What Makes You Swipe Right?:
Gender Similarity in Interpersonal Attraction
in a Simulated Online Dating Context
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ABSTRACT. Online dating is quickly becoming one of the most popular ways to select a prospective dating partner. With this in mind, we examined 2 factors influencing interpersonal attraction and deliberate evaluations of a partner, facial attractiveness and ambition, in a simulated online dating context. College-age participants viewed an online dating profile that depicted either a more or a less physically attractive college-age individual of the other sex and described the individual as either more ambitious or less ambitious. Participants then completed a brief likeability questionnaire to measure their interpersonal attraction to the person in the profile. Participants rated the profile higher (more favorably) on the scale of interpersonal attraction when it displayed a more physically attractive person, $F(1, 116) = 23.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$. Participants also rated the profile higher when the autobiography depicted a more ambitious person, $F(1, 116) = 20.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$. None of the interactions were significant. This investigation highlighted gender similarity by demonstrating that both women and men viewed physical attractiveness and ambition as desirable characteristics when selecting a potential dating partner.
The processes of self-presentation and impression formation may be different in online and traditional dating. The misrepresentation that occurs in the context of online dating can make it difficult to separate fact from fiction.

Another practice in online dating that differs from face-to-face dating is communication. Nonverbal communication is an important part of impression formation and attraction (Givens, 1978). However, nonverbal cues present in face-to-face dating such as tone of voice, gestures, posture, and mannerisms are not present in electronic message exchanges. In online dating, communication is also asynchronous. Because people are not physically together when communicating, there are often delays between messages. Traditional and online dating encompass differing contexts and practices. Thus, it is important to determine if the same variables, which are important in face-to-face dating, have an effect on online dating.

Factors Influencing Attraction
It is both natural and healthy for human beings to form romantic relationships with others (Buss, 1989; Diener & Oishi, 2005; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Psychological and evolutionary factors play a role in influencing the selection of a potential dating partner. Psychological factors that influence attraction include proximity, mere exposure, similarity, type of relationship, verbal communication patterns, and desirable personality traits such as ambition.

Proximity and physical closeness increase the likelihood of forming relationships (Priest & Sawyer, 1967). People have more frequent encounters with those who are close by. In a classic study examining the effect of proximity on interpersonal attraction, Priest and Sawyer (1967) studied the interactions of students in a dormitory for two semesters. The closer in proximity that students lived to their peers, the more they recognized and liked (were interpersonally attracted to) their peers. Even in the second semester when students recognized peers who lived on the other side of the building, those peers were still liked less than peers who lived closer to the students. The results showed that proximity was a strong predictor of attraction (Priest & Sawyer, 1967).

A phenomenon that often results from proximity is mere exposure. Mere exposure is a phenomenon by which more frequent exposure to and familiarity with a stimulus (e.g., an object, person, song) lead to greater liking of that stimulus (Saegert, Swap, & Zajonc, 1973). Saegert et al. (1973) conducted two studies testing the mere exposure effect and context. Mere exposure was manipulated by varying the number of interactions participants had with each other. Context was manipulated by having participants drink either pleasant or unpleasant tasting beverages. The results showed that attraction increased with the number of interactions, regardless of the context.

Another factor influencing interpersonal attraction is similarity (Montoya & Horton, 2013; Reid & Davis, 2013). Individuals often choose to date those who are similar to them in some way including sharing demographic, physical, personality, and attitude characteristics. A study examining interpersonal attraction and similarity (Reid & Davis, 2013) found that participants were more attracted to partners who, when they first met, held similar attitudes to their own and also to partners who, over time, changed their attitudes to be more like the participants’. Another investigation of interpersonal attraction and similarity (Tidwell & Eastwick, 2012) found that perceived similarity was a stronger predictor of attraction than actual similarity. The researchers found this for specifically perceived similarity (e.g., certain traits and attitudes) as well as general perceived similarity (e.g., how similar individuals felt overall). This may be attributable to people’s tendency to use their schemas to infer additional information about others such as similarity among other traits and attitudes not specifically mentioned.

