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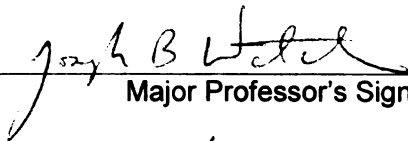
**SORRY, YOU'RE JUST NOT MY TYPE: EXPLORING ROMANTIC
REJECTION IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION**

presented by

STEPHANIE TOM TONG

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**SORRY, YOU'RE JUST NOT MY TYPE: EXPLORING ROMANTIC REJECTION
IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION**

By

Stephanie Tom Tong

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
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ABSTRACT

SORRY, YOU'RE JUST NOT MY TYPE: EXPLORING ROMANTIC REJECTION IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

By

Stephanie Tom Tong

Although online dating has increased in popularity, little is known about how online daters respond to date requests, or how they handle the delivery of romantic rejection. This research was designed to identify the types of linguistic strategies employed in romantic date rejection. One hundred and ninety respondents were asked to compose a message rejecting a romantic date request initiated by a member of the opposite sex. Results showed that use of politeness strategies varied as a function of the relationship between the requester and rejector (acquaintance vs. stranger) and the type of media used (email vs. online dating messaging service). Additionally, it was found that online daters take advantage of certain features provided by dating website messaging services which allow new ways for rejectors to deliver refusals that were not previously available in FtF communication or prior types of CMC.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Although computer-mediated communication (CMC) has a well-established reputation for its use in a variety of task-oriented activities, researchers are coming to understand how this medium functions in interpersonal relationships. Online dating and online personals have become a popular practice for those trying to find romantic partners. An initial survey of the online public projected that as of 2006, 16 million adults have “gone to an online dating website or other site where they can meet people online” (Madden & Lenhart, 2006, p. 3). Searching for a potential romantic date can be a dramatically different process when done on a computer from the comfort of one’s desk. Increased convenience, control, and affordability are only some of the reasons individuals utilize online matchmaking services (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Lack of time to peruse traditional settings (e.g. bars, clubs, etc.) for dates is one of the top reasons that single adults turn to online dating (Close & Zinkhan, 2004; Whitty & Carr, 2006).

The present research investigates whether another reason online dating is attractive to users is that it alters the process of rejections to date requests. Online dating websites provide a venue for adults to view individual profiles of other daters. The overall goal of these websites is to help users “meet” another person who is potentially compatible in order to start a romantic relationship. The websites themselves are willing to share many anecdotal stories documenting the “success” of mixed-mode relationships that began online (e.g., success.match.com) but less is known about the nature of online romantic rejection. While researchers have focused on the self-presentation (Ellison et al., 2006), characteristics and demographics (e.g., income, physical attractiveness, education level, etc.), and interactions among online daters (Hitsch, Hortaçsu, & Ariely, 2005;

Whitty & Carr, 2006), none have examined the process by which online daters reject initial requests to meet. As online dating increases in popularity, it provides a new environment in which to examine the messages people construct and their behaviors when rejecting romantic date requests.

The process of romantic refusal can prove communicatively stressful. Often delivering rejection means attending to several distinct, and sometimes competing, goals at once (Johnson, 2007; Kline & Floyd, 1990). The rejector must construct a message that conveys the refusal clearly, manage self-presentation concerns, and minimize the threat to the target's feelings. Furthermore, those who are acquainted with the target of their rejection must mitigate the threats to the existing relationship. The fact that one simple rejection may contain many a "face threatening act" (FTA) has prompted researchers to examine how individuals prioritize and manage these FTAs when designing refusal messages in different contexts ranging from interpersonal romantic rejection to organizational rejection (Besson, Roloff, & Paulson, 1998; Johnson, 2007; Kunkel et al., 2000; Saeki & O'Keefe, 1994).

Several reasons make online romantic rejection an important topic to research. Because much of the previous research of rejection messages has been studied within FtF contexts there may be unanticipated ways in which CMC influences the self-presentation management of the rejector, the facework strategies used to mitigate the face threats to the target, and the reasons given in rejection messages—particularly along the attributional dimensions of locus, controllability, and stability. Additionally, the editing, timing, and selective self-presentational capabilities found in different types of CMC can help rejectors to construct their ideal refusal messages and their ideal selves. Those

rejectors who are concerned with the face needs of the target and are acquainted with the target will be more likely to take advantage of the special features of online dating websites.

A question raised by these communicative features is whether or not rejection messages conveyed in dating websites contain the same elements as refusals delivered through email. As CMC begins to expand in its application to the arena of romantic dating, researchers must also explore how these technologies facilitate (or inhibit) one's ability to design a message to reject a romantic date request. Also, relational dynamics can impact rejection message construction. Online rejectors may modify their refusals based on their anticipation of future interaction with an acquainted target. Complicating matters is the mixed-mode nature of such relationships and the different ways in which offline and online contexts influence communication between individuals. However the question of how different communication technologies and relational contexts influence the content and delivery of romantic date refusals remains to be answered.

