

HOW DO LADIES FLIRT? PERCEIVED ATTRACTIVENESS, SEXUAL ORIENTATION,
AND TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY-FEMININITY.

by

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ABSTRACT

SAMUEL CLARKSON. How Do Ladies Flirt? Perceived Attractiveness, Sexual Orientation, and Traditional Masculinity-Femininity.
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Flirting is crucial in romance, yet so little is known about how non-heterosexual people, such as lesbian women, flirt. Flirtatious behaviors communicate interest and are shaped by gender roles in heterosexual exchanges. Men actively pursue women (direct), while women passively await men's attention (indirect). Beauty takes higher priority for women than men in this dynamic. However, less emphasis is placed on beauty and adherence to gender roles in lesbian romance. Lesbians may flirt directly or indirectly in expression of their masculinity-femininity. This study sought to examine the relationship between women's self-perceived attractiveness and their willingness to flirt across sexual orientation, as well as the significance of masculinity-femininity in how lesbian women flirt. A sample of 350 women, 175 straight women and 175 lesbian women, was recruited through Prolific. Participants completed measures of self-perceived attractiveness and masculinity-femininity, and rated the likelihood of engaging in flirtatious behaviors in response to three hypothetical scenarios. Sexual orientation did not moderate the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to flirt. Self-perceived attractiveness equally predicted the willingness of straight and lesbian women to initiate flirtation. It is unclear if traditional masculinity-femininity predicts the directness of flirtation in lesbian women based on this data alone. Implications for future research are discussed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	v
INTRODUCTION	1
What is Flirting?	2
Traditional Gender Roles and Flirting	4
Flirting Across Sexual Orientation	5
Self-Perceived Attractiveness	6
The Current Study	7
METHODS	10
RESULTS	14
Self-Perceived Attractiveness and Flirtation Across Sexual Orientation	17
Traditional Masculinity-Femininity and Flirtation Directness in Lesbian Women	20
DISCUSSION	24
REFERENCES	29
APPENDIX A: Demographics	31
APPENDIX B: Self-Perceived Attractiveness	32
APPENDIX C: Traditional Masculinity-Femininity (TMF) Scale	33
APPENDIX D: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory	34
APPENDIX E: Hypothetical Scenarios	35

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations	15
Table 2. Results of Self-Perceived Attractiveness, Sexual Orientation, and the Interaction Between Self-Perceived Attractiveness and Sexual Orientation Predicting Flirtation	18
Table 3. Results of Self-Perceived Attractiveness, Traditional Masculinity-Femininity, and the Interaction between Self-Perceived Attractiveness and Traditional Masculinity-Femininity Predicting Indirect Flirtation in Lesbian Women	21
Table 4. Results of Self-Perceived Attractiveness, Traditional Masculinity-Femininity, and the Interaction between Self-Perceived Attractiveness and Traditional Masculinity-Femininity Predicting Direct Flirtation in Lesbian Women	23

INTRODUCTION

Flirtatious behavior has been thoroughly examined by scientists across many disciplines for decades, yet there remain a few questions to be answered as to how people communicate romantic interest. Namely, it's unclear how flirtation takes place within non-heterosexual populations, such as lesbian women. It has been well-established by this point that initiating flirtation is inherently risky given the possibility of romantic rejection, and people usually gauge their risk of being rejected based upon their own self-perceived romantic desirability. Physical beauty occupies a unique place in this conversation. While highly valued within the dating market generally, beauty takes higher priority in the perceived romantic desirability of women than men due to societal expectations.

This is compounded by different expectations for behavior within flirtatious exchanges based on gender norms. While men are expected to take the active role in a flirtatious encounter through more direct flirtatious behaviors, women are expected to play a passive role through more indirect flirtatious behaviors. This heteronormative flirtation script is quite structured, but it's unknown if this translates to homosexual flirtation between women. Less emphasis is placed on beauty in lesbian courtship, and lesbian women are allowed more flexibility in terms of behavior during flirtation (Rose, 1996; Clark et al., 2021). This fluidity in flirtatious behavior may intersect with traditional masculinity-femininity in lesbian women who may elect to flirt in a way that best reflects their own self-image. The current study will examine the association between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to risk rejection to initiate flirtation in women across sexual orientation, as well as the relationship between traditional masculinity-femininity and directness of flirtation in lesbian women.

What is Flirting?

Flirtation refers to behaviors intended to signal romantic or sexual interest in order to achieve interpersonal goals (Serafeimidis, 2018). Flirtatious behaviors have been examined through a variety of theoretical lenses, namely evolutionary theory, social learning theory, and social script theory (Moore, 2010). Evidence suggests that people use a range of behaviors to signal interest that vary according to their goals. For instance, people tend to use more physical flirtatious behaviors that involve touching when sexually interested in the target, but exercise caution in a respectful manner if interested in forming a romantic relationship (Hall et al., 2010). Although the motivations to flirt may vary from a boost in self-esteem to just a bit of fun, the core evolutionary role of flirtatious behaviors in social interactions would be to initiate courtship with a potential mate in the hopes of establishing a short or long-term romantic and/or sexual relationship (Apostolou & Christoforou, 2020).

Flirtation is an implicitly understood aspect of human interaction as most people are able to describe and identify actions meant to communicate romantic interest (Moore, 2010). Often, these actions are intentionally ambiguous, and it is ultimately the responsibility of the recipient to determine what is being communicated. Although this ambiguity also allows for error in communication, this is largely an advantageous feature of flirtation as it allows for individuals to assess the romantic interest of a potential mate without the risk of incurring any serious interpersonal consequences (Moore, 2010).