The type of relationship desired (e.g., short-term vs. long-term or romantic vs. friendship) also influences attraction and selection of a potential dating partner. Regan and Joshi (2003) investigated ideal partner preferences among adolescents, the age when romantic attraction and dating often emerges. Their results indicated that young people have different preferences depending on the length of the relationship. When considering the ideal long-term partner, adolescents emphasized intrinsic qualities such as intelligence and humor. When considering the ideal short-term partner, however, adolescents emphasized externally visible attributes such as physical attractiveness and attributes related to sex drive. The long-term and short-term preferences found in the present study supported previous findings about adult preferences as well (Regan & Joshi, 2003). In another study examining preferences for different relationship types (Sprecher & Regan, 2002), women and men generally preferred several
desirable traits including kindness, expressiveness, and a sense of humor. However, they desired a higher level of these desirable traits in a romantic partner than in a friend. People also preferred a date or romantic partner to have a higher level of physical attractiveness than they preferred a friend to have.

Previous research has suggested that communication patterns play in attraction. Wright, Bates, and Ferguson (2007) examined the effects of stereotypically masculine and feminine communication patterns on attraction. The results indicated that both women and men showed a preference for stereotypically feminine patterns of communication such as offering empathy and support, sharing experiences, and asking questions. Women strongly preferred this open pattern of communication, and men slightly favored this pattern, suggesting gender convergence. Gender differences occurred only in intensity of attraction toward this communication pattern (Wright et al., 2007).

Along with psychological factors, researchers and theorists have considered evolutionary factors that may influence attractions. Evolutionary factors that influence the selection of a potential mate include resource possession, reproductive capability, and physical attractiveness. Women tend to prefer a mate who possesses resources or is likely to acquire resources. These resources can help offspring survive. Thus, women are attracted to men who demonstrate characteristics associated with resource acquisition such as industriousness, earning capacity, and ambition. Across cultures, women value ambition in a mate more than men do (Buss, 1989; Eagly & Wood, 1999). In contrast, men tend to prefer a mate who has reproductive capability. Thus, men are attracted to women who possess characteristics associated with fertility such as youth and physical attractiveness (a sign of health). Crosscultural research (Eagly & Wood, 1999) offered strong support for the prediction that males value physical attractiveness more than women do. Although traits considered as attractive can vary across cultures such as weight and skin color, some characteristics related to physical attractiveness are universal. For example, traits associated with youth and fertility such as smooth skin, full lips, and muscle tone are considered attractive across many cultures (Buss, 1989; Eisenthal, Dror, & Ruppin, 2006). Typically, average faces are seen as more attractive because unusual facial features can be associated with hereditary disease or reproductive problems. There is also some evidence that extreme or exaggerated facial features can be seen as attractive, so long as bilateral symmetry is present (Eisenthal et al., 2006).

Physical attractiveness has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of interpersonal attraction. Although physical attractiveness tends to be considered more important by men, it is also a strong predictor of attraction for women. Physical attractiveness is such an important factor in dating because the level of physical attractiveness is immediately visible to others. Other characteristics such as a sense of humor and intelligence can take time to discern, whereas good looks are detected instantaneously. First impressions are important when selecting a potential dating partner, and physical attractiveness has a large effect on this initial reaction (Olivola, Eastwick, Finkel, Ariely, & Todorov, 2011).

In a classic summary of early research on interpersonal attraction, Byrne and Griffitt (1973) discussed common determinants of attraction. Much of the experimental work they reviewed demonstrated that physical attractiveness was positively related to interpersonal attraction. When a target photo was presented, both women and men rated more physically attractive photos higher on a scale of interpersonal attraction (Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968). Byrne and Griffitt (1973) concluded that physical attractiveness was an important factor in selecting short-term dating partners as well as long-term spouses. Although physical attractiveness is a stronger factor for men, both women and men valued attractiveness when selecting a romantic partner (Stroebe, Insko, Thompson, & Layton, 1971). There was also a positive relationship between prestige and interpersonal attraction (Bond, Byrne, & Diamond, 1968) as well as intellectual competence and interpersonal attraction (Griffitt & Jackson, 1970).