This paper will explore the argument that the type of relationship the requester and rejector share, the pursuit of multiple communicative goals, and the type of CMC they use to communicate all influence rejectors' motivation for and construction of messages used to refuse a date request. As background for this study, a literature review is presented which contains an examination of the goal-driven behavior of romantic rejectors and an analysis investigating the characteristics and themes found in refusal messages and the conditions under which these elements can change. Theory regarding the rejectors' self-presentational concerns, the mitigating potential face threat of the target, and the implication of the symbolic meaning embedded in media selection

follows. In addition, the results of an empirical study designed to examine the above argument will be reported.

Chapter 2: Rejection Messages

Rejection message construction has been studied as compliance-resistance and as overt refusal messages (Saeki & O' Keefe, 1994). No matter how it is conceptualized, there is an abundance of literature examining both the motivation for performing refusals and their linguistic construction. Both of these elements will be reviewed in the following sections.

Goals

As Kline and Floyd (1990) point out, a refusal message is a speech act designed to fulfill multiple goals at once. Goals have been shown to be powerful motivations for human interaction and behavior, especially in problematic or stress-inducing situations. Goals have been defined as “end states toward which individuals continually strive” (Berger, 1995, p. 5). Research examining the pervasiveness of goals as motivations for human communication has found that they are present in a variety of situations ranging from compliance-gaining (Dillard & Burgoon, 1985; Hunter & Boster, 1987), to date initiation (Berger & Bell, 1988; Mongeau, Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004), to refusal of sexual initiation (Afifi & Lee, 2000). In fact, goals are such important motivations for communicative action that a lack of goal focus has been shown to lead to a chaotic or unclear communicative episode (Berger, 1995). Goals themselves are constructs that often compete with one another: Indeed, individuals can have multiple goals within one communicative situation, making it difficult to prioritize them and decide on a course of action. Berger (1995) states that both research and theory pertaining to goal-oriented

behavior are based upon two assumptions, namely that “individuals pursue clearly defined goals in their interactions with others, and they frequently seek to achieve multiple goals simultaneously” (p. 5).

Because of the multiple goal focus of many communicative situations, scholars have tried to organize goals as having a hierarchical relationship to each other such that goals are ordered cognitively in a step-wise fashion prioritizing the desired, overarching, end-goal (sometimes called a “superordinate” goal). However, both Berger (1995) and Dillard (1997) point out that goals and hierarchies are not static; they continually fluctuate in both importance and focus during a communicative episode and are somewhat dependent upon time and context for their definition. Dillard (1997) suggests that because individuals often seek to attain multiple goals within one situation that a hierarchical structure of goals is more or less a simplification of the actual cognitive process of goal-directed communication. Dillard also notes that someone who is ending an intimate relationship must attend to the “plausibility of lasting affection, the potential for rejection, and the prospect of disharmony” (p. 55). Forcing a hierarchical structure upon these goals makes for a simplification of multiple motivations. It is useful to look at the communicative context in which these goals are embedded to see which goal(s) individuals eventually ascribe importance to and how that prioritization manifests itself in their goal-driven communication (Mongeau et al., 2004).

As Dillard (1997) suggests, those who communicate refusals desire to achieve multiple goals types: *functional* and *relational*. The functional goal is simply conveying the refusal clearly. The relational goals are (1) mitigating face threat of the target (especially important for those who are acquainted with the target of rejection) after

directly opposing the target's wants, while simultaneously maintaining one's own desired self-image by managing self-presentation. To accomplish the functional goal, the rejector must first recognize the target's request and then convey his or her refusal to perform that request. The substantive meaning of the rejection is based on the dyad's shared knowledge of the request, and the shared inferences that both parties make based on the original request. Thus in order for the rejection to be "intelligible and legitimate" it must attend to the issue(s) set forth in the request (Kline & Floyd, 1990). For example, the rejection of the date request must somehow reference the previous utterance of the date request ("I can't go out on a date with you") rather than some ambiguous or unresponsive remark ("It's cloudy today"). According to Berger (1997), the goal(s) that is considered most important by the communicator will manifest itself in the end communicative result, in this case message production.

Furthermore, Saeki and O'Keefe (1994) note that to best fulfill the functional goal of a refusal, the message content must share the same frame of reference as the original request by virtue of its being a complementary (or closely related) communicative action: "An act of refusal or rejection is made and justified in relationship to the conditions that make the original request legitimate, and so different ways of rejecting are seen as elaborations of one or more issues raised by the request itself" (p 69). In order to obtain the functional goal, the sender must construct his or her refusal in conjunction as the reciprocal of the request message.