Intentionally signaling romantic interest to another is an incredibly risky act as it could result in the emotional pain of rejection. Thus, an approach-avoid conflict emerges as people are simultaneously motivated to pursue interpersonal gains and to protect themselves from rejection (Murray et al., 2008). The risk-regulation model of social behavior provides an explanation for

how individuals approach this issue. The decision to initiate flirtation by signaling interest is made in accordance with the expected likelihood of rejection based on a rough estimate of the other person's romantic interest in oneself, which is itself based on evaluations of oneself (Murray et al., 2006). This is why higher evaluations of one's own mate value predict a greater likelihood of initiating flirtation than lower evaluations of one's own mate value when there is considerable risk of rejection (Cameron et al., 2013).

It is due to this risk of rejection that the vast majority of actions performed in the early stages of a flirtatious encounter are typically non-verbal as opposed to verbal (Moore, 2010). Non-verbal flirtatious behaviors are more ambiguous in nature than verbal flirtatious behaviors, which are more explicit, and so have less severe consequences. Observational research has shed light on the non-verbal behaviors that are frequently used to convey romantic interest (Moore, 2010). Common non-verbal flirtatious behaviors include prolonged eye contact, flirtatious glances, smiling, suggestive touching, nodding in agreement, increased physical proximity, and orientation of the body towards the person of interest (Moore, 2010). Prolonged eye contact is the most common non-verbal gesture used to signal romantic interest to a target of interest. While non-verbal flirtatious behaviors are intended to convey romantic interest, there is enough ambiguity for the recipient to potentially mistake these gestures for mere friendliness, and so there's a lesser risk of experiencing pain from rejection (Moore, 2010).

This ambiguity relates to the directness of flirting behavior, or the extent to which one's romantic interest (as well as one's goal/intention) is made explicitly clear to the recipient through the flirtatious behavior (Cameron et al., 2013). Direct flirtatious behaviors are more straightforward and make the actor's interest in the recipient unmistakable, whereas indirect flirtatious behaviors are more subtle and ambiguous. A key difference between the two is that

direct flirtation effectively forces the target to respond by either accepting or rejecting the advance. Thus, flirting directly is more of a “high risk, high reward” approach compared to flirting indirectly which is the “safer” approach that’s ambiguous enough not to force a response, and so less likely to end in rejection (Cameron et al., 2013).

Traditional Gender Roles and Flirting

Although individual flirtatious behaviors vary, the “dance of courtship” is an extraordinarily organized affair that follows a very strict script in relation to the sequencing of events (Metts & Mikucki, 2008). Typically, non-verbal signals are employed to communicate interest, effectively extending an invitation for a romantic approach from the target, which then sets the stage for a direct, verbal flirtatious interaction.

Within this model of courtship, men and women are expected to play very different roles (Lamont, 2021). Expectations concerning traditional gender roles are a major component of flirtation in the heterosexual population as men and women typically perform different actions to signal interest, and the qualities widely associated with the desirability of potential mates differ in men and women (Lamont, 2021; Apostolou & Christoforou, 2020). According to gender norms around courtship, men are expected to take on the role of “the initiator” by actively pursuing the affection of women, while women are expected to play “the gatekeeper” in reaction to men’s advances (Lamont, 2021).

In order to not violate these gender norms, heterosexual women most often choose to initiate flirtation through indirect behaviors meant to catch the eye of a man so as to invite an interpersonal approach, and then await a response (Serafeimidis, 2018). Women have been shown to use over 50 non-verbal gestures (glancing, smiling, fixing their hair, etc.) to attract men’s attention, all of which allow for some level of ambiguity such that they are indirect, as

opposed to direct, in nature (Metts & Mikucki, 2008). Men, on the other hand, report using direct methods to initiate flirtation, but use indirect signals to assess the other party's interest (Moore, 2010). This dichotomy of gender roles in flirtation is illustrated by the fact that women are capable of vividly describing the non-verbal flirtation that takes place during courtship (i.e., "the woman's job"), but struggle to describe the behaviors that immediately precede sexual activity initiation (i.e., "the man's job") (Moore, 2010).

Flirting Across Sexual Orientation

The strict dichotomy of gender roles in flirtatious behavior is, for obvious reasons, less relevant to instances of homosexual flirtation between two members of the same gender. Although homosexual flirtation may be less influenced by gender roles, homosexual individuals are likely influenced by the traditional heteronormative model of flirtation due to how they have been socialized according to their gender in combination with a lack of non-heteronormative alternatives (Rose, 1996). As a result, non-heterosexual people most likely follow a slightly modified version of the traditional, heteronormative romance script during flirtatious encounters.

Lesbian women, in particular, occupy an interesting place in this conversation. A study conducted by Rose and Zand (2002) with a sample of gay women found perceived freedom from the restrictions imposed by traditional gender roles to be one of the most frequently reported defining aspects of lesbian relationships. Furthermore, many lesbians report the use of both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine courtship behaviors during past flirtatious encounters with other women. This would suggest that, compared to heterosexual women, there is significantly more fluidity in the "roles" (i.e., "initiator", "gatekeeper") that lesbian women play in the early stages of romantic courtship (Rose & Zand, 2002).