**Overview of Present Research**

Li et al. (2013) conducted four studies to examine whether people’s mate preferences (favoring particular traits) predicted actual attraction to and choice of a date in the early stages of dating. Before each study began, participants filled out a questionnaire indicating the importance of social status and physical attractiveness in a potential date (mate preference). In the first two experiments, researchers manipulated social status and physical attractiveness in an online messaging paradigm. In the second two experiments, the same variables were manipulated in a speed-dating paradigm. After
interacting with the potential dates, participants filled out a survey about how attracted they were to the person, and if they would be interested in going on a date with him or her. Li et al. predicted that physical attractiveness would influence men’s romantic interest more than women’s, and that social status would influence women’s romantic interest more than men’s. The results supported both of their hypotheses. In the pre-study survey, men rated physical attractiveness as more important than women did, and women rated social status as more important than men did. Physical attractiveness increased both men’s and women’s evaluations of the potential dates, with whom they interacted in the online messaging and speed dating simulations, but it was considered (marginally) more important by men. Social status increased women’s evaluation of the potential dates, with whom they interacted in the simulations, but not men’s.

In an investigation of actual online dating profiles, Brand, Bynatsos, D’Orazio, and DeShong (2012) were interested in whether the online dating environment would level the playing field by allowing less attractive individuals to showcase their appealing personalities. The researchers hypothesized that the more attractive a person was, the more attractive their personal description would be rated. In order to test their hypothesis, the researchers recruited female participants to rate a number of male dating profiles. Each participant evaluated 25 photos and 25 autobiographies from actual dating profiles. The photos and autobiographies from each profile were separated and rated by different judges. Participants rated the photos and autobiographies on attractiveness. Participants were also asked to evaluate the profiles on how kind, confident, intelligent, and funny they thought the target was, in order to examine if those variables had an influence on how profiles were rated. The investigators assessed the relationship between attractiveness in the photos and in the personal descriptions from the profiles. They found that photo attractiveness and personal description attractiveness were correlated. Those who were rated as more physically attractive also had personal descriptions that were rated as more attractive, even though different judges rated each target’s autobiography and pictures. This finding supported the hypothesis that more attractive men’s autobiographies would also be rated as more attractive. The researchers believed that perceived confidence was a mediating variable. The more aware men were of their attractiveness, the more confident they were of themselves, which in turn influenced their personal descriptions. As a result of this mediating relationship, the investigators concluded that online dating does not provide a context that would level the playing field of dating.

Lee, Dubbs, Von Hippel, Brooks, and Zietseh (2014) created a simulation of online dating. They investigated how multiple variables affected women’s and men’s mate preferences in an online dating context. The investigators hypothesized that facial attractiveness, perceived femininity or masculinity, perceived intelligence, and whether participants were asked to consider the profile in the context of a long-term or short-term relationship, would influence participants’ interpersonal attraction and mate selection. They created simulated online dating profiles to study the effects of these variables. Each stimulus included a facial photo and a brief personal description. The profiles varied on four dimensions: facial attractiveness, perceived femininity or masculinity, perceived intelligence, and short-term versus long-term relationship considerations. The investigators also surveyed participants on a set of demographic variables in order to take the potential effect of those variables into consideration. They found that all of the manipulated variables contributed to the participants’ mate preference and interpersonal attraction to the target in the dating profile. Greater masculinization of men’s profiles and greater feminization of women’s profiles increased the ratings of attraction to the target. Perceived intelligence also increased ratings of attraction to the target. An interaction showed that women who were rated as more attractive received higher interpersonal attraction scores when they had an intelligent statement in their profile, compared to women who were rated as less attractive. This was the sole interaction in the study, but the remaining variables had independent and additive effects.

Sritharan, Heilpern, Wilbur, and Gawronski (2010) conducted an online dating simulation to examine two of the variables that influence impression formation and interpersonal attraction during the online dating process. They hypothesized that facial attractiveness and self-described ambition would influence deliberate evaluations of a potential dating partner in an online dating context. The participants (100 heterosexual female college students) viewed one of four possible online dating profiles, which varied by high or low attractiveness, and high or low ambition. Deliberate evaluations were obtained. Participants completed
Interpersonal Attraction as less attractive, but this effect was significantly labeled with the job title “politician” were rated more by women than men because of the association between reproductive capability and physical attractiveness (Buss, 1989; Eagly & Wood, 1999). We predicted that ambition would be valued slightly larger for women. The researchers concluded that female ambition may be a “turn off” for men, and that women with ambitious job titles may intimidate less ambitious men (Shames et al., 2017). Fisman, Iyengar, Kamenica, and Simonsin (2006) found that men avoid women with high levels of ambition as potential mates, especially when the men believe the women’s ambition exceeds their own.