The rejector must also complete the second goal of the rejection message which is to mitigate the face threat caused by the direct opposition to the target (Kline & Floyd, 1990). More precisely, to refuse is to disagree with the target's desires which creates an

intrinsic threat to the target's face wants. From the target's perspective, a rejection is thought of as an undesirable response, and the rejector must then handle the face threats that such a response creates. According to Kline and Floyd (1990) the rejector first must recognize that the failure to comply with the requested action has created an obstacle blocking the target's wishes which constitutes a threat to the target's *negative* face (one's desire to be autonomous and free from impediment). Secondly, the refusal signifies to the target that the rejector simply does not value the target's desires, which constitutes a threat to *positive* face (the need to be accepted and appreciated by others, or the want to be wanted). Because rejector's communicative goals require the fulfillment of several objectives, certain situational or contextual factors will impact goal prioritization, and this impact will show itself in the features of the refusals they construct.

Politeness in Rejection Messages

Because the simultaneous pursuit of multiple goals can create greater uncertainty in communication than the pursuit of singular goals (Berger, 1995), Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory provides a useful theoretical framework with which to examine the fulfillment of multiple goals within the refusal. Politeness theory maintains that when the goals of facework and communicative clarity are in conflict, simple message design becomes complicated. In an attempt to satisfy all communicative goals, the speaker designs a longer, more convoluted message.

Johnson (2007) provides an instance of prior applications of politeness theory to the study of refusal messages. She argues that politeness theory is uniquely well-suited in its application to interactions such as refusal situations "where diverse interpersonal goals are present" (p. 197). Johnson noted that how communicators attended to these goals

(e.g., dealing with several types of FTA, attending to one's own and partner's face needs, influencing subsequent message content and perception) could potentially affect how others viewed the appropriateness, effectiveness, or competence of such messages. Although Johnson's study did not examine the actual underlying differences in message construction, she does provide rationale for the application of politeness theory to the current research.

The desire to fulfill multiple goals forces communicators to compromise between communicative efficiency and redressive action (or actions that "give face" to the target in an attempt to repair the FTA present in the refusal). Such a compromise means that individuals will vary their messages with respect to the amount and type of redressive action they choose to employ. Politeness theory identifies different strategies which communicators can choose from when attempting to fulfill the relational and functional goals of the rejection. Initially, the speaker must choose to perform or not perform the FTA (i.e., refuse or accept a date request). If the speaker does perform the FTA, he or she must choose to do so "on record" or "off record." In essence, the rejector must choose how explicit the refusal message should be. An off record refusal allows the rejector to deny communicative intent. If one uses sarcasm or a joke ("*You* want to go out with *Me*? Really? Ha, ha!") the meaning and intent are often indistinguishable, while an on record refusal which is very clear in its communicative intent ("I can't go out with you on Saturday").

The off record refusal is characterized by extreme indirectness, which allows the speaker to deny the communicative intent behind the utterance, and forces the receiver to make his or her own inferences from the speaker's message. Off record messages hint at

the refusal, but are not explicit in their rejection in the same way an on record rejection would be. While off record refusals allow the rejector to avoid committing to the specific intent of the rejection, the extreme indirectness also renders the substantive meaning of the refusal essentially negotiable. Forcing the requester to make the correct interpretation based on the rejector's utterance leaves much room for subjective interpretation and the rejector risks failing to fulfill the functional goal of the refusal. As an example, the above refusal of the joke neither confirms nor disconfirms the rejector's desire or ability to go out on a date with the requester.

Prior research found that off record utterances were utilized much less often in CMC than in FtF interaction. In his content analysis of an interactive teleconference, Hiemstra (1982) found only one off record utterance from a transcript with a total of 71 utterances. This is an extreme difference in the politeness strategies observed by Brown and Levinson who report off record utterances as "the most pervasive" of politeness forms in natural, FtF conversations they examined. Hiemstra (1982) proposed that the differences in use of off record utterances is due to "the pressure exerted by the computer medium toward efficiency, the lack of nonverbal cues needed to interpret indirect or off-record utterances and a task-related emphasis on efficiency" (p. 900).