However, lesbian flirtation between women still resembles heterosexual flirtation in the sequence of events characterized by indirect, non-verbal signals that invite a direct, verbal approach (Clark et al., 2021). While there may be more fluidity in the roles available to lesbians to play in this process, many lesbian women may be predisposed towards one role over the other. In fact, lesbian women may choose to play a particular role during flirtation as a form of self-expression (Clark et al., 2021). While examining lesbian courtship and relationships across different age groups, Rose and Zand (2002) noticed that lesbians who consistently report playing one role (“initiator” or “gatekeeper”) in past flirtatious experiences also report engaging in corresponding traditionally masculine or feminine behaviors in relationships. Clark et al. (2021) expanded upon this by examining the roles of gender and sexual orientation in flirting finding that masculinity-femininity predicted flirtatious behavior in women across sexual orientation. It’s likely that, given the freedom from rigid gender roles, lesbian women may elect to flirt with other women in a way that is in keeping with their own self-image (Clark et al., 2021).

Self-Perceived Attractiveness

Given the evolutionary significance of physical attractiveness in mating (i.e., attractive features indicate good health and reproductive potential), it’s not surprising that beauty is highly valued across the board in the dating market (Bale & Archer, 2013). Given that willingness to risk romantic rejection hinges upon one’s perceptions of their own romantic desirability, it stands to reason that a relationship would exist between self-perceived attractiveness and willingness to initiate flirtation (Teng et al., 2022).

However, it is likely that this relationship may vary in strength across gender. If so, scripts pertaining to romance may be responsible for this difference in the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and willingness to initiate flirtation across gender. Within the

culturally predominant courtship script, men are the strong, active pursuers and women are the beautiful, passively desirable recipients of attention (Rose, 1996). This is why physical beauty is prioritized to a much greater degree in women than men (Bale & Archer, 2013). Yet, it remains unclear as to how significant self-perceived attractiveness is in terms of the self-perceived romantic desirability, and subsequent willingness to initiate flirtation, of lesbian women compared to heterosexual women.

The Current Study

This study will examine the potential relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to risk rejection to initiate flirtation in women as moderated by sexual orientation, as well as the relationship between traditional masculinity-femininity and flirtation directness in lesbian women. To do so, correlational data will be collected and analyzed in order to test three separate hypotheses.

Given the evolutionary significance of physical attractiveness in perceived mate value, I expect to find a positive main effect between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to flirt. However, I hypothesize that higher self-perceived attractiveness will be associated with willingness to initiate flirtation *to a greater degree* in straight women than lesbian women. According to societal ideas surrounding traditional romance, physical beauty is a key aspect of a woman's romantic desirability (Rose, 1996). Within the traditional, heteronormative romance script, the woman is the alluring object of affection who incites the desire of the man with her beauty. However, traditional gender role ideology has less influence over the flirting patterns of homosexual individuals than heterosexual individuals, and a less priority is placed upon physical attractiveness in lesbian media (VanderMolen, 2013; Rose, 1996). As a result, it's likely that heterosexual women interested in men will place more value in their physical attractiveness in

terms of their self-perceived mate value than lesbian women who are interested in women. Self-perceived attractiveness may not have as much influence over lesbian women as a group who follow a modified version of this script that involves less rigidity in the roles to be performed during flirtation with less emphasis on physical beauty (Rose & Zand, 2002; Rose, 1996). This may culminate in levels of self-perceived attractiveness having a greater impact on the willingness to initiate flirtation in heterosexual women than lesbian women.

Although the association between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to initiate flirtation may possibly be weaker in lesbian women than heterosexual women, it is also possible that self-perceived attractiveness may interact with traditional femininity-masculinity to predict the directness of flirtation in lesbian women. Lesbian women who identify as being more feminine may prefer to play “the gatekeeper” within flirtatious encounters, and lesbian women who identify as being more masculine may prefer to play “the initiator” (Clark et al., 2021). The traditionally female role of “the gatekeeper” is characterized by the more passive use of indirect flirtatious behaviors, while the traditionally male role of “the initiator” is likewise characterized by the more active use of direct flirtatious behaviors (Lamont, 2021). In lesbian women, higher self-perceived attractiveness may lead to an increase in romantic self-confidence that fosters the willingness to flirt, but the choice of how to flirt (directly or indirectly) may be made in accordance with traditional masculinity-femininity as a form of self-expression.

I hypothesize that higher self-perceived attractiveness will be more strongly associated with willingness to *indirectly* initiate flirtation in more feminine lesbian women than more masculine lesbian women. Indirect flirtation invites a romantic approach from the target, and often relies upon physical beauty to elicit romantic desire (Metts & Mikucki, 2008; Serafeimidis, 2018). This flirtatious strategy is relatively passive and has been culturally linked to femininity

(Cameron et al., 2013; Rose, 1996). Feminine lesbian women higher in self-perceived attractiveness may be more willing to initiate flirtation as they are confident in their ability to attract a potential mate. With this confidence, they may elect to flirt indirectly to invite a direct, romantic approach from the target as a way of expressing their femininity.

In contrast, I hypothesize that higher self-perceived attractiveness will be more strongly associated with willingness to *directly* initiate flirtation in more masculine lesbian women than more feminine lesbian women. Direct flirtation is characterized by a greater degree of agency in which the actor actively pursues the affection of the target and has been culturally linked to masculinity (Cameron et al., 2013; Rose, 1996). It's likely that masculine lesbian women prefer to flirt in this fashion as it aligns with their identity, but only if they are confident that their romantic advances will not be rejected. Higher self-perceived attractiveness in masculine lesbian women likely promotes confidence in the ability to seduce a potential mate, which in turn boosts their willingness to flirt directly in expression of their masculinity.