An alternative explanation to consider is a socioeconomic model, where economic realities are considered. In the United States, single-earning households cannot get along well in today’s economic reality (Pew Research Center, 2015), so men in the United States may set aside traditional gender roles in order to meet their economic needs. For an average-sized family in the United States to be considered a member of the middle class in 2014, it needed to earn at least $48,347 annually. On average, dual-earner households earned $102,400, whereas single earner households only earned $55,000. Therefore, the average single earner household barely met the threshold for the middle class. Although the average single-earner household qualified as middle class, they likely still experienced economic disadvantage. Each partner has wage-earning potential, and in order to support a middle class household and quality standard of living today in the United States, dual-earner households are almost necessary (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Additionally, traditional gender roles of the man as the breadwinner and the woman as the housewife are shifting. In 1970 in the United States, only 40.7% of adult women were in the workforce. In 2009, this increased by more than 19% to 59.7% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Therefore, because of the current economic demands and more women in the workforce (a possible indicator of changing gender roles), American men’s reactions to ambitious women may be more positive than they once were. If the socioeconomic model is the better explanation, men would be as interpersonally attracted to ambitious women as women were to ambitious men.

The Present Study
This investigation was partially modeled after the study conducted by Sritharan et al. (2010). This investigation replicated the impression forming task and the deliberate evaluation measure. The current investigation examined the effects of physical attractiveness and ambition on both men’s and women’s evaluations of a potential dating partner, whereas the original study relied on only female participants. Further, the present study offers a different cultural context because it was conducted in the Midwestern United States, and the Sritharan et al. study was conducted in Canada.

We predicted that both facial attractiveness and self-described ambition would have an effect on both women’s and men’s deliberate evaluations of a potential dating partner. We predicted that physical attractiveness would have a larger effect on men’s evaluations than women’s, because of the association between reproductive capability and physical attractiveness (Buss, 1989; Eagly & Wood, 1999). We predicted that ambition would be valued slightly more by women than men because of the association between earning capacity and ambition (Buss, 1989; Eagly & Wood, 1999). Based on traditional sex roles, which hold the man as the breadwinner of the household, male participants may actually be intimidated by ambitious women. A study by Shames, Frankel, and Farjood (2017) investigated women’s political ambition and its influence on attraction. The results indicated that both women and men labeled with the job title “politician” were rated as less attractive, but this effect was significantly

Method
Participants and Design
The procedure of this study was modeled, in part, after the procedure described by Sritharan et al. (2010). Participants were a convenience sample consisting of 116 heterosexual college students, ages 18–22 (65 women and 51 men). Many participants took part in the study in exchange for

a 5-item likability questionnaire about the target in the profile. Spontaneous evaluations were also obtained. Participants viewed a prime stimulus (the attractive or unattractive photo from the impression formation task) followed by a Chinese ideograph. Then, the participants rated the Chinese ideograph as more or less pleasant than the average. In 30 trials, the attractive photo was presented before the Chinese ideograph, in 30 trials, the unattractive photo was presented before the Chinese ideograph, and in 30 trials, a gray square was presented before the Chinese ideograph. Self-described ambition was not manipulated in the spontaneous evaluation task. The results indicated a main effect of attractiveness on spontaneous evaluations and a main effect of both attractiveness and ambition on deliberate evaluations. The investigators concluded that both physical attractiveness and ambition have an effect on the selection of a dating partner.
credit in a variety of different courses offered at the college. The remaining participants were recruited by word of mouth or through student organizations and received no compensation. All participants were recruited from a small, private, four-year, primarily undergraduate, highly residential college located in the upper Midwestern United States. Among the undergraduate student population from which participants were drawn, the average age of the young women was 19.77 years ($SD = 1.21$) and the average age of the young men was 19.70 ($SD = 1.22$). Additionally, 87% identified as European American and 13% identified as students of color. In regards to religion, 41% of undergraduates identified as Roman Catholic, 21% as Protestant, and 38% identified as another religious tradition, no religious tradition, or religious tradition not known. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions in a 2 (ambition) x 2 (physical attractiveness) between-subjects design. Participants viewed a profile including either a more ambitious or less ambitious autobiography and either a more physically attractive or less physically attractive photo. The number of participants in each condition is presented in Table 1.