Hiemstra's (1982) claim that off record utterances are less prevalent in CMC due to reduced nonverbal cues is certainly relevant: To convey meaning through an off record utterance, a communicator (usually) must do so through the use of paralinguistic cues such as vocalics, proxemics, or gestures. However, reduced cue environment of CMC does not necessarily mean that interactants do not ever "go off record," but rather adapt the ambiguity of off record utterances and perform them differently than in FtF

interaction. For instance, in response to an online date request, an off record refusal could be performed using an ambiguous statement (as in FtF encounters), but rejectors could also choose *not* to respond. In this case, the absence of a response (or lack of reciprocation) could be viewed as an ambiguous, off record rejection. Those rejectors who choose to reject a request through silence can convey (indirectly) that they are not interested in a date and simultaneously resist openly committing themselves to that particular communicative intent. The lack of response also provides deniability in communicative intent as a one could simply deny ever receiving the request in the first place. Thus this reconceptualization of the off record strategy to include the deliberate ambiguity of a “no response” refusal would seem to contradict Hiemstra’s claim, and instead assert that off record strategies could be *more* prevalent in CMC rather than less.

If an on record refusal is chosen, the rejector then has the choice to perform the refusal baldly, without redress or with redress. Bald on record (BOR) refusals performed without redressive action are as clear, concise, and direct as possible (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Because they prioritize communicative efficiency, BOR refusals fulfill only functional goals and do not offer any redressive action to account for the threat to the target’s face: “I can’t go out with you this weekend.” Alternatively, rejectors can choose to perform the refusal on record, with redressive action. Depending on which aspect of face is being emphasized, the rejector can deploy positive or negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness appeals to the target’s desire to be socially accepted, included, valued, and appreciated and could include such strategies as preceding the rejection with an expression of appreciation or a compliment (exaggeration of interest in target), using in-group language or identity markers, or asserting knowledge of the

requester's wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987): "You're really sweet to ask me out, but I can't go out tonight. Let's try another time, shall we?" Negative politeness includes strategies that are applied to the requester's threat to negative face, or the desire to be free from impediment. An apology such as the following would be considered a negative politeness strategy: "You want to go out tonight? Gee, I'm awfully sorry, but I don't really think I can."

Brown and Levinson (1987) note that differences in *power* distance and *social* distance may greatly impact strategy selection, message design, and delivery. Differences in power and social distance underscore the role orientation that each individual embodies with respect to the communicative environment in which they interact. Power distance is described as a "vertical" continuum along which subordinates communicate with their superiors or those with significantly more status than themselves. However, those individuals engaging in an interaction consisting of a date request and subsequent refusal would be more likely to interact along the continuum of social distance which is a "horizontal" relation. High differentials in social distance are exhibited among individuals who are not familiar with each other, while low levels of social distance exist between individuals who are friendly, casual, and familiar with each other (Morand & Ocker, 2002).

It follows that those who are more familiar (or have less social distance) with the target of their rejection message would be more concerned with fulfilling the relational goals of the rejection message (i.e., maintaining the relationship with the target and maintaining one's desired self-image) than strangers who have no pre-existing relationship with the target (high social distance pairs). As such, known acquaintances

who have a lower degree of social distance will still want to reduce the effects of their rejection through use of politeness strategies, whereas relative strangers with high degrees of social distance will be less motivated to do so. Consequently high social distance communicators are more likely to produce messages BOR, which convey “impersonality, formality, coldness” (Morand & Ocker, 2002, p. 7).

Prior research has found that social distance does impact romantic date goal fulfillment. Mongeau et al. (2004) found that relationship type (or degree of familiarity between dating partners) had a significant impact on first date goals. Specifically, they conceptualized relationship type on a first date as a continuum with one end being no prior acquaintanceship (as in a blind date) and the other end being a first date between good friends who have known each other for several years, but are just initiating a romantic turning point in their relationship. Subjects were asked to imagine themselves on a first date with either a good friend or a mere acquaintance. Mongeau et al. (2004) found that those in the friend condition placed more importance on goals relating to sexual activity and the investigation of the romantic potential of the relationship than those in the acquaintance condition. It follows that relational type, or degree of social distance, will also have an impact on other date-related communication between acquainted or unknown individuals.

The degree of social distance that conversational partners have also raises questions regarding how the complexities of a pre-existing acquaintanceship may affect their expectation of *anticipated future interaction*. As Saeki and O’ Keefe (1994) suggest, anticipated future interaction may impact how individuals craft their messages, but was not considered initially by politeness theory:

However, their [Brown and Levinson] analysis presupposes a stable network of acquaintance; they did not consider the consequences of being in versus not being in a relationship with the other person. Quite apart from social distance, the anticipation of future interaction with the target should lead to a higher priority on protecting the face wants of the target, whereas the expectation of no future interaction should lead to a lower priority given to face wants. (p. 72)

Within CMC contexts, research regarding anticipated future interaction has found it to have an impact on interpersonal dynamics. Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino (2006) found that those online daters who anticipated future interaction with others from the website were more open and honest in their self-disclosures, as they were more likely to be “held accountable” for such self-presentational claims. Walther (1994) found anticipated future interaction to be a more powerful predictor of interpersonal communication behaviors (intimacy, similarity, and trust) than media (CMC vs. FtF). Those that anticipated a long-term relationship with group members in CMC and FtF were more affected by the prospect of future interaction with their groups than those interacting in a “one-shot,” short-term setting. However, while anticipation of future interaction was more varied in CMC groups, anticipation among FtF group members remained unaffected by the prolonged group membership. Specifically FtF groups maintained similar expectations of anticipation regardless of short-term or long-term interaction, showing that such anticipation is heightened among CMC interactants.