However, it is unclear how much of a role self-esteem may play in the flirtatious behaviors of lesbian women as moderated by traditional masculinity-femininity. It's quite clear that women likely place higher or lower value on their physical beauty if interested in flirting with men or with women, regardless of their own self-esteem. Therefore, it's unlikely self-esteem may provide an alternative explanation for differences in the strength of the positive relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to flirt between straight and lesbian women (Hypothesis #1). However, self-esteem may provide an alternative explanation for the link between self-perceived attractiveness and flirtation directness as moderated by masculinity-femininity within lesbian women exclusively (Hypotheses #2 & #3).

METHOD

Participants

A sample of 350 female participants (175 heterosexual women, 175 homosexual women) was recruited through Prolific for participation in this study. All participants were at least 18 years old, proficient in the English language, cisgender women, and self-identified as either straight or lesbian. The sample was 69% White/European, 16% African American, 8% Latino/Latina, 6% East Asian, and 3% South Asian. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 75 with a mean age of 37.

Procedure

Participants were asked to provide demographic information (see Appendix A) at the beginning of the study. As part of the screening process, the demographic information provided pertaining to gender, age, English fluency, and sexual orientation were used to determine participant eligibility.

Participants answered items to assess their evaluations of their own attractiveness, as well as their masculinity-femininity and self-esteem. Then, they were asked to read three separate hypothetical scenarios each describing an event in which they encounter an attractive, potential mate of their preferred sex. The events described in these three scenarios include (in order) encountering an attractive individual in the aisle of a grocery store, at a party, and after arriving early to work (see Appendix E). In each scenario, the point-of-view actor (the participant reading the scenario, i.e., "You") was presented with an opportunity to flirt with the attractive individual. In response to each individual scenario, participants were asked to rate the likelihood of engaging in specific flirtatious behaviors (e.g. "I would flirt, tease, or joke around with him/her",

“I would look at him/her a lot, give him/her “the look”) coded for directness from a 1 (*very unlikely*) to a 7 (*very likely*).

Participants whose survey responses were accepted were debriefed as to the purpose of the study and compensated (\$2) for their time according to Prolific’s standards.

Measures

Self-perceived Attractiveness. Self-perceived attractiveness was measured through responses to three items taken from Teng et al’s (2022) study (see Appendix B). These items are as follows: “How is your physical attractiveness compared to other people?”, “How satisfied are you with your appearance?”, and “How do you rate your appearance?”. Participants were asked to respond according to a 9-point scale, ranging from 1 (*very unattractive/unsatisfied*) to 9 (*very attractive/satisfied*), and scores were averaged. This scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .94.

Traditional Masculinity-Femininity. Traditional Masculinity-Femininity was measured by way of the Traditional Masculinity-Femininity (TMF) scale (Kachel et al., 2016). The TMF (see Appendix C) consists of six items that assess individuals’ gender self-concept (i.e., “I consider myself as...”), preference (i.e., “Ideally, I would like to be...”), and perceived adherence to traditional gender norms (i.e., “Traditionally, my interests would be considered as...”). Responses were made in accordance with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very masculine*) to 7 (*very feminine*). High scores indicate high traditional femininity, while low scores indicate high traditional masculinity. This scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .90.

Self-Esteem. Self-esteem was measured through the use of Rosenberg’s (1979) Self-Esteem Inventory. This scale consists of 10 items related to feelings of self-worth (e.g., “I feel

that I have a number of good qualities”, “I feel that I’m a person of worth”, etc.). Participants were asked to rate their agreement with each statement on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and items were averaged to obtain a composite score for each participant (See Appendix D). This scale was reliable, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .93.

Willingness to Initiate Flirtation. Participants were asked to respond to eight items taken from Cameron et al.’s (2013) checklist of initiation behaviors after reading each hypothetical scenario (See Appendix E). Each item contains a statement describing the intent to engage in a specific flirtatious behavior within the context of the scenario (ex. “I would smile at him/her a lot”, “I would try to make myself look more attractive for him/her”, “I would flirt, tease, or joke around with him/her”). In response, participants will be asked to rate the likelihood that they would engage in each behavior from a 1 (*very unlikely*) to a 7 (*very likely*). Scores will be averaged across all three sets of items corresponding with each scenario.

Flirtation Directness. The initiation behaviors that were presented to participants following each scenario (see Appendix E) had been previously rated for directness by an independent sample (Cameron et al., 2013). Following each scenario, participants were asked to rate the likelihood of engaging in four indirect behaviors and four direct behaviors from a 1 (*very unlikely*) to a 7 (*very likely*). Scores associated with indirect and direct behaviors were calculated separately across all three scenarios.

A confirmatory factor analysis revealed some issues with this scale, namely the cross-loading of items across factors. In response, I conducted an exploratory factor analysis to pinpoint the items that loaded most strongly onto the two factors (direct and indirect). I was able to identify the two items that best captured direct flirtation (“I would ask him/her for his/her phone number or snapchat”, “I would flirt, tease, or joke around with him/her”), and there was a

positive correlation between these two items, $r = .54, p < .001$. Also, I identified the two items that best captured indirect flirtation (“I would smile at him/her a lot”, “I would try to make eye contact with him/her (give him/her “the look”)), and these two items were positively correlated as well, $r = .47, p < .001$. During data analysis, all tests pertaining to Hypotheses 2 & 3 were carried out with the modified version of this measure containing four items: two direct and two indirect.