**Measures**

Deliberate evaluations of the potential dating partner’s profile were measured with the same 5-item likeability questionnaire used in the study conducted by Sritharan et al. (2010). The survey included the following questions: (a) “How much do you like the person in the profile you have just seen?” (b) “Would you like to go out on a date with this person?” (c) “Would you like to be friends with this person?” (d) “Do you think this person is nice?” and (e) “Would you like to get to know this person better?” Each question was answered on a scale that ranged from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). The ratings from each question on the likeability questionnaire were then added together to form a composite score. A higher composite score indicated a more favorable evaluation and increased interpersonal attraction to the target in the profile.

**Procedure**

Before beginning the study, institutional review board approval (FWA #00015576) was given. At the beginning of each experimental session, participants were greeted and then completed an informed consent form. All participants were made aware that the study was a dating simulation and that their participation would end as soon as they left the experimental session. After informed consent was obtained, the investigator asked participants to take a seat in a small room with a computer that displayed the impression formation task on the screen. Participants were asked to view the dating profile that appeared on the screen and then answer a questionnaire about their opinion of the person in the profile. Participants viewed one of four dating profiles of the other sex target for one minute. After viewing the profile, the task advanced automatically and prompted participants to complete the 5-item likeability questionnaire used in Sritharan et al. (2010). After participants completed the survey, they were debriefed, thanked, and dismissed.

**Impression Formation Task**

The impression formation task was modeled after the task used by Sritharan et al. (2010). During the impression formation task, participants viewed one of four hypothetical online dating profiles for one minute. The profile displayed a target of the other sex named either Nick or Nicole. The profile was a similar format to that of popular dating apps and websites. The target’s name was displayed on the left side of the profile, with the target’s age (Nick 22; Nicole 20), occupation (student), and distance from the participant (10 miles away) below. A brief autobiography was displayed under this information. The autobiography in every condition began with basic neutral information about the target including height (Nick 6’0”; Nicole 5’6”), physicality (fit), hobbies (spending time with family and friends), favorite food (pizza), zodiac sign (Gemini), and preferences regarding smoking.

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The information included in the beginning of the autobiography was based on the neutral information used in Sritharan et al., as well as research on the autobiographies of real profiles on common apps and websites. The rest of the autobiography was manipulated to describe Nick or Nicole either as more ambitious or as less ambitious, depending on the condition. Ambition was manipulated using the same information used in the Sritharan et al. study. In the high ambition condition, the target’s autobiography said that the target was applying to several law schools and working hard to keep up good grades. In the low ambition condition, the target’s autobiography said that at one time the target was going to apply to law school, but decided against it because it was too competitive. The low ambition autobiography also indicated that education was unimportant to the target.

The photograph showing the head and shoulders of the target was displayed to the right of the name and autobiography. The photograph on the profile was chosen to be more or less attractive. In the more facially attractive condition, a photo was featured that had been previously rated as more attractive by a convenience sample of twelve 18–22-year-old heterosexual members of the other sex who did not participate in the study. The judges rated eight photographs of the other sex. The photo of the more facially attractive man received an average rating of 8.1 out of 10, which was the highest rating out of the eight photographs. The photo of the less facially attractive man received a mean rating of 3.9 out of 10, which was the lowest rating out of the eight photographs. The same rating procedure was used for the photos of women. The photo of the more facially attractive woman received a mean rating of 7.0 out of 10, and the photo of the less facially attractive women received a mean rating 3.0 out of 10. The photos that appeared in the profiles were selected because they received markedly different ratings of attractiveness (8.1 vs. 3.9; 7.0 vs. 3.0 respectively). Neither was rated as extraordinarily attractive (e.g., a rating of 10) or unattractive (e.g., a rating of 1).