Thus for CMC dyads, anticipation of future interaction is expected to impact date refusal messages depending on the type of relationship dyads have. Low social distance dyads that are currently acquainted will likely have a higher expectation of future

interaction with the target of rejection. On the other hand, strangers will have no expectations for future communication, and will reflect that in their refusals. Under these conditions, anticipated future interaction is expected to have some impact on the way individuals construct rejection messages. Those low social distance dyads that are acquainted have greater cause to expect future interaction, and consequently will attend to the relational goals of the refusal more intently than those who remain strangers.

Elements of Rejection Messages

Because managing FTAs, direct opposition, and communicative disharmony are cognitively taxing, in order to ensure that they have attended to all the relevant goals, rejectors often rely on standardized message designs that contain many of the same elements. Presumably, rejectors are motivated to accomplish both functional relational goals, but their motivation to do so is contingent upon the differences in social distance. While the direct refusal is easy to create and deliver, the relational goals are more difficult to accomplish. Individuals will want to use a variety of facework and politeness strategies to meet such goals, but may be hard pressed to generate them spontaneously during a fast-paced communicative encounter.

Goffman (1967) asserted that to remedy this, senders may rely on predetermined or ritualized discourse to reconcile the relational disruption the refusal has caused. Besson, Roloff, and Paulson (1998) argue that “conventionalized” refusal messages develop not because they help restore the social order but because these conventionalized messages have proven to be effective in helping senders accomplish the necessary goals. This habitual message framing allows individuals to anticipate the frequently occurring clash of communicative goals mentioned above.

No matter the reason, several studies have examined the elements of such ritualized rejection messages and have developed specific typologies accounting for their shared elements. The most popular study of these typologies exists within an organizational context such as a rejection for a promotion or job (Jablin & Krone, 1974; Locker, 1995; Limaye, 2001; Saeki & O’Keefe, 1994). However, Besson et al. (1998) point out several characteristics that exist in conventionalized date rejection messages delivered in an interpersonal context. These elements serve to fulfill the instrumental goal of conveying the refusal by direct opposition and elements of facework to mitigate the threat posed to the target’s face wants:

(a) a statement that announces the sender cannot go out on the date, (b) an apology for not granting the request, (c) an expression of appreciation for the target’s request, (d) a reason for rejection, (e) an expression of concern for the target’s potentially hurt feelings. (p. 186)

Besson et al. (1998) describe (a) and (d) as elements which satisfy the instrumental goal of conveying the refusal and identifying the reason for non-compliance, and elements (b), (c), and (e) as facework attending to the threats of the target’s negative and positive face wants. In addition to those elements mentioned above, rejectors may offer statements of encouragement to the requester (i.e., “giving face”), and suggestions for future contact on a platonic level. While Besson et al.’s (1998) study was conducted in a FtF context, it is expected that these elements will also be present in date refusal messages delivered via CMC. Similarly to FtF settings, the differences in social distance will change how these elements are utilized in online rejection message design:

H1: When rejectors communicate with the target of rejection using CMC, those who are acquainted (low social distance) with the target design refusal messages that contain more positive or negative politeness strategies (such as an apology, an expression of appreciation for the request, an expression of concern or sympathy for the requester's feelings, expressions of encouragement, suggestions for future relationship or contact, and longer length) than those rejectors who are do not know (high social distance) the target.

With regard to refusal message design, it is the reason for rejection upon which many targets focus their attention. Limaye (2001) has gone as far to suggest that the reason or explanation for rejection is the single, most important part of the refusal message. A review of the relevant literature reviewing reasons for romantic date rejection is considered below.

Reasons for Romantic Rejection

Many targets of rejection feel the need to understand the *cause* of the rejection in order to make a critical assessment of rejection episode (Folkes, 1982). Understanding the importance of the reason for rejection, rejectors are motivated not only by their own privately-held opinions about the target (which may have influenced their refusal in the first place) but also the desire to communicate the refusal, concern for threats to the target's face, and their own self-presentation.