RESULTS

Analyses were conducted in three phases. In Phase 1, I tested the hypothesis that sexual orientation will moderate the association between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to initiate flirtation. In Phases 2 and 3, only data from the lesbian group were analyzed. In Phase 2, I tested the hypothesis that masculinity-femininity would moderate the association between self-perceived attractiveness and indirect flirtation in lesbian women. In Phase 3, I tested the hypothesis that traditional masculinity-femininity would moderate the association between self-perceived attractiveness and direct flirtation in lesbian women. All hypotheses were tested using model 1 in PROCESS, version 4.1 (Hayes, 2022) in SPSS version 28; continuous variables were centered in all analyses. Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for all study variables.

Table 1.*Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations.*

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Self-Perceived Attractiveness	4.42	1.4	-										
2.Self-Esteem	3.51	.88	.59*	-									
3.Traditional Masculinity-Femininity	4.96	1.15	.21**	.16**	-								
<i>Grocery Store</i>													
4.Willingness to Flirt	4.20	1.22	.19**	.21**	.13*	-							
5.Direct Flirtation	3.27	1.54	.18**	.17**	.07	.88**	-						
6.Indirect Flirtation	5.09	1.28	.20**	.23**	.23**	.75**	.51**	-					
<i>Party</i>													
7.Willingness to Flirt	4.93	1.15	.24**	.20**	.08	.73**	.61**	.64**	-				
8.Direct Flirtation	4.06	1.49	.21**	.18**	.03	.67**	.69**	.47**	.87**	-			
9.Indirect Flirtation	5.34	1.27	.23**	.21**	.18**	.59**	.40**	.76**	.81**	.56**	-		
<i>Office</i>													
10.Willingness to Flirt	4.15	1.24	.04	.14**	.11*	.62**	.55**	.55**	.59**	.48**	.56**	-	
11.Direct Flirtation	2.90	1.55	.06	.12*	.03	.56**	.63**	.38**	.45**	.49**	.35**	.84**	-

12.Indirect Flirtation	4.48	1.50	.06	.16**	.19**	.50**	.38**	.62**	.51**	.35**	.65**	.88**	.65**
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Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. $N=350$. Items were rated on 1 to 7 Likert scales for all measures except self-esteem, which used a 1 to 5 scale. For traditional masculinity-femininity, high scores indicate high femininity, and low scores indicate high masculinity. For all other measures, higher scores indicate higher levels of the construct.

Self-Perceived Attractiveness and Flirtation Across Sexual Orientation

In Phase 1, I tested the hypothesis that self-perceived attractiveness would predict more flirtation to a greater extent in straight women compared to lesbian women. I tested three models that included self-perceived attractiveness as the predictor, sexual orientation as the moderator, and the general willingness to initiate flirtation as the outcome, with a separate model for each of the three scenarios.

A positive main effect of self-perceived attractiveness on the willingness to initiate flirtation was observed in two out of the three scenarios (see Table 2). Self-perceived attractiveness predicted flirtation at a grocery store, $t(3, 346) = 3.26, p < .001$, and at a party, $t(3, 346) = 3.84, p < .001$, but not at the workplace. In addition, a positive main effect of sexual orientation (straight=1, lesbian=2) was observed in the first scenario (Grocery Store), $t(3, 346) = 2.27, p = .024$, but not in the second (Party) or third (Office).

However, I tested the interaction between self-perceived attractiveness and sexual orientation across all three scenarios, but none of the product terms were statistically significant (see Table 2). This suggests that the magnitude of the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to flirt does not differ in straight women compared to lesbian women.

Table 2

Results of Self-Perceived Attractiveness, Sexual Orientation, and the Interaction Between Self-Perceived Attractiveness and Sexual Orientation Predicting Flirtation

Scenario	β	t	P	ΔR^2	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
<i>Grocery Store</i>						
Self-Perceived Attractiveness	.19	3.76	<.001		.08	.25
Sexual Orientation	.12	2.27	.024		.02	.27
Interaction	.03	.73	.465	.00		
<i>Party</i>						
Self-Perceived Attractiveness	.24	4.80	<.001		.11	.28
Sexual Orientation	.08	1.59	.111		-.02	.21
Interaction	.05	1.22	.222	.00		
<i>Office</i>						
Self-Perceived Attractiveness	.04	.82	.411		-.05	.13
Sexual Orientation	.01	.33	.740		-.10	.15
Interaction	.02	.41	.674	.00		

Note. N=350. Product terms were not included in models testing main effects. High scores of self-perceived attractiveness indicate high self-perceived attractiveness.

Traditional Masculinity-Femininity and Flirtation Directness in Lesbian Women

In Phase 2, I tested the hypothesis that lesbian women who scored higher in femininity would be more inclined to use indirect flirtatious behaviors than lesbian women who scored higher in masculinity. I tested three models in which self-perceived attractiveness was the predictor, masculinity-femininity was the moderator, and indirect flirtation was the outcome, with a separate model for each of the three hypothetical scenarios. A positive main effect of self-perceived attractiveness predicting indirect flirtation was observed for the first scenario (Grocery Store), $t(3, 171) = 3.33, p < .001$, and the second scenario (Party), $t(3, 171) = 4.56, p < .001$ (see Table 3). In addition, high scores of traditional masculinity-femininity indicating high femininity did predict indirect flirtation in the first scenario (Grocery Store), $t(3, 171) = 2.56, p = .011$. Yet, none of the product terms were significant. This indicates that traditional masculinity-femininity does not moderate the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and indirect flirtation in lesbian women.

