that year at Northwestern.

The experimenter immediately joined the observers and turned on a microphone that allowed them to hear the conversation. The observers had a clear view of the actors' profiles. After 5 minutes the experimenter turned off the microphone, reminded the observers to remain silent, and returned to the actors' room to stop the conversation. The experimenter gave the actors questionnaires containing the dependent measures and asked them to fill them out in their individual cubicles. Then the experimenter gave the observers their questionnaires and asked them to return to their original rooms to complete them. When all four subjects were finished, they were brought together in the center room and thoroughly debriefed.

### Dependent Measures

After the conversation, subjects completed a questionnaire that asked them to evaluate the quality of the conversation (this was included in order to make the cover story more convincing) and their reactions to the male and female actors. First, subjects were asked to describe one actor's personality in an open-ended question. Then they rated that actor on a variety of trait terms using a 7-point Likert-type scale. Then they answered the same questions about the other actor.<sup>2</sup> The subjects were asked to base their ratings on how they thought the actor was "trying to behave" because according to the experimental hypothesis it is the target person's intentions that are misjudged. The key trait terms were the adjectives *flirtatious*, *seductive*, and *promiscuous*; these words were selected because they were thought to measure the construct "sexuality." Additional trait terms such as *considerate*, *interesting*, *likeable*, and *intelligent* were included to avoid alerting subjects to the true focus of the study. Other important dependent variables were subjects' responses to questions asking them if they would like to get to know the actors, if they were sexually attracted to the opposite-sex actor, if they would like to date him or her, and why or why not. The observers were also asked if they thought each of the actors was sexually attracted to and would like to date his or her partner and why or why not. Finally, the actors were asked to respond "yes" or "no" to a question asking them if they would like to interact with the same partner in the second half of the experiment.<sup>3</sup>

## Results<sup>4</sup>

### Sex of Experimenter

Two male and two female experimenters conducted the study.<sup>5</sup> The results of a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  (Sex of Subject  $\times$  Role of Subject  $\times$  Sex of Experimenter) analysis of variance

indicated that the sex of experimenter did not have an effect on subjects' responses. Therefore, all further analyses were conducted by summing across this variable.

### Sex Differences

As expected, there were no sex differences in subjects' ratings of the female actor's friendliness and these ratings were quite high (female  $M = 6.0$ ; male  $M = 5.7$ ). A multivariate analysis of variance combining subjects' ratings of the female actor on the three sexual adjectives—*flirtatious*, *seductive*, and *promiscuous*—into a Sexuality Index (interitem correlations ranged from .39 to .62,  $p < .001$ ) indicated that there was a significant sex of subject effect for this variable,  $F(3, 138) = 3.09$ ,  $p < .03$ . An examination of the univariate findings indicated that, as predicted, male subjects rated the female actor as being significantly more promiscuous than female subjects did,  $F(1, 140) = 7.67$ ,  $p < .01$  (see Table 1). Similarly, there was a marginal effect,  $F(1, 140) = 2.98$ ,  $p < .09$ , for males to rate the female actor as being more seductive than did fe-

<sup>2</sup> The order in which the observers completed these questions was counterbalanced so that half of them rated the female actor first, whereas the other half rated the male actor first. The actors, however, always answered the questions about their partners before they answered the questions about themselves. This was done because during pilot testing actors asked to rate themselves first complained that this was too difficult to do, whereas actors who were asked to rate their partner first did not raise any objections.

<sup>3</sup> Subjects were led to believe that two conversations would take place so that this behavioroid measure could be included. However, no significant differences were found; virtually all the actors preferred to interact with the same partner.

<sup>4</sup> Because of a concern that the actors might not act particularly friendly during their interaction, two conditions were added to the design: one in which the female actor was instructed to act friendly and one in which the male was instructed to act friendly. There was also a control group in which neither actor received any instructions. A  $2 \times 2 \times 3$  (Sex of Subject  $\times$  Role of Subject  $\times$  Instruction Condition) analysis of the data indicated that subjects from all three groups perceived the actors as being quite friendly. This manipulation did not affect subjects' responses to any of the key dependent variables, so subjects' scores were collapsed across this variable for all further analyses.

<sup>5</sup> Special thanks to Lisa Schurer, Rich Mazanak, and Glenn Cohen for their assistance.

Table 1  
*Mean Scores for Ratings of the Female Actor  
 on the Sexuality Items as a Function of  
 Sex of Subject*

Ratings of female actor	Sex of subject		<i>p</i> <
	Male	Female	
Promiscuous	2.2	1.7	.01
Seductive	2.3	1.9	.09
Flirtatious	2.9	2.8	<i>ns</i>

males. However, there were no sex differences in subjects' ratings of the female actor's flirtatiousness.

A multivariate analysis of variance combining actors' responses to the questions "Would you like to get to know your partner better?"; "Would you be interested in becoming friends with your partner?"; "Are you sexually attracted to your partner?"; and "Would you be interested in dating your partner?" into a Future Interaction Index for actors (interitem correlations ranged from .56 to .88,  $p < .001$ ) yielded a significant sex-of-subject effect,  $F(4, 67) = 2.83$ ,  $p < .03$ . Responses to the question asking the actors if they were sexually attracted to their partner indicated that the male actors were more sexually attracted to their partners than the female actors were,  $F(1, 70) = 7.17$ ,  $p < .01$  (male  $M = 3.5$ , female  $M = 2.4$ ). None of the other univariate results were significant.

Also, a multivariate analysis of variance combining observers' responses to questions asking them how sexually attracted they were to the opposite-sex actor and how interested they were in dating her or him into a Sexual Attraction Index for observers ( $r = .85$ ,  $p < .001$ ) showed a significant effect for sex of subject,  $F(2, 69) = 4.83$ ,  $p < .01$ , again indicating greater male interest than female interest. Univariate analyses indicated that the male observers were more sexually attracted to,  $F(1, 70) = 9.10$ ,  $p < .004$ , and eager to date,  $F(1, 70) = 8.87$ ,  $p < .004$ , the opposite-sex actor than were the female observers (sexually attracted: male  $M = 3.3$ , female  $M = 2.1$ ; date: male  $M = 3.3$ , female  $M = 2.2$ ). Similarly, the male observer thought that the female actor

wanted to be friends with the male actor,  $F(1, 70) = 3.25$ ,  $p < .08$ , was sexually attracted to the male actor,  $F(1, 70) = 6.58$ ,  $p < .01$ , and wanted to date the male actor,  $F(1, 70) = 6.80$ ,  $p < .01$ , more than the female observer did (friends: male  $M = 4.1$ , female  $M = 3.5$ ; sexually attracted: male  $M = 3.2$ , female  $M = 2.4$ ; date: male  $M = 3.1$ , female  $M = 2.3$ ).

Analyses of subjects' ratings of the male actor exhibited some surprising sex-of-subject effects. A multivariate analysis of variance combining subjects' ratings of the male actor on the Sexuality Index (interitem correlations ranged from .40 to .72,  $p < .001$ )—flirtatious, seductive, and promiscuous—indicated that there was a significant sex-of-subject effect,  $F(3, 138) = 2.99$ ,  $p < .03$ . The univariate analyses indicated that the male actors and observers rated the male actor as being significantly more flirtatious,  $F(1, 140) = 4.21$ ,  $p < .04$ , and seductive,  $F(1, 140) = 9.07$ ,  $p < .003$ , than the female subjects did. There was also a significant sex by role interaction for each of these variables,  $F(1, 140) = 4.21$ ,  $p < .04$ ;  $F(1, 140) = 4.12$ ,  $p < .04$ , respectively. Tukey (*b*) tests indicated that the female actors' and the male actors' ratings were significantly different ( $p < .05$ ) with the male actor rating himself as significantly more flirtatious and seductive than the female actor rated him (see Table 2).<sup>6</sup> There was a marginal trend for males to rate the male actor as being more promiscuous than females did,  $F(1, 140) = 3.34$ ,  $p < .07$ . Male actors and observers also rated the male actor as being more attractive than females did,  $F(1, 140) = 7.94$ ,  $p < .01$  (male  $M = 4.4$ ; female  $M = 3.8$ ).

### *Gender of Stimulus*

Because of the intriguing similarity of the males' ratings of both the male and female actor, the data were reanalyzed as a repeated measures analysis of variance. Gender of the stimulus was conceptualized as a repeated measure with respondents' ratings of the fe-

<sup>6</sup> The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Tukey (*b*) statistic averages the Tukey and Newman-Keuls range values at each step.

Table 2

*Mean Scores for Ratings of the Male Actor on the Sexuality Items as a Function of Sex of Subject and Role of Subject*

Sex of subject	Rating of the male actor								
	Flirtatious <sup>a</sup>			Seductive <sup>b</sup>			Promiscuous <sup>c</sup>		
	Actor	Observer	<i>M</i>	Actor	Observer	<i>M</i>	Actor	Observer	<i>M</i>
Female	2.1	2.4	2.3	1.5	1.9	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.8
Male	3.1	2.4	2.8	2.5	2.1	2.3	2.1	2.1	2.1

<sup>a</sup> Sex of Subject  $\times$  Role interaction,  $p < .04$ . Sex-of-subject effect,  $p < .04$ .

<sup>b</sup> Sex of Subject  $\times$  Role interaction,  $p < .04$ . Sex-of-subject effect,  $p < .003$ .

<sup>c</sup> Sex of Subject  $\times$  Role interaction, *ns*. Sex-of-subject effect,  $p < .07$ .

male actor representing one level of the variable and respondents' ratings of the male actor representing the second level of the variable. This analysis permits testing of the hypothesis that there is an overall sex-of-subject effect (same-sex subjects rate both actors similarly) or, alternatively, a gender-of-stimulus effect (both sexes rate actors of the same gender similarly).

For the dependent variable flirtatious, this analysis indicated a significant gender-of-stimulus effect,  $F(1, 140) = 5.76$ ,  $p < .05$ . Examination of the means indicates that the female actor was rated as more flirtatious than the male actor by all respondents (female actor  $M = 2.8$ ; male actor  $M = 2.5$ ). However, this finding was not replicated with the other two dependent variables, seductive and promiscuous. For both of these variables there was a significant sex-of-subject effect indicating that male subjects rated both actors higher than female subjects did,  $F(1, 140) = 6.98$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $F(1, 140) = 6.52$ ,  $p < .02$ , respectively (seductive: male subjects  $M = 2.2$ , female subjects  $M = 1.8$ ; promiscuous: male subjects  $M = 2.2$ , female subjects  $M = 1.7$ ).

### Role

There was a large and systematic role effect indicating that actors thought more highly of themselves and their partners than the observers did (see Table 3). The male actors and the female actors rated the female actor as being significantly more considerate, interesting, likeable, warm, intelligent,

and sincere than did the male and female observers. Similarly, both actors rated the male actor as being significantly more cheerful, interesting, likeable, warm, intelligent, attractive, and sincere than the observers did. Actors also thought more highly of their conversation than the observers did. Compared to observers, actors rated the conversation as more interesting and educational and their ideas as more creative and were more likely to say there was not enough time

Table 3

*Mean Scores for Ratings of the Male Actor, the Female Actor, and the Conversation as a Function of Role of Subject*

Rating	Actor	Observer
Female actor		
Considerate	5.6	5.2
Interesting	5.4	5.0
Likeable	5.8	5.4
Warm	5.6	5.0
Intelligent	5.4	5.0
Sincere	5.9	5.2
Male actor		
Cheerful	5.4	5.0
Interesting	5.3	4.7
Likeable	5.8	5.4
Warm	5.2	4.8
Intelligent	5.4	5.0
Attractive	4.4	3.9
Sincere	5.8	5.4
Conversation		
Interesting	5.1	4.1
Educational	4.0	3.4
Presence of creative ideas	3.7	3.2
Not enough time to talk	4.5	3.2

to talk,  $F(1, 140) = 3.99-36.57$ ,  $.001 < p < .05$  for all significant role effects.

## Discussion

### *Sex Differences*

The results of the experiment were generally consistent with our predictions. Males rated the female actor as being more promiscuous and seductive than females did. Male actors were more sexually attracted to their partners than their partners were to them. Similarly, the male observers were more sexually attracted to and eager to date the opposite-sex actor than the female observers were. Finally, the male observers rated the female actors as being more sexually attracted to and willing to date their partners than the female observers did.

It is noteworthy that most of the significant differences were found with the traits and behaviors most obviously sexual in nature. There were no sex differences in subjects' ratings of the female actor's flirtatiousness, the mildest trait term. In fact, the finding that both sexes rated the female actor as being more flirtatious than the male actor substantiates the interpretation that this term has a connotation that implies female gender. There were also no sex differences in actors' desire to get to know their partner better, to become friends, or to date their partner. This sex difference in perception of the opposite sex is only apparent when unmistakably sexual terms are used.

As mentioned earlier, if this effect was due to a self-serving bias on the male actors' part, then the male actors' ratings should have been significantly higher than the male observers' ratings. Similarly, if it was due to actor-observer differences, then the female actors' (the target persons') ratings should have been different from the other three participants' (her observers) ratings. Therefore, the absence of any significant sex by role interactions for these key dependent variables is consistent with the hypothesis that this effect is due to a general masculine style of viewing female behavior.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, the above results provide support for the hypothesis that men mistakenly interpret women's friendliness as an indication of sexual interest. According to the female

actors' self-ratings, they intended to be friendly yet they were perceived as being seductive and promiscuous by the male subjects. Clearly, one has no way of judging if the women's behavior truly was seductive or not. What is important, however, is her own perception of her behavior. If she felt she was not being sexually provocative, then she would be offended if a man interpreted her behavior this way, regardless of how an unbiased observer would rate her behavior. In future research similar interactions can be videotaped and later rated by judges, thereby providing a clearer interpretation of these findings.

Although most of the predictions were substantiated by the results, an examination of the subjects' ratings of the male actor necessitated rethinking the initial hypothesis. Not only were males inclined to rate the female actor in sexual terms but they also rated the male actor in a similar manner. Male actors perceived themselves as being more flirtatious and seductive than the female actors rated them. Furthermore, male actors perceived themselves and male observers perceived the male actor as being more attractive and promiscuous than females did. The repeated measures analysis, which combined males' ratings of both actors and found a significant sex-of-subject effect for the variables seductive and promiscuous, corroborates this conclusion. These findings also replicate Hendrick's (Note 1) results; in his study, male subjects, who were observers, rated the male actor as being more physically attractive and sexually promiscuous than females did.

The results of this experiment indicate that men are more likely to perceive the world in sexual terms and to make sexual judgments than women are. The predicted effect that men misperceive friendliness from women as seduction, appears to be merely

<sup>7</sup> It is possible that the male observers thought they would have the opportunity to meet the female actor later. This could have caused them to rate her in a sexual manner for ego-enhancing motives also. Based on comments that respondents made during the debriefing, the author considers this to be unlikely. (Most observers reported that they thought it would be their turn to interact with each other next; they did not seem to think they would be asked to interact with either of the actors.)

one manifestation of this broader male sexual orientation.