Previous studies looking at the reasons that rejectors give for romantic date refusals in FtF contexts suggest that they communicate reasons that vary along three different attributional dimensions of *locus*, *stability*, and *controllability* (Weiner, 1979). *Locus* refers specifically to the target of the rejection (rather than the rejector) and can be

internal (personal) or external (impersonal). Folkes' (1982) analysis found that female date rejectors rarely reported a reason with an internal locus ("You're just not my type") preferring instead to use a reason with an external locus ("My cousins are in town this weekend"). With an externally-based rejection (e.g., undesirability of proposed activity or unavailability) male rejectees may feel less dejected than when an internally-based rejection is used that points to a specific characteristic associated with the target. Folkes (1982) reported that impersonal reasons were shown to cause less individual uncertainty in the target than personal ones, presumably because the source of the rejection was external rather than internal.

Stability refers to the rejection being perceived as "permanent and unchanging or temporary and fluctuating" (Folkes, 1982, p. 237). Using unstable reasons ("I have to study for finals") can leave the rejectee feeling a sense of opportunity since these circumstances cannot last forever and allows the female rejector to maintain her desired positive self-image. Contrastingly, a stable reason ("I can't date you because I'm dating someone else") does not. In communicating an unstable reason, rejectors can manage their self-presentation and mitigate the FTA to the target's face.

Varying the *controllability* allows the rejector to either deny responsibility for rejection or place that responsibility on the target of rejection. The woman may not have control over her health (i.e. "I can't go out with you because I'm sick"), but she does have control over her choice of desired activities ("I can't go out with you because I don't want to miss my favorite TV show"). In the former, no blame can be ascribed to her; however, the latter suggests that she has control over her own actions, but chose to reject the date request. Alternatively, the woman can place the blame on the man making him

the cause of rejection, which decreases her responsibility. Thus if the man is presumably in control over the reason for rejection such as sloppy appearance, then the fault is his rather than hers. Both options allow the rejector to “avoid blame” because while individuals can be blamed for negative events that they can control, they cannot be held responsible for those occur outside of their control.

Folkes (1982) suggested varying these attributional dimensions allowed rejectors to minimize the hurtful effects of the rejection while maximizing self-presentational benefits. The reasons for concealing or revealing attributional information may be motivated by self-presentational concerns and concern for the other’s feelings. For example, rejecting a date request because of the physical disabilities of the initiator would damage the woman’s self-image by making her appear unfair and heartless while also making the target of rejection feel dejected and helpless (Folkes, 1982).

Folkes also found that regardless of their privately held reason(s) for refusal, female rejectors most often vary the locus of their reason by giving externally-based reasons for refusal to protect the face of the target and their own self-presentational concerns. When surveying the male rejectees, Folkes found that these men confirmed receiving impersonal reasons for rejection most often. Thus the degree of social distance that requester-rejector dyad shares is expected to have an effect on the attributional dimensions of the reason that rejectors will give in their refusals such that:

H2: When rejectors communicate with the target of rejection using CMC, rejectors who are acquainted with the target (low social distance) will use reasons with an external locus for rejection more than those rejectors who do not know the

target (high social distance), regardless of the locus of the privately-held reason for rejection.

Although Folkes' (1982) and Besson et al.'s (1998) analyses were conducted in FtF contexts, they give rise to the assumption that communicative subtleties should also be present within CMC rejections. New technologies have changed how self-presentation occurs in CMC settings and may also change how the variations in attributional dimensions function in the reasons that rejectors use in online rejection messages.

Chapter 3: Implications for Rejection in CMC Environments

Because rejection within an online environment has not yet been explored, it is useful to investigate some background research to understand how the CMC context may change or modify previous theoretical assumptions about rejection message design. Implications of how the use of asynchronous media and the different CMC types can affect message design are presented in the following sections.

The Use of Asynchronous Media for Rejection

Is rejection easier to deliver asynchronously? It certainly seems so given that several institutions utilize the rejection letter as a form of refusal for job or student applicants. The rejection letter has received much scholarly attention in organizational literature, in both its usage and construction (Jablin & Krone, 1984; Limaye, 2001; Locker, 1999). These studies have primarily focused on the formulaic elements of rejection letters (such as the reason for rejection, use of buffers, greetings and closings, perceptions of letter clarity, personalness, and appreciative tone) rather than their effects on job applicants. However, these studies have documented the overwhelming use of asynchronous media for interpersonal rejection tasks within organizational contexts.