In Phase 3, I tested the hypothesis that lesbian women high in masculinity would be more likely to flirt directly. I tested three models in which self-perceived attractiveness was the predictor, masculinity-femininity was the moderator, and direct flirtation was the outcome, with a separate model for each of the three scenarios. None of the product terms were significant, although a main effect of self-perceived attractiveness was observed for the first scenario (Grocery Store), $t(3, 171) = 3.26, p < .001$, and the second scenario (Party), $t(3, 171) = 3.84, p < .001$ (see Table 4). No main effect of traditional masculinity-femininity predicting direct flirtation was observed in any of the three scenarios. This suggests that traditional masculinity-femininity does not moderate the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and direct flirtation in lesbian women.

Table 3.

Results of Self-Perceived Attractiveness, Traditional Masculinity-Femininity, and the Interaction between Self-Perceived Attractiveness and Traditional Masculinity-Femininity Predicting Indirect Flirtation in Lesbian Women

Scenario	β	SE	ΔR^2	t	p	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
<i>Grocery Store</i>							
Self-Perceived Attractiveness	.24	.06		3.33	.001	.08	.34
Traditional Masculinity-Femininity	.19	.08		2.56	.011	.05	.37
Interaction	.02	.06	.00	.34	.729		
<i>Party</i>							
Self-Perceived Attractiveness	.32	.06		4.56	.001	.16	.40
Traditional Masculinity-Femininity	.09	.08		1.28	.202	-.05	.26
Interaction	.07	.05	.01	1.28	.200		
<i>Office</i>							
Self-Perceived Attractiveness	.07	.08		1.02	.309	-.09	.23
Traditional Masculinity-Femininity	.09	.10		1.19	.234	-.09	.31
Interaction	.06	.07	.00	.86	.390		

Note: N=175. High scores on Traditional Masculinity-Femininity indicate high femininity, and high scores of self-perceived attractiveness indicate high self-perceived attractiveness. Product terms were not included in models testing main effects.

Table 4.

Results of Self-Perceived Attractiveness, Traditional Masculinity-Femininity, and the Interaction between Self-Perceived Attractiveness and Traditional Masculinity-Femininity Predicting Direct Flirtation in Lesbian Women

Scenario	β	SE	ΔR^2	t	p	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
<i>Grocery Store</i>							
Self-Perceived Attractiveness	.24	.08		3.26	.001	.10	.43
Traditional Masculinity-Femininity	.09	.10		1.29	.196	-.07	.35
Interaction	-.08	.07	.01	1.14	.255		
<i>Party</i>							
Self-Perceived Attractiveness	.28	.07		3.84	.001	.14	.44
Traditional Masculinity-Femininity	.09	.09		1.30	.194	-.06	.32
Interaction	.07	.07	.01	1.06	.290		
<i>Office</i>							
Self-Perceived Attractiveness	.10	.08		1.37	.172	-.05	.29
Traditional Masculinity-Femininity	.04	.11		.52	.600	-.15	.27
Interaction	.03	.08	.00	.32	.745		

Note: N=175. Low scores on Traditional Masculinity-Femininity indicate high masculinity, and high scores of self-perceived attractiveness indicate high self-perceived attractiveness. Product terms were not included in models testing main effects.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the role of sexual orientation in the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to initiate flirtation in women, as well as the role of traditional masculinity-femininity in how lesbian women flirt. Straight and lesbian women were compared in terms of potential differences in the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to risk rejection to initiate flirtation. In addition, traditional masculinity-femininity was examined as a potential moderator between self-perceived attractiveness and the directness of flirtatious behaviors in lesbian women.

Sexual Orientation and Self-Perceived Attractiveness

I hypothesized that sexual orientation would moderate the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to initiate flirtation in women, such that self-perceived attractiveness would predict flirtation to a greater extent in straight women than lesbian women. Studies on lesbian romantic relationships have shown that lesbian women are freer from gender roles in romance than heterosexual women, and it is these traditional gender roles that posit a woman's beauty as the primary indicator of her romantic desirability (Rose & Zand, 2002).

A main effect was found between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to initiate flirtation in the grocery store and at a party, but not at the workplace (See Table 2). Contrary to my expectations, sexual orientation did not moderate the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and the willingness to risk rejection to initiate flirtation in women. In both groups, self-perceived attractiveness significantly predicted willingness to engage in flirtatious behaviors meant to signal romantic interest. Within lesbian women, self-perceived attractiveness predicted both indirect and direct flirtation (See Tables 3 & 4). This suggests that

lesbian and straight women are similarly concerned with their own physical appearance when faced with the opportunity to flirt with someone.

Media representations of lesbian romance typically do not place as much emphasis on physical beauty, and lesbian women are thought to be free of the heteronormative gender norms that posit beauty as the primary factor in a woman's desirability as a mate (Rose & Zand, 2002). Yet, these data suggest that lesbian women are not differentially concerned with their own physical attractiveness compared to straight women when faced with the approach-avoid conflict of flirting with someone that they find attractive.

These findings are consistent with the evolutionary significance of physical attractiveness, regardless of sexuality. Evolutionary forces have greatly shaped human attraction over time as indicated by innate preferences for traits that indicate good fitness, which are found to be attractive (Apostolou & Christoforou, 2020). It is possible that lesbian women do follow a different social script when flirting with another woman than heterosexual women when flirting with a man, but it is likely only a tweaked version of the predominant heteronormative script (Rose & Zand, 2002). The innate preference for physically attractive features in a mate may overpower any beauty standard differences between lesbians' and straight women's social scripts concerning flirtation.