Results

The internal consistency of the interpersonal attraction index was examined using Cronbach’s $\alpha$. Although the internal consistency among the five items was strong, $\alpha = .88$, the question “Do you think this person is nice?” had a markedly lower corrected item-total correlation (0.42) than the others. The researchers chose to omit this question from the measure for subsequent analysis, which increased the internal consistency slightly, $\alpha = .91$. Scores on the revised 4-item likeability questionnaire could range from 0 (a score of 0 on all four questions) to 28 (a score of 7 on all four questions). Means, standard deviations, and ranges of scores on the likeability questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ univariate analysis of variance was conducted to assess the differences in the scores on the likeability questionnaire between women and men among the four dating profile conditions. Participants who viewed the facially attractive target rated the profile higher on the likeability questionnaire than participants who viewed the facially less attractive target, $F(1,116) = 23.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$. Participants who read the ambitious autobiography rated the profile higher on the likeability questionnaire than participants who read the less ambitious autobiography, $F(1,116) = 20.92, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$. The main effect of participant sex was not significant, nor were any of the interactions between the three variables (all $p$’s > .49). Facial attractiveness and ambition had independent and additive effects on interpersonal attraction for both women and men. Women and men rated targets higher on the measure of interpersonal attraction who were more physically attractive and who characterized themselves as more ambitious.

Discussion

The present study investigated the effect of facial attractiveness and ambition on a deliberate measure of interpersonal attraction in a simulated online dating context. As hypothesized, both women and men rated the simulated profile higher on a measure of interpersonal attraction when the autobiography described the individual as ambitious than when the autobiography described the individual as less ambitious. Women and men also rated the simulated profile higher when the photo displayed a physically attractive individual than when the photo displayed a less physically attractive individual. The effects of ambition and physical attractiveness on interpersonal attraction were independent and comparable. The interactive effect of physical attractiveness and ambition was not statistically significant. The magnitude of their effects on interpersonal attraction was comparable as indicated by their identical effect sizes. However, the prediction that physical attractiveness would have a greater effect on interpersonal attraction
for men while ambition would have a greater effect for women was not supported. The effect of both variables on interpersonal attraction was comparable for women and men.

There are a few different explanations that can account for the results of this study. An evolutionary theory of interpersonal attraction helps explain the main effect of facial attractiveness. Physical attractiveness is an indicator of good health and reproductive capability for both sexes (Buss, 1989; Eagly & Wood, 1999). A socioeconomic model helps explain the main effect for ambition because ambition is an indicator of resource acquisition and financial success (Buss, 1989; Eagly & Wood, 1999). Each partner has wage-earning potential, and dual-earning households are almost necessary today in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2015). Thus, an ambitious partner is desirable for both women and men.

A trait perspective can be used to explain the main effect of ambition. People associate traits with either a positive or negative feeling through a process of classical conditioning. According to research conducted by Anderson (1968), the trait ambition has a positive connotation. A list of personality-trait words was rated for likeability, and ambition was ranked 59 out of 555 on that list. Thus, someone who lacks ambition in one aspect of life such as not applying to law school may lack ambition in other aspects of life such as work or vacationing. Lacking ambition has a negative connotation and can be associated with other negative traits such as being lazy, which was ranked 469 out of 555 using Anderson’s likeability scale. The effect of ambition on attraction can also be explained by specific perceived similarity (Tidwell & Earwick, 2012). All participants in the study were college students. Ambition is related to participation in college and furthering one’s education. Thus, the ambitious autobiography, which included applying to law school as an indicator of ambition, might have also tapped into specific perceived similarity (e.g., participant and target sharing the trait of ambition).

These findings were also consistent with previous research. Sritharan et al. (2010) also found a main effect for ambition and a main effect for physical attractiveness. Lee et al. (2014) found that multiple variables including facial attractiveness had an effect on interpersonal attraction. Byrne and Griffitt (1973), summarizing earlier research, reported that, in studies where a target photo was displayed, participants rated more physically attractive photos higher on an interpersonal attraction scale.

Although much of the interpersonal attraction and mate selection literature has highlighted gender differences (Buunk, Dijkstra, Fetchenhauer, & Kenrick, 2002; Evans & Brase, 2007; Mardhekar & Aradhye, 2010; Townsend & Wasserman, 1998; Wiederman, 1993), the present study offered support for gender congruence. Women and men may actually value many of the same characteristics when selecting a potential mate. Wright et al. (2007) found that women and men both preferred their partners to have a stereotypically feminine communication pattern. Cramer, Schaeffer, and Reid (1996) also found evidence for gender similarity in mate selection. The results indicated that possessing traits associated with reproductive success (women who are attractive and sexually responsive; men who are college-educated with a good earning capacity) leads to gender convergence in mate preferences. They used sexual strategies theory as an explanation for this convergence. Sexual strategies theory asserts that women and men must solve both common and gender-specific problems for short-term as well as long-term mates. Thus, both women and men prefer mates who possess traits that offer a solution to a common mating problem, reproductive success (Cramer et al., 1996).

There were several limitations to this investigation. The study was only a simulation and participants were aware of this. Participants did not arrange a date with any of the targets. This hindered the experimental realism of the study. Participant characteristics such as additional demographic, attitudinal, and behavioral data were not collected. It cannot be determined if any participant characteristic was associated with a preference for a more ambitious or attractive potential dating partner. This study only tested college-age individuals in one region of the United States, which limited the ability to draw conclusions about individuals in other age groups and regions. A self-report measure was used to measure interpersonal attraction, which hindered validity. The self-report measure of preferences may not be correlated with the actual behavior of the participants. Participants’ implicit evaluations were not measured. The stimuli could be seen as a limitation because only two different photos and two different autobiographies were presented. Including multiple high and low attractiveness photos and a variety of different ambition-related autobiographies could increase generalizability.
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because participants would respond to a variety of indicators of attractiveness and ambition.

The findings from this investigation suggest possibilities for future research. It would be advantageous to conduct a field study to increase external validity. Researchers could post profiles on actual dating websites or applications and observe a variety of behaviors such as swiping right, sending a message, or trying to stage a meeting. A field study would be able to study not just preference, but actual behavior that takes initiative and might lead to an encounter. If a trait perspective is the best explanation, other characteristics, aside from ambition and the traits connected with the attractiveness stereotype, could be studied to see if women and men value them equally and to see if they influence interpersonal attraction. For example, there is research to support humor’s influence on attraction in traditional dating (Murstein & Brust, 1985; Sprecher & Regan, 2002). Researchers could investigate whether humor is typically used in online dating profiles as a strategy to attract a mate. They could also examine whether humor conveyed in online dating profiles effectively influences interpersonal attraction, and if the effect is similar for both women and men.

There are practical and theoretical implications of the study’s findings. The findings add to the understanding of how potential dating partners are selected in an online context. The results provide an optimistic view for individuals who are not both physically attractive and ambitious. Having both qualities is better, but not necessarily imperative to spark interpersonal attraction. Profiles that displayed the target as physically attractive but less ambitious or ambitious but less physically attractive still received moderately favorable scores of interpersonal attraction on the likeability questionnaire. These findings also demonstrate that women and men place similar value on ambition and physical attractiveness when evaluating a potential partner, whereas a lot of current research highlights gender differences (Buunk et al., 2002; Evans & Brase, 2007; Mardhekar & Aradhye, 2010; Townsend & Wasserman, 1998; Wiederman, 1992). The present research highlights gender similarities. This differs from what popular stereotypes suggest. This research shows that women and men value the same traits (ambition and physical attractiveness) when selecting a potential dating partner.

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**Questions related to the PhD in school psychology’s accreditation status should be directed to the Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation, American Psychological Association, 750 First St. NE, Washington, D.C. 20002; (202) 336-5979; apaaccred@apa.org or apa.org/ed/accreditation.
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DR. NAHID AZIZ
Associate Professor at the American School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University | Northern Virginia

Dr. Aziz is committed to mentorship, training, and addressing issues relevant to the ethnic and racial diversity.

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