The Choice to Use CMC for Romantic Rejection. The “cues filtered out” (CFO; Culnan & Markus, 1987) perspective suggests that reduced cue systems, increased anonymity, and decreased social presence make CMC an undesirable medium for interpersonal communication. However, when CMC is applied to interpersonal tasks, some CFO theorists have argued that the increased anonymity present in asynchronous media may promote a decreased amount of facework due to the lack of importance placed on conventional maintenance of face (Hiltz & Turoff, 1978). If it is true that rejectors feel “safer” behind a computer screen due to reduced social presence and the built-in buffer that the medium provides, they might be less likely to “sugar coat” their message and more likely to state their actual, privately-held reasons for rejection more explicitly and with less redressive action (McGlone & Batchelor, 2003). As such, CMC refusals may reflect rejectors’ prioritization of efficiency over politeness, even if the risk of performing a FTA increases. Thus from a CFO perspective, the reduced attention to face needs suggests that more bald, on record (BOR) rejections would be present in CMC, especially for those dyads who share high social distance. Those who are not directly acquainted would have less motivation to fulfill relational goals or perform any sort of redressive action, and the heightened anonymity and decreased social presence in online interaction only reduces the need to do so. This is also expected to be especially evident for those rejectors who will deliberately choose CMC in an attempt to emphasize depersonalization.

While the CFO perspective may apply to those communicative situations involving high social distance dyads exploiting the impersonal nature of CMC, CFO may be less applicable to low social distance dyads, or those using CMC in a more personal

manner. Those that are acquainted will be more likely to attend to the face needs of others involved in the interaction, and will find ways to do so, even in a reduced cue environment. Hiemstra (1982) found that more than 75 percent of the utterances of an interactive teleconference contained some type of linguistic facework. Additionally, Morand and Ocker (2002) suggest that online communicators will continually adjust the framing of their message to convey whatever degree of politeness and clarity they wish. Thus far from being ill-suited to interpersonal communication as CFO theorists contend, it can be argued that CMC users can fulfill the functional and relational goals of rejection if they so choose. In fact, CMC may offer certain advantages over other channels, and these advantages are expected to be important to low social distance dyads who are concerned with relational as well as functional goals.

The hyperpersonal model of CMC (Walther, 1996; 2007) suggests that rejectors can selectively self-present in CMC by taking advantage of editing, timing, effort, and “the masking of involuntary cues” thereby influencing the impressions receivers make. CMC’s heightened editing capabilities afford rejectors the ability to craft a detailed or ambiguous, personal or impersonal message, and provide opportunities for the rejector to frame the message according to his or her desires. In terms of message content, online daters can minimize self-embarrassment through careful scrutiny and editing of their online statements. CMC also provides rejectors with heightened interactional control over their communications in cyberspace. By scrutinizing content, they can ensure that their messages appear appreciative, polite, even apologetic, but also firm in their refusal. They can control the timing of their messages, sending correspondence according to their

schedule. They can attend to the threats to target's face by utilizing specific facework strategies linguistically in CMC.

In recent work, many scholars have proposed new theoretical models which depart from the CFO perspective by suggesting that CMC can certainly equal the interpersonal involvement levels in FtF interaction, and (in some cases) can even surpass those levels of involvement and create more emotional immediacy among interactants (Walther, 1996). However, fewer theorists can account for those circumstances under which interactants desire both interpersonal involvement *and* the communicative distance that the CMC medium provides (see for example, Markus, 1994). Under certain circumstances, individuals may deliberately desire to be involved and detached simultaneously—a state that seems only to be achievable with a medium like CMC.

The above discussion sheds light on CMC's ability to change the formulaic construction of rejection messages and the elements which they contain. In this respect, other theoretical frameworks that did not account for online communication may not address all of the questions posed in this paper. It is possible that emphasizing different aspects of CMC (e.g., control over timing, editing capabilities, etc.) elicit different effects on the construction of the message or its impact on the target. In addition, each type of CMC correspondence (email, online dating websites, IM, etc.) may also influence the rejection process because of the socially constructed norms of use surrounding such technologies. The types of CMC and their usage patterns may alter the theoretical implications that CFO and the hyperpersonal model offer for online date request refusals.

The Impact of CMC

The type of CMC utilized in message delivery is expected to have a significant impact on message construction. O' Sullivan's (2000) impression management model points out the importance of the *symbolic meaning* that each type of communicative channel conveys above and beyond its linguistic content. For example, one would expect a colleague to fax over a finished work report, but does not expect the death of a family member to be handled through the fax machine. Similarly, we would find it strange if our boss took out a television ad to remind us of a project deadline rather than sending a reminder through email. However as O' Sullivan notes, such norms can evolve between interactants as to which channels to use for what purposes:

Whereas some individuals may consider electronic mail inappropriate for anything but information exchange, others may view it as perfectly appropriate for flirting, expressions of emotion, or cybersex. The model proposes that the interaction initiator's perceptions of various channels' symbolic meaning is [*sic*] a...key consideration in channel selection. (p. 412)