Traditional Masculinity-Femininity and Directness in Lesbians

This study also examined the role traditional masculinity-femininity in the relationship between self-perceived attractiveness and the directness of flirtation in lesbian women.

Typically, in heterosexual flirtation, the woman initiates the flirtation with the man indirectly, who then makes a more direct flirtatious advance (Lamont, 2021). Rose and Zand (2002) found that lesbian women who consider themselves to be either highly feminine or highly masculine

also frequently perform traditionally feminine or traditionally masculine roles in lesbian relationships. I predicted that self-perceived attractiveness would predict indirect flirtation in lesbian women who considered themselves to be more traditionally feminine, and direct flirtation in lesbian women who considered themselves to be more traditionally masculine.

However, results did not show a significant interaction between traditional masculinity-femininity and self-perceived attractiveness in predicting the directness of flirtation in lesbian women. Across feminine and masculine lesbian women, self-perceived attractiveness is linked to both direct and indirect flirtation. This does not support Rose and Zand's (2002) previous findings that traditionally feminine lesbian women typically play the more passive "gatekeeper" role (indirect) and traditionally masculine lesbians typically play the more active "initiator" role (direct) during flirtation. While this could be the result of a shift in cultural norms surrounding masculinity-femininity in lesbian flirtation, it is possible that this could be due to weaknesses within the study.

Weaknesses

The only scenario in which self-perceived attractiveness did not predict the willingness of women to initiate flirtation was the one set in the workplace. It is entirely possible that self-perceived attractiveness did not predict flirtation in this scenario, as it did in the other two, due to cultural norms surrounding appropriate behavior in the workplace. It is also possible that romantic rejection from a co-worker may have more severe consequences than romantic rejection from someone in the grocery store or at a party. Unreciprocated romantic interest between co-workers may negatively affect their working relationship in the future, and thus the workplace may be a riskier setting for flirtation than the grocery store or a party. In light of this,

the third scenario used in this study may not have been very useful in terms of examining the relationship between women's self-perceived attractiveness and flirtatious behaviors.

In addition, a sample size of 175 lesbian women only provided enough power to detect an interaction effect of .02 at .46 power. This lack of statistical power to detect an interaction effect makes it difficult to draw conclusions on the relationship between traditional masculinity-femininity and flirtation directness in lesbian women based on this data alone.

Takeaways and Future Directions

What is clear in these findings is the importance of women's self-perceived attractiveness in how they respond to the approach-avoid conflict of flirting with a potential mate. Self-perceived attractiveness predicted women's willingness to initiate flirtation across sexual orientation in two out of three hypothetical scenarios.

These results are consistent with the value placed upon beauty within the dating market (Bale & Archer, 2013), as well as the notion that risking rejection to initiate flirtation is predicated upon perceptions of one's own romantic desirability (Teng et al., 2022).

Unexpectedly, this also points to at least one way in which straight and lesbian women are similar in how they flirt. When women are faced with the opportunity to flirt, their willingness to do so is linked to how attractive they perceive themselves to be, regardless of sexual orientation.

Yet, many questions remain unanswered as to how lesbian women flirt compared to straight women. Continued research on romantic courtship between lesbian women in general is greatly needed due to the severe underrepresentation of non-heterosexual populations, most especially lesbian women, in the literature. In addition, future work should be dedicated to the construction of a valid instrument to assess the directness of flirtatious behaviors as such a

measure will be necessary to further examine the link between traditional masculinity-femininity and the directness of flirtatious behaviors in lesbian women.

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Appendix A - Demographics

1. What is your age? (*Text Entry*)
2. What do you identify as?
 - A. Cisgender Male
 - B. Cisgender Female
 - C. Transgender Male
 - D. Transgender Female
 - E. Non-Binary
 - F. Other (Please Specify) (*Text Entry*)
3. What is your race?
 - A. Black or African-American
 - B. East Asian
 - C. Latino/Latina/Latinx
 - D. Middle Eastern
 - E. Native American or First Nation
 - F. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - G. South Asian
 - H. White or European American
 - I. Other (Please Describe)
4. Are you fluent in English? (Yes or No)
5. Are you currently in a romantic relationship? (Yes or No)

If “Yes” is selected: 5B. Which of the following best describes your current relationship?
(Casually Dating, Exclusively Dating, Engaged, Married)

5C. How long have you and your partner been in a romantic relationship together? (*Text Box Entry: Years/Months*)
7. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?
 - A. Straight
 - B. Bisexual
 - C. Gay/Lesbian
 - D. Sexually Fluid
 - E. Other (Please Specify)
 - F. Prefer Not To Say

If “C. Gay/Lesbian” is selected: 7B. Are you out of the closet?

7C. How long have you been out of the closet?
(*Text Box Entry: Years/Months*)

Appendix B – Self-Perceived Attractiveness

First, we would like to ask you a few questions about how you feel about your physical appearance.

1. How is your physical attractiveness compared to other people?
2. How satisfied are you with your appearance?
3. How do you rate your appearance?

Responses will be made upon a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very unattractive/unsatisfied) to 7 (very attractive/satisfied), and scores will be averaged.

Appendix C – Traditional Masculinity-Femininity (TMF) Scale

Now, we would like to ask you a few questions about how masculine or feminine you consider yourself to be, as well as how masculine or feminine others might perceive you to be based on cultural gender norms.

1. I consider myself as...
2. Ideally, I would like to be...
3. Traditionally, my interests would be considered as...
4. Traditionally, my attitudes and beliefs would be considered as...
5. Traditionally, my behavior would be considered as...
6. Traditionally, my outer appearance would be considered as...

Responses to items will be made in accordance with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very masculine) to 7 (very feminine). Scores will be averaged.

Appendix D – Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. At times I think I am no good at all.
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I certainly feel useless at times.
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Participants will be presented with four response items (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) for each statement. Response items will be scored so that higher scores indicate higher self-esteem (Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Agree=3, Strongly Agree=4), and scores for all ten statements will be summed together. Items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 will be reverse scored.

Appendix E – Hypothetical Scenarios

Scenario #1: Attractive Stranger at the Grocery Store

It's late in the afternoon. You just got off from work, and you stop by the local grocery store to pick up a few things. Nothing seems out of the ordinary until you make the turn down the dairy aisle. You freeze immediately. It's him/her. That really cute guy/girl who just recently moved into the area. There he/she is. Standing all alone in the middle of the aisle. Suddenly, you feel yourself get a little excited. You've seen him/her around many times, but you've never had a chance to speak to him/her. Even though you've never had an opportunity to talk to him/her, you can't keep your eyes off him/her whenever he's/she's around. There's no one else around right now; the two of you are completely alone. Then it hits you. In probably 45 seconds or less, he/she will walk away. When will you have another opportunity like this? Will you ever have another opportunity like this? What do you do?

Think about what would be going through your mind at this moment, and how you might respond in this situation, then rate your responses to the following questions from a 1 (*very unlikely*) to a 7 (*very likely*).

1. I would intentionally act in a way that lets him/her know that I'm interested in him/her. **(Direct)**
2. I would wait to see if he/she might make a move first. **(Indirect)**
3. I would smile at him/her a lot. **(Indirect)**
4. I would ask him/her for his/her phone number or snapchat. **(Direct)**
5. I would introduce myself. Tell him/her my name. **(Indirect)**
6. I would complement him/her on something. Maybe tell him/her that I like what he's/she's wearing, or say that I like his/her hair. **(Direct)**
7. I would flirt, tease, or joke around with him/her. **(Direct)**
8. I would try to make eye contact with him/her (give him/her "the look"). **(Indirect)**

Scenario #2: Attractive Stranger at A Party

It's finally Friday night. You've been looking forward to going out with your friends this weekend, and you can't wait to have a great time. Tonight, the party is located at a friend of a friend's house, and while you know many people there, there are also a few new faces as well. An hour into the party, your one friend who knows the host of the party calls him over. He comes over toward where you and your friends are sitting, and a few of his friends follow behind him. You feel a sudden rush of excitement when you immediately recognize one of them; it's that super cute guy/girl that you've seen around town. You've bumped into him/her many times, but you've never had the opportunity to speak to him/her.

Think about what would be going through your mind at this moment, and how you might respond in this situation, then rate your responses to the following questions from a 1 (*very unlikely*) to a 7 (*very likely*).

1. I would intentionally act in a way that lets him/her know that I'm interested in him/her. **(Direct)**
2. I would wait to see if he/she might make a move first. **(Indirect)**
3. I would smile at him/her a lot. **(Indirect)**
4. I would ask him/her for his/her phone number or snapchat. **(Direct)**
5. I would introduce myself. Tell him/her my name. **(Indirect)**
6. I would complement him/her on something. Maybe tell him/her that I like what he's/she's wearing, or say that I like his/her hair. **(Direct)**
7. I would flirt, tease, or joke around with him/her. **(Direct)**
8. I would try to make eye contact with him/her (give him/her "the look"). **(Indirect)**

Scenario #3: Attractive Co-Worker

Rise and shine. It's Monday morning, and work begins at 9:30. You're punctual today, and you arrive at 9:15. As you walk in, you see that the office is completely empty except for one other person, but it's not just anyone; it's that really attractive guy/girl new hire. He/She caught your attention on their very first day at the office, and you haven't been able to take your eyes off of him/her ever since. A rush of excitement comes over you the moment that you lay eyes on him/her, and it only gets stronger as you walk past him/her on your way towards your desk. Although his/her office is near your own, you've never really had a chance to talk to him/her up to this point. You put your things down, and the two of you are now completely alone. This is the perfect time to say something. However, everyone else will be trickling in one-by-one over the next 15 minutes. The two of you will be alone for only a few more minutes. If you're going to say something, you need to do it now.

Think about what would be going through your mind at this moment, and how you might respond in this situation, then rate your responses to the following questions from a 1 (*very unlikely*) to a 7 (*very likely*).

1. I would intentionally act in a way that lets him/her know that I'm interested in him/her. **(Direct)**
2. I would wait to see if he/she might make a move first. **(Indirect)**
3. I would smile at him/her a lot. **(Indirect)**
4. I would ask him/her for his/her phone number or snapchat. **(Direct)**
5. I would introduce myself. Tell him/her my name. **(Indirect)**
6. I would complement him/her on something. Maybe tell him/her that I like what he's/she's wearing, or say that I like his/her hair. **(Direct)**
7. I would flirt, tease, or joke around with him/her. **(Direct)**
8. I would try to make eye contact with him/her (give him/her "the look"). **(Indirect)**