Alternatively, one could explain these findings by arguing that males and females in our experiment were equally likely to make sexual judgments but that males were simply more willing than females to admit them. Although this explanation is feasible, we consider it to be unlikely: Respondents' explanations as to why they were or were not interested in dating the opposite-sex actor were coded. Males and females were equally likely to mention sexual factors such as "I'm not physically attracted to her" or "The magnetism was not there" as influencing their decision (females = 22%, males = 25%; interrater reliability = .91). If females and males were equally willing to admit their sexual judgments in open-ended responses, then it is likely that they were both being equally honest about these feelings throughout the questionnaire. Also, an approximately equal number of males and females volunteered the information that they were currently dating (females = 19%; males = 17%). Therefore, differential levels of sexual availability do not explain the findings.

Further verification of our revised hypothesis—that males perceive more sexuality in their own and in others' behavior than females do—comes from the recent work of Zellman, Johnson, Giarrusso, and Goodchilds (Note 3). Zellman et al. (Note 3) asked adolescents, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years, whether they view various cues in the dating situation as indicators that their partner is interested in engaging in sexual relations. They found "a consistent tendency for female respondents to view the behaviors of both male and female actors as less expressive of an interest in sex than males did" (p. 11). Females were less likely than males to feel that the type of clothes either sex wore, the male's reputation, the setting in which the date occurred, or various dating behaviors (telling the date you love him or her, tickling, looking into the date's eyes, etc.) were signs of sexual interest. Not only do their findings provide independent support for the hypothesis that males view the world in a more sexualized manner than females do but they also extend it to a different age group.

A thorough explanation as to why males

and females differ in their propensity to make sexual judgments is beyond the scope of this paper. An explanation based on differential socialization could probably be proposed. Certainly the stereotypes of our culture, as evidenced by the mass media's depiction of men and women, portray men as having a greater interest in sexual matters than do women. Once men develop this sexual orientation, it may act as a generalized expectancy, causing them to interpret ambiguous information, such as that presented in our study, as evidence in support of their beliefs. As Markus (1977) suggests, events that fit one's self-schemas have a greater impact than those that do not. Consequently, if the issue of sexuality is more central to men's concerns than those of women, then males may be more aware of the potential sexual meaning of others' behavior. Future research that delineates the extent of this phenomenon and the conditions under which it does and does not occur may help elucidate its origin.

### *Role Effects*

The role effects, though unexpected, were both extensive and consistent. Actors had a higher opinion of themselves, their partner, and their conversation than observers did. This effect cannot be dismissed as a self-serving bias (Bradley, 1978; Miller & Ross, 1975; Snyder, Stephan, & Rosenfield, 1976), because it applies not only to the self and the conversation that one participated in but also to one's partner, a complete stranger, as well. Perhaps because the observers are not involved in the interaction they may remain more judgmental. Actors may be "caught up in" what is happening and, therefore, be unable to analyze it objectively. There may be a psychological reality to the situation for the actors that makes the experience more involving and pleasant, consequently inflating their ratings (Brickman, 1978). Observing, on the other hand, is a passive behavior that arouses only weak emotions and, therefore is likely to lead to lower ratings (Brickman, 1978).

Alternatively, one could argue that the role differentiation established a sense of "we versus them." This can cause the actors to inflate their "in-group" ratings and the



observers to deflate their "out-group" ratings (Tajfel, 1974, 1978).

### Summary and Conclusions

Although the initial hypothesis appears to be only partially correct, its implications remain the same. Men do in some circumstances mistake friendliness for seduction. In fact, the whole issue of sexual availability appears to be more salient for men than for women, as evidenced by men's greater tendency to make sexual judgments.

In conclusion, the results of this laboratory investigation corroborate the author's personal experience: Men do tend to read sexual intent into friendly behavior. However, this appears to occur because of a general male bias rather than an attitude about females only. Evidently, women are not subject to this bias (at least not under these circumstances) and are, therefore, unlikely to misjudge male intentions in the way that men misjudge those of women. It is for future researchers to determine the underlying causal factors that contribute to this male bias and the specific circumstances that elicit it.

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