It is worth noting that O' Sullivan's model does not take issue with transactional communication and only considers channel selection from the sender's point of view. As such, he notes that the "initiator's perceptions regarding symbolic meaning" are what prompts media choice. Thus, if the requester initiates contact with the rejector via email, presumably, the rejector would utilize the same medium to convey the reciprocating speech act of the refusal. Regardless of whether or not the rejector believes another CMC type would be more suited to the communicative task of rejection, he or she is expected reciprocate medium choice because if it is true that the rejection is the reciprocal speech

act of the request message tied together by a common frame of reference, then the rejector should use the same medium as the requester to complete the speech act (Saeki & O' Keefe, 1994). This constrains the rejector's free choice of media, and such restrictions are assumed to have an effect on how the message is constructed mainly because each type of CMC has its own specific symbolic meaning and norms of use.

Although O' Sullivan included several different types of communicative channels in his model, this research is only examining differences in communication technologies *within* CMC. Regardless, the notion of symbolic meaning remains salient among different types of CMC technologies. Examining how users internalize the symbolic meaning and norms of use surrounding media is one goal of this research. The social constructivist approach to communication technology is one perspective with which to explore how online interactants come to understand the functions and norms surrounding CMC technologies. The several social constructivist theories have different underlying aspects however they share a united theme: Social interaction creates shared meaning among social actors such that the norms regarding the use of certain communication technologies become mutually defined and known (Fulk, Schmitz, & Ryu, 1995).

Following this theoretical perspective, the effects elicited by each type of CMC depend upon norms that surround its use. Thus, contextualizing the study of the CMC media by considering the social norms of use is an important part of understanding how such media function in interpersonal rejection. These distinctions between *personal* and *impersonal* asserted below are not characterizations of the media itself, but rather distinctions as to how they are used in interpersonal communication. The media

themselves are neither personal nor impersonal, but they influence the processes under which they can be conceived as such (Walther, 1996).

The purpose of online dating websites is specific: People use them to find a romantic connection amid the millions of participants involved in the website. As such, a profile on Match.com carries with it the expectation that several date requests may come to the profile-owner as a result of putting him or herself out on display. In this sense, Match.com and other Internet dating services similar to it are regarded as *impersonal*; one in which relative strangers search the site and screen profiles for potential dates¹.

Although an abundance of dating websites are available on the Internet, the current research focuses on the usage patterns of Match.com and other “see and screen” types of online dating websites. The reason for this is that Match.com is one of the most widely used dating websites. Practically speaking, it is advantageous to discover how individuals will behave within Match.com (and other similar websites) as this information will have implications for the over 15 million users worldwide (Match.com/howitworks).

The norms regarding email use differ with regard to communicative purposes. While email can be used for a one-to-many distribution (as in a listserv), an individual using email to send a date request intends to communicate with only one person. Because email addresses are not usually included in an online dater’s profile, they are not typically used for personal correspondence between online daters. Thus if an email date request were to be sent, this presumes that the requester must have taken the time and effort to

¹ It is important to note that not all online dating websites have this same “see and screen” type of format. Some, such as eharmony.com make daters fill out a lengthy questionnaire, and then match the participant to another dater who fits their “criteria” before either party initiates contact. These dating websites are not considered in this research.

locate the email address of his or her target indicating a much more *personal* correspondence than simply sending a message within the dating website itself.

Close and Zinkhan (2004) created a working definition of “dating netiquette” based on their qualitative analysis of online daters’ perceptions of normative use and found that the norms and etiquette regarding online dating are generally less stringent than those found in FtF dating. Indeed, part of the appeal of online dating is the relative anonymity associated with the medium: Users are able to “screen” or view several profiles at once and send multiple request messages to those that interest them (Close & Zinkhan, 2004). Furthermore Wang and Lu (2007) noted that this type of electronic communication facilitates a one-to-many kind of communication “better serves cyberdaters’ need for a greater quantity of information and enables them to multi-communicate with several people at the same time” (p. 4).

Furthermore, online matchmaking websites have certain features that facilitate impersonal communication. The use of “winking” in Match.com (also called “eye contact” or a “collect call” in other dating websites) allows users to make contact with those who interest them without extending any specific personal message. Sending a wink generates a message sent to the recipient with the notification that an interested party has “winked at you” and a link to the sender’s profile. The message content is pre-written and generated by the website messaging system rather than the message sender, and provides an impersonal first attempt at initiating communication. A returned wink signifies mutual interest and invites continued escalation to a personal message sent through the private channel provided by the website. Private messaging channels usually function like email; however such correspondence is restricted to paying subscribers

(Fiore & Donