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Reactions to Heterosexual Opening Gambits: Female Selectivity and Male Responsiveness

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Gender-related responses to opening conversational gambits were examined in two field and one laboratory experiment. In Experiment 1, a male approached female singles bar patrons, using one of six opening lines, classified as direct, innocuous, or cute-flippant. The cute-flippant lines were found to elicit significantly more negative responses than did the direct and innocuous lines. In Experiment 2, male and female experimenters delivered direct, innocuous, and cute-flippant lines to opposite-sex bar patrons. The experimenters also touched half of the subjects while delivering the opening lines. Female subjects again responded more negatively to the cute-flippant approaches compared to the direct and innocuous gambits. Male subjects displayed significantly more positive responses than did female subjects, regardless of the opening gambit. Interpersonal touch had no significant effect on heterosexual responses. A third, laboratory experiment examined whether gender differences in personality inference processes or in mindlessness could account for female discernment and male responsiveness. Males responded more positively than did the females to the two cute-flippant, the two direct, and one of the innocuous lines and made more positive personality attributions about the individuals who delivered them, suggesting that the genders differ in their attributions in this domain. Although both males and females were influenced by the perceived sociability of the target, judgments of sexiness were closely related to males' interest in the female target but not to females' interest in the male. Females, in contrast were more influenced by the male targets' perceived brightness than by their sexiness.

Females may employ more stringent criteria than males do when evaluating potential partners for a heterosexual relationship. Females have been found to attach more weight than males do to the personality characteristics of potential

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mates (Buss & Barnes, 1986), to be more reluctant to make an emotional commitment to a new partner, and to be more decisive in terminating a relationship if it seems unsatisfactory (Hill, Ruben, & Peplau, 1976). Females also were more likely than males to reject an explicit sexual offer (Clark & Hatfield, 1981) and reported themselves to be more sexually idealistic and responsible, and less permissive, than males (Hendrick, Hendrick, Slapion-Foote, & Foote, 1985). Female selectivity, including the use of critical evaluative standards for their partners and a reluctance to become heterosexually involved, may stem from cultural sex role standards regarding appropriate female behavior. Yet females in many species tend to be more selective than males in the choice of a mate, and evolutionary theory suggests that female discrimination in mating is due to the greater female investment in the bearing and rearing of offspring and greater costs from choosing an unsatisfactory mate (Cunningham, 1981, 1986; Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure, 1986; Trivers, 1985).

Female selectivity might be most evident during the first few seconds of a romantic encounter between strangers, when the male delivers his opening line. At that moment the female must decide whether to invest time in a conversation and potentially in a relationship. The singles bar has served as a useful field setting for observing a range of variables involved in attraction (Moore, 1985; Pennebaker et al., 1979; Sprecher et al., 1984; Walsh & Hewitt, 1985). Yet despite the implications for the psychology of attraction, and applied interest in social skills training, only one published study was located that investigated the effect of the initial verbal approach on overt heterosexual responses. Glenwick, Jason, and Elman (1978) approached females in a singles bar, using the line "Hi, having a good time?" The investigators reported that 63% of their female subjects responded positively, but there was no test of alternate approaches.

Kleinke, Meeker, and Staneski (1986) employed a self-report format to evaluate 100 opening lines appropriate for different contexts. Factor analysis of ratings of the lines revealed three basic types. The direct approach involved an overt statement of interest, sometimes with elements of self-disclosure or self-effacement, such as "I feel a little embarrassed about this, but I'd like to meet you." The innocuous approach elicited conversation through a banality, such as "How are you?" The cute-flippant approach involved a humorous challenge such as: "I'm easy, are you?" The investigators reported that direct and innocuous approaches were about equally represented among the preferred opening lines, but nearly all of the least preferred approaches were of the cute-flippant type. Kleinke et al. also reported a tendency for females to dislike cute-flippant opening lines and to prefer innocuous lines more than did males. The authors suggested that "these findings support expectations from research on sex role socialization that men prefer more direct and aggressive approaches toward social encounters while women are inclined toward approaches that are nonthreatening and benign" (pp. 597-598).

