

THE EFFECT OF A WOMAN'S SMILE ON MEN'S COURTSHIP BEHAVIOR

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Previous studies have found that various nonverbal behaviors performed by women are associated with men approaching. A female confederate was instructed either to smile or to not smile at a man when entering a bar. It was found that those men who were smiled at approached the woman and considered her more favorably. This effect is explained in accordance with studies that found smiling enhanced attractiveness and that a smile is interpreted to be a signal of a woman's interest towards a man.

Keywords: nonverbal influence, smile, courtship behavior.

Tidd and Lockard (1978) found that patrons in a bar gave significantly larger tips to a waitress who approached them with a broad smile than with a minimal smile. Guéguen and Fischer-Lokou (2004) found that female hitchhikers received more help from motorists when smiling, while male hitchhikers received the same amount regardless of smiling. In a similar vein, Solomon et al. (1981) found that, in a large department store, a smiling woman waiting near the elevator door received more help (information about the floor where the umbrellas were sold) than a nonsmiling woman. A woman's smile is associated with more helpful behavior from men, and the research also found that women smiling is highly associated with men's courtship behaviors. Lockard, McVittie, and Isaac (1977) asked a female confederate to go into an elevator where a man was present. It was found that the distance between the participant and the female confederate decreased when she smiled while entering the elevator. Moore (1985) found that in a mate relevant context, women who were approached by men exhibited

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higher average frequencies of nonverbal displays toward those men, such as smiling, tossing the head, caressing an object, or flinging back their hair. Moore and Butler (1989) found that the exhibition versus nonexhibition of such nonverbal behaviors could predict the likelihood of men approaching women. Walsh and Hewitt (1985) found that a female confederate in a bar who smiled after establishing an eye contact with a man was more likely to be approached. Therefore it seems that a woman smiling at a man enhances her attractiveness in courtship contexts. Furthermore, in this later experiment smiling was combined with several kinds of eye contact and several smiles were displayed. So the effect of smiling alone still remains in question. Therefore, we carried out an experiment testing the effect of a smile alone on male's interest, in a field setting. Given the positive effect of smiling found in previous studies, we hypothesized that women's smiling would be more positively associated with males approaching compared to not smiling.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 100 men (approximate age of 20 to 26) present in a bar in a medium-sized town (more than 70,000 inhabitants) located in the west of France on the Atlantic coast of Brittany.

PROCEDURE

A twenty-year-old woman was used as the confederate in this experiment (height = 5.40 feet (164 centimeters), weight = 120.23 pounds, Body Mass Index (BMI) = 20.0, Waist to Hip Ratio (WHR) = .70). She was selected from a group of female students who volunteered for this experiment because she was rated by 15 male students as having average physical attractiveness. When entering the bar, the confederate established eye contact with a man who was alone and seated at a table on the pavement area of the bar. According to a random distribution, the confederate was instructed, in the experimental condition, to smile at the participant for two seconds and then to look away. In the control condition, the confederate was instructed to maintain her eye contact with the man for two seconds and then to look away, but she was also instructed not to smile. After this nonverbal interaction, the confederate was instructed to sit at a table near the participant and to begin to read a magazine. As soon as she was seated, a male observer who was seated on a public bench in front of the pavement area of the bar started a chronometer which beeps every 30 seconds. The observer was instructed to note if the participant approached the confederate and, if not, he was instructed to look at the participant at each 30-second interval in order to see if the participant looked in the woman's direction. After 10 minutes, the

observer was instructed to stand up. The confederate also stood up at this point and if she was in conversation with the participant, she was instructed to leave on the pretext that she had an important appointment.

RESULTS

With 100 participants observed (50 in each group) it was found that more participants approached the confederate when she had smiled at them (11/50) than in the no smile control condition (2/50). The difference was statistically significant (χ^2 Yates Corrected (1, $N = 100$) = 5.66, $p = .017$, $r = .26$). For the participants who made no verbal contact during the observational period, the mean of glances was 7.02 ($SD = 3.40$) in the smiling condition and 2.01 ($SD = 1.91$) in the no-smiling control condition. Again the difference was significant (t (85, Two tailed) = 8.67, $p < .001$, $d = 1.88$).

DISCUSSION

In this experiment, it was found that a smiling woman was more attractive to a man and that smiling increased both the number of males who approached and the nonverbal behavior exhibited towards the woman confederate. This effect could be explained by the attractiveness enhancing property of a smile. Otta, Pereira, Delavati, Pimentel, and Pires (1993) and Reis et al. (1993) found that smiling increased the physical attractiveness of a target. It could be that in this experiment, because female confederates became more attractive when smiling, they were more favorably approached or observed. It is also possible that smiling is perceived by the men as an expression of a woman's interest in them. Moore and Butler (1989) found that the expression of nonverbal behaviors like smiling, tossing the head, caressing an object, and flinging back one's hair at a male predicted the probability of the man's approach. As shown in our experiment, smiling is sufficient to facilitate a man's approach.

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