Kleinke et al.'s results suggest that males' liking for cute-flippant lines may be a prescription for interpersonal disaster, but there is a possibility that ratings

obtained in the laboratory may not generalize to the spontaneous, beer-saturated ecology of the field setting. Singles bar patrons might ignore the opening line and respond solely as a function of their desire for social contact and their liking for the appearance of the initiator. The following experiments, therefore, were designed to explore the effects of opening gambits on heterosexual behavior. The hypothesis of female selectivity suggests that they will use the content of the brief verbal interaction to evaluate the suitability of the initiator as a potential mate. Based on the results of Kleinke et al., it was expected that females would respond more positively to a male employing direct or innocuous approaches and more rejectingly to a male employing a cute-flippant approach.

EXPERIMENT 1

Method

Subjects were 63 young Caucasian female evening patrons of three large middle-class suburban Chicago bars. Because of concern that people might resent having their romantic responses subjected to scientific observation, pilot subjects were carefully debriefed, revealing that all had expected that social contacts might follow from being in the public setting of the bar and that none resented the brief intrusion of the research. Thus this study was deemed to meet Cook and Campbell's (1979, p. 369) criteria for an innocuous field experiment excluded from the ethical requirement of informed consent.

A male Caucasian experimenter, who was tall and of medium attractiveness, was trained to appear friendly and sincere while delivering each of six opening lines. Four lines were selected from Kleinke et al.'s six most preferred lines for use in a bar and a general situation, while the two cute-flippant were chosen from the six least preferred lines for those settings:¹

Direct approach:

- (1) I feel a little embarrassed about this, but I'd like to meet you.
- (2) It took a lot of nerve to approach you, so can I at least ask what your name is?²

Innocuous approach:

- (3) Hi.
- (4) What do you think of the band?

Cute-flippant approach:

- (5) You remind me of someone I used to date.
- (6) Bet I can outdrink you.

The experimenter had no a priori hypotheses about the effectiveness of the opening lines and was instructed not to tally the responses or try to guess about the effectiveness of the approaches. The choice of which line to deliver was randomly determined, as was the selection of a target female for the approach, after eliminating those accompanied by a male or engrossed in conversation. The female's response to the opening line was scored by the experimenter as

positive if she smiled, maintained eye contact, or answered in a friendly fashion. Negative responses included averting the head, walking away, or making a negative comment. Piloting of the study indicated that the females' responses were relatively unambiguous; there was 93% agreement between the experimenter and a blind rater, using 15 subjects. Subjects who remained nearby were informed of the reason for the approach and were debriefed. A 5-minute delay was imposed between approaches to minimize the possibility that potential subjects saw the previous interaction; none expressed suspicion.

Results

The percentages of females who displayed a positive response to each opening line are displayed in Table 1. An analysis of variance on the six opening lines was significant, $F(5, 57) = 3.31, p = .02$. Planned contrasts revealed that the direct opening lines were more effective than the cute-flippant lines, 66.67 versus 19.05, $z = 2.19, p < .02$. The innocuous lines also were more effective than the cute-flippant lines, 61.90 versus 19.05, $z = 2.00, p < .04$. The direct and innocuous categories of lines did not differ in effectiveness, 66.67 versus 61.90. The effectiveness rates of the lines within the approach categories were not significantly different: direct category, $z = 1.47, p < .14$; innocuous category, $z = .73, n.s.$

EXPERIMENT 2

Female selectivity as a function of the opening line was found in Experiment 1, but prior to discussing those results, a second closely related study will be described that includes data on males' responses to females. Given that Kleinke et al. found that males rated cute-flippant lines more positively and innocuous lines more negatively than did females, it is possible that such preferences will be evident in males' overt behavior. Hendrick et al. (1985), however, noted that men display more permissive sexual attitudes than women, and sociobiologists have suggested that males are more easily sexually aroused than females and less discriminating concerning their partners. The hypothesis of greater and more indiscriminate male responsiveness leads to the competing prediction that males will display minimal variability in response to the females' approach as a function of the opening line and instead will display high levels of receptivity to *all* female opening gambits.

A second field experiment, therefore, was designed to assess the hypothesized selectivity of females and the responsivity of males when presented various opening gambits. Experiment 2 also was designed to explore the effect of brief physical touching on attraction. Suggesting that a touch may lead to liking, Kleinke (1977) reported increased helping if a female touched a respondent's forearm while making a small request. Much of the experimental work on behavioral responses to touching involved neutral or positive situations, in which the touch would not be viewed as unpleasant (Steir & Hall, 1984). If a

TABLE 1 Experiment 1: Percentage of Female Subjects Who Responded Positively to Each Opening Line

	%	<i>n</i> ^a
Direct approach		
I feel a little embarrassed about this, but I'd like to meet you.	81.82	11
It took a lot of nerve to approach you; so can I at least ask what your name is?	50.00	10
Innocuous approach		
Hi.	54.55	11
What do you think of the band?	70.00	10
Cute-flippant approach		
You remind me of someone I used to date.	18.18	11
Bet I can outdrink you.	20.00	10

a. *n* = number of subjects per condition.

male touched a female who was not attracted to him, such as during the delivery of a cute-flippant line, her response might polarize and become even more avoidant (see Paulsell & Goldman, 1984). Thus females were expected to respond more negatively to the cute-flippant line, especially when it was accompanied by a touch, than to other approaches. Males were expected to respond more positively than females to each category of opening approach, particularly when accompanied by a touch.

Method

Subjects were 103 male and 109 female Caucasian patrons of seven medium and large, middle-class, suburban Chicago bars. Two female and two male Caucasian college students of medium physical attractiveness served as experimenters. The experimenters traveled in pairs, but approached the subjects individually. The member of the pair who was not making the approach was blind to the line being used in each trial and recorded the response of the target. The procedures were identical to those in the first study, except that only three lines were used: "I feel a little embarrassed about this, but I'd like to meet you," "Hi," and "You remind me of someone I used to date." A randomly determined half of the subjects also were touched lightly on the forearm by the fingertips of the experimenter for approximately 2 seconds as the opening line was being delivered. Subjects who remained in proximity after the delivery of the opening gambit were given a card informing them about the study. Only one intoxicated

TABLE 2 Experiment 2: Percentage of Positive Responses to Opposite-Sex Experimenter as a Function of Opening Line, Gender, and Touch

	<i>Female Subjects</i>				<i>Male Subjects</i>			
	<i>Touch</i>		<i>No Touch</i>		<i>Touch</i>		<i>No Touch</i>	
	<i>%</i>	<i>n^a</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>
I feel embarrassed . . .	68.75	16	70.00	20	81.25	16	81.25	16
Hi	71.43	21	70.00	20	100.00	18	100.00	17
You remind me . . .	18.75	16	31.00	16	80.00	20	100.00	16

a. *n* = number of subjects per condition.

male expressed resentment that the experimenter was not romantically interested, although several expressed good-humored disappointment.

Results

The results of Experiment 2 are presented in Table 2. Analyses of variance indicated effects for opening line, $F(2, 200) = 7.75$, $p < .001$, and for gender of subject, $F(1, 200) = 39.38$, $p < .001$, but not for touch, $F(1, 200) = 1.40$, *n.s.* The interaction of Opening Line by Subject Gender was significant, $F(2, 200) = 9.59$, $p < .0001$, indicating that the opening line influenced the responses of females but not the responses of the males. The Opening Line by Touch interaction, $F(2, 200) = .63$, and Touch by Subject Gender analyses, $F(1, 200) = .53$, were not significant, nor was the three-way interaction, $F(2, 200) = .38$.

The direct and innocuous lines had equivalent effects when male experimenters approached female targets, and those approaches were more effective than the cute-flippant line, $z = 4.33$, $p < .001$. The highest rate of rejection occurred when a male experimenter touched a female while delivering the cute-flippant line, but this rate was not significantly less than when this line was used without the physical contact, $z = .86$, *n.s.* The most striking finding, however, was the gender difference; the rate of positive response to female experimenters was almost twice that shown to males (91% vs. 56%) and displayed less variability as a function of the approach.

Discussion

Experiments 1 and 2 demonstrated that females responded selectively to a male initiator as a function of the content of his opening line. The innocuous approaches were about as effective as the self-disclosing direct lines and averaged over 50% success in establishing initial heterosexual interaction. The innocuous line was a little more effective when a male approached a female in Experiment 2 compared to Experiment 1, whereas the direct line was a little less

effective, but because the direct and innocuous approaches were not significantly different from each other in Experiment 1, such fluctuations were to be expected. Kleinke et al.'s (1986) laboratory-based observations concerning females' aversion to cute-flippant lines were verified in a field application setting. Females may have disliked the dominance or assertiveness inherent in cute-flippant approaches and may have made negative personality attributions about a male who used such an approach.

Supporting the hypothesis of male responsiveness, males displayed a high rate of heterosexual interest and did not systematically vary their response rate as a function of the opening line. Langer, Blank, and Chanowitz (1978) noted that individuals tend to process some requests in a mindless fashion, discounting the specific justification for the request if it was low in cost. Responding to a heterosexual overture may have been seen as a low-cost behavior by the males; so they might have been more likely than females to have responded mindlessly to the opening gambits.

Alternately, it is possible that males responded more positively than did the females because they employed different schemas and attributed more favorable personality characteristics to the individual who used each type of line. Thus a male subject might have concluded that a female experimenter was being friendly and complimentary when she said, "You remind me of someone I used to date." Females, in contrast, may have employed more discerning and critical inferential processes and made more negative personality inferences about a male who used that line. Because the bar patrons were not directly questioned concerning their impressions of the personality of the experimenters using the opening gambits, neither the mindlessness nor the gender-related inference interpretation can be excluded.

Experiment 2 failed to find a significant effect due to interpersonal touch. Although this was not the first time that touch proved to be a weak variable (Steir & Hall, 1984), its ineffectiveness was unexpected. It is possible that because of crowding and the need to attract attention in the midst of noise, a touch in a bar was not seen as a meaningful interpersonal gesture. Alternately, the failure of the touch manipulation could have been due to stimulus overload. During the encounter the target may have been preoccupied with processing the opening line and the stranger's appearance, so that the mild tactile stimulation from the fleeting touch went unnoticed. Perhaps a stronger or more intimate touch, such as on the cheek, would have produced the predicted interaction.

EXPERIMENT 3

The requirement that Experiment 2 be conducted in a minimally intrusive fashion precluded the manipulation checks that could have provided evidence of the processes underlying the behavioral responses. A third experiment, therefore, was conducted in the laboratory to investigate sex differences both in response to the opening lines and in personality attributions made about

individuals who might employ various opening lines. A scenario format was employed to exclude effects due to the experimenter's physical appearance and style of delivery and to the bar population.

If females' rejections of males are due to inferring undesirable personality characteristics revealed in the opening gambit, then there should be a strong correlation between females' decisions to talk to the male and their personality judgments. Experiment 3, therefore, employed a wide range of trait terms believed to be associated with female attraction to males, including intelligence, kindness, sociability, income potential (Buss & Barnes, 1986), and dominance (Sadalla et al., 1987).

If male responsiveness to female opening gambits is due to gender-related personality inference processes, males should make more positive personality attributions than females do to the various lines, especially to the cute-flippant approaches. Male responsiveness may be evident if males' decisions to talk to the target female are more closely correlated with their perception of the target's sexiness than with their other personality attributes. Alternately, if the males' positive reactions to female opening gambits are a result of mindlessness, then males should show less sensitivity to the content of the lines in making their personality attributions, which would produce less variability than that among females in the personality judgments that they make as a function of the opening-line condition. Further, if males are reacting positively on the basis of mindlessness rather than positive personality judgments, then males' decisions to talk to the target females should be less correlated with their personality judgments than the females' decisions.

Method

A total of 40 males and 47 females from a midwestern college volunteered to participate in the experiment on "judgments of men and women" to fulfill a requirement of their introductory psychology course. Subjects were given six scenarios in random order that asked:

Imagine that you are in a singles bar and a college student of the opposite sex, about age 21, who is fairly good looking, comes up to you and says "HI." What are the chances that you would talk to the individual, at least for a few minutes?

The six scenarios were identical except for the opening line, which included the six approaches used in Experiment 1. Responses were indicated on a 5-point scale, ranging from *definitely would not talk* to *definitely would talk*. After indicating their likely behavior, subjects were asked to rate the individual who approached them on 13 personal attributes using 6-point scales. The attributes included unsociable/sociable; dull/bright; unsexy/sexy; submissive/dominant; dishonest/honest; cruel/kind; irresponsible/responsible; naive/shrewd; vain/modest; unattractive/attractive; bad as parent/great as parent; likely to have an extramarital affair/unlikely to have an extramarital affair; likely to end up poor/likely to end up rich.³

TABLE 3 Experiment 3: Rating of the Likelihood of Talking and Percentage Indicating a High Likelihood as a Function of Opening Line and Gender

	<i>Female Subjects</i>	<i>Male Subjects</i>
I feel embarrassed		
rating	3.56 ^a	4.54 ^b
percentage	55.32 ^a	85.00 ^b
Ask your name		
rating	3.83 ^a	4.35 ^b
percentage	68.09 ^a	85.00 ^b
Hi		
rating	4.19 ^a	4.63 ^b
percentage	87.23	97.50
What do you think of the band?		
rating	3.83	4.05
percentage	63.83	65.00
You remind me of date		
rating	2.67 ^a	3.71 ^b
percentage	17.02 ^a	52.50 ^b
Bet I can outdrink you		
rating	2.30 ^a	3.03 ^b
percentage	21.28	35.00

Note: Female subjects, $n = 47$; male subjects, $n = 40$. Entries in the same row with different subscripts differ $p < .05$.

Results

The rated likelihood of talking and the percentages of males and females who indicated that they probably or definitely would talk in response to the opening lines are presented in Table 3, with significant gender differences evident in responses to the two direct and one of the cute-flippant lines.⁴ Females responded more positively to "Hi" and less positively to "I feel embarrassed" in the scenarios of the third study compared to the field results, whereas men responded less positively to the line "You remind me of someone" on paper than in vivo. The response rate to the other lines, in contrast, were remarkably consistent between field and laboratory studies. Differences in the college versus bar subject population, the scoring of the dependent variable, the immediacy of the stimulus, or the time of day when the line was being considered could have been responsible for the observed differences.

TABLE 4 Experiment 3: Mean and Variability of Self-Reports of Chances of Talking and Personality Attributions as a Function of Gender

	Mean		Variability	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Chances of talking	20.17 ^a	24.40 ^b	1.06	1.11
Sociable	25.00	26.00	1.65	1.73
Bright	20.15 ^a	22.38 ^b	1.62	1.63
Sexy	21.15 ^a	22.98 ^b	1.66	1.60
Dominant	23.36	23.51	1.69	1.68
Honest	23.36	24.23	1.67	1.65
Responsible	21.78	22.51	1.60	1.72
Kind	23.94	24.49	1.64	1.66
Shrewd	20.89	21.93	1.34	1.48
Modest	20.57	21.87	1.85	2.02
Attractive	22.87	23.83	1.40	1.40
Good parent	20.36	19.64	1.32	1.61
No affairs	19.64	19.83	1.90	2.14
Rich	20.26	20.90	1.49	1.43

Note: Female subjects, $n = 47$; male subjects, $n = 40$. Entries in the same row with different subscripts differ $p < .05$.

The female and male self-reports for the likelihood of talking and the personality attributions, summed across opening lines, are presented in Table 4. Male responsiveness was evident in their greater likelihood that they would talk to an approaching stranger, and their estimation that a female stranger would be bright rather than dull, and sexy rather than unsexy.

The variability measures presented in Table 4 were calculated by computing for *each* individual the variance among his or her six assessments of each personality dimension (see Snyder & Monson, 1975). The variability measure provided an index of the mean extent to which males and females altered their judgments of a trait as a function of the opening line. Males and females were found to display equivalent levels of variability; males did not appear to be responding mindlessly.

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine the personality attributions that predicted willingness to talk to the opposite-sex stranger, using responses summed across opening-line conditions. The best linear predictor of the females' willingness to talk, $R = .64$, $F(2, 45) = 12.83$, $p < .0001$, was perceived sociability, $\beta = .45$, $t = 2.99$, $p < .005$, plus perceived brightness, $\beta = .27$, $t = 1.80$, $p < .08$. Perceived sexiness, $\beta = .12$, *n.s.*, and perceived dominance, $\beta = -.17$, *n.s.*, were unrelated to females' willingness to talk to a male initiator. Males' willingness to talk was best predicted, $R = .73$, $F(2, 37) = 17.91$, $p < .0001$, by perceived sociability, $\beta = .47$, $t = 2.82$, $p < .008$, plus perceived sexiness, $\beta =$

.33, $t = 2.01$, $p < .05$; no other variable made a significant contribution, perhaps due to a halo effect and high intercorrelation among the personality attribution dimensions.

Contrasts between the genders on their attributions of sociability, brightness, sexiness, and dominance as a function of opening line, plus all other significant post hoc gender differences in attributions are presented in Table 5.⁵ Males rated females who used the "I feel embarrassed" opening line more positively than females rated males, including more sociable, brighter, sexier, more attractive, and likelier to end up rich. Males also rated females using the "ask your name" line as sexier and shrewder than females rated males. Females and males displayed general agreement, however, on their personality attributions for the "ask your name," "Hi," and "What do you think of the band?" lines. Males responded favorably to the line "You remind me of someone I used to date" and judged a female who used that approach as more sociable, brighter, and sexier than females rated males using that approach. Females were more likely than males to see the line "Bet I can outdrink you" as a sign of irresponsibility. Both genders saw someone using that line as relatively dominant and sociable, but not bright or sexy.

Table 5 also presents the correlation between the personality attributions about an individual using a specific opening line and the male and female subjects' estimation that they would stay and talk. The dimensions of sociability, brightness, and sexiness were the most consistent predictors of both males' and females' expectation of continuing a conversation. In 73% of the 11 cases in which females made personality attributions significantly different from those of males, the females' personality attributions also were related to their decision whether or not to stay and talk to the male. On only 18% of the dimensions on which significant gender differences were apparent did males display significant correlations between their personality attributions and their willingness to talk to the female. This difference between males and females was statistically significant, $z = 2.57$, $p < .01$, suggesting that on the dimensions on which females made more negative attributions than males did, they were also more likely to reject the person whose opening line precipitated their judgments, but male positive evaluations on those dimensions did not predict their willingness to talk to the females. Males' decisions to stay and talk, however, often were predicted by those personality attribution dimensions on which males and females did not differ.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The males' self-reported willingness to talk to approaching females was slightly lower in Experiment 3 than in actual public settings, but it was consistently higher than that of the female subjects. Mindlessness did not seem to be responsible for the male responsiveness to the various opening gambits. Males displayed levels of response variability as a function of opening-line conditions that were comparable to those of females. It is possible, however, that

TABLE 5 Experiment 3: Mean Personality Attributions and Correlations with Chances of Talking as a Function of Gender and Opening Line

	<i>Female Subjects</i>		<i>Male Subjects</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Correlation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Correlation</i>
I feel embarrassed				
sociable	3.55 ^a	.30*	4.15 ^b	.12
bright	3.45 ^a	.28	4.50 ^b	.27
sexy	3.53 ^a	.47*	4.20 ^b	.27
dominant	2.92	-.02	3.23	.15
honest	4.51 ^a	.01	5.13 ^b	-.08
attractive	3.77 ^a	.47*	4.45 ^b	.07
rich	3.66 ^a	.38*	4.13 ^b	.20
Ask your name				
sociable	3.78	.35*	3.60	.08
bright	3.45	.52*	3.93	.41*
sexy	3.51 ^a	.46*	3.93 ^b	.39*
dominant	3.51	-.19	3.38	-.12
shrewd	3.32 ^a	.04	3.88 ^b	-.13
Hi				
sociable	5.04	.28	4.90	.43*
bright	4.26	.37*	4.25	.10
sexy	4.55	.46*	4.60	.27
dominant	4.32	.29	4.30	-.02
What do you think of the band?				
sociable	4.49	.38*	4.60	.57*
bright	3.77	.48*	3.68	.60*
sexy	3.77	.51*	3.70	.73*
dominant	4.00	.41*	3.88	.37*
You remind me of date				
sociable	4.13	.61*	4.45	.74*
bright	2.89 ^a	.66*	3.48 ^b	.03
sexy	3.15 ^a	.43*	3.85 ^b	.43*
dominant	4.09	.19	4.18	.33*
Bet I can outdrink you				
sociable	4.02	.43*	4.05	.80*
bright	2.34	.55*	2.55	.39*
sexy	2.64	.44*	2.70	.39*
dominant	4.53	-.03	4.62	.30*
responsible	1.89 ^a	.54*	2.33 ^b	.24

Note: Female subjects, $n = 47$; male subjects, $n = 40$. Entries in the same row with different subscripts differ $p < .05$.

the use of college students rather than bar patrons, and paper-and-pencil methodology rather than an actual approach ensured relatively careful rather than mindless processing of the stimuli.

The content of the opening line influenced personality attributions and provided some indication of the processes that might have influenced subjects' responses in Experiments 1 and 2. A portion of the male responsiveness to the line "You remind me of someone I used to date," for example, may have been due to the males' perceiving the line as a compliment and seeing the communicator as bright and sexy, an inference not made by the female subjects.

Judgments of the sociability of the initiators were predictors of the willingness of both males and females to pursue a conversation. Judgments of sexiness were closely related to males' interest in the stranger but were not related to females' willingness to stay and talk. Further, males attributed greater sexiness to the individuals whose lines they liked than did females. Such results are consistent with other studies that found males to overattribute sexual interest to females (Abbey, 1982).

Female selectivity, and gender-related inference processes, were evident in the females' tendency to be generally more critical than males of the brightness of those whom they were evaluating. Further, female attributions of brightness and sociability were the best predictors of their decisions as to whether or not they would stay and talk. Although males did not seem to have responded mindlessly, the females' attributions concerning the personal qualities associated with the use of the opening lines were more closely correlated than were males' with their decision whether to stay and talk. Thus the rejecting responses of females to the "Bet I can outdrink you" opening line seemed due to the females' attributing dullness and irresponsibility to the initiator. In contrast, males' judgment of responsibility was not significantly related to their decision to talk to a person who used that line.

Both of the cute-flippant lines were associated with strong attributions of dominance by females, but such perceptions did not increase their attraction. Apparently, females do not appreciate dominance traits when the assertive behaviors are directed at them personally. Yet such reactions may not discourage some males from using cute-flippant lines. Kleinke et al. noted that the cute/flippant line may be employed to downplay the seriousness of the heterosexual approach and protect the ego from rejection. As such, the use of cute-flippant lines could represent a form of self-handicapping. Humorous opening gambits that do not convey the impression of irresponsibility or dominance, however, might produce more positive responses than the cute-flippant lines tested here.

In conclusion, the present experiments demonstrated that females manifested greater selectivity than males by demonstrating a consistently lower willingness to talk to a stranger who approached them, by appearing to base their decisions on their perception of the presence or absence of important, stable personal qualities, such as brightness and sociability, and by displaying a close

correspondence between their personal attributions and their approach or avoidance responses to the potential mate. Females were particularly likely to reject males who employ cute-flippant lines, which seems to be based on their tendency to attribute negative personal qualities to men who employ such opening gambits. Males' responsiveness was evident in their strong willingness to converse with the females across opening-line conditions, by the close correspondence of their attributions of sexiness to their willingness to talk to the female, and by the weaker relation of their other personal quality attributions with their decision about whether or not they would stay and talk.

The present results were consistent in indicating that females should feel more self-confident than males about the chances of a positive response when approaching an opposite-sex stranger in a singles bar, even when using a poorly chosen opening gambit. But a male who tries to be devastatingly clever with a female may simply devastate his chances of success.

NOTES

¹The other two preferred lines were "That's a very pretty [sweater, dress, etc.] you have on" and "Do you want to dance?" The other four cute-flippant lines were "Is that really your hair?" "Wow [looking at woman's jewelry], it looks like you just robbed Woolworth's!" "Your place or mine?" and "I play the field and I think I just hit a home run with you."

²Kleinke et al. classified this line as both innocuous and cute-flippant, which seemed plausible if it were delivered in a sarcastic tone of voice. If presented sincerely, however, its meaning seems similar to the other direct line.

³Subjects also completed questions concerning their background, dating history, experience in singles bars, alcohol consumption, and self-reported sociability. The only variable that predicted willingness to talk to the target was the single-item measure of sociability, males $r(38) = .32, p < .05$; females $r(45) = .37, p < .05$.

⁴The average age of the male subjects was $M = 19.20, SD = 2.015$, and that of the female subjects was $M = 18.79, SD = 2.92$. As a consequence, the stipulation that the target was "about age 21" may have been more sex role appropriate for the females than for the males and may have influenced response rates. To examine this possibility, a multiple regression equation was computed that tested for the effects of gender, age, and the interaction of gender and age on the willingness to talk, summed across the six opening gambit scenarios. A trend was observed for gender, $t = 1.68, p < .09$, but neither age, $t = 1.12, p < .27$, nor their interaction, $t = 1.10, p < .28$ had a significant effect on willingness to talk.

⁵A table of the mean self-reports, collapsed across gender, of the subjects' willingness to talk to the opposite-sex individuals, and the personality attributions that they made as a function of the specific opening lines, is available from the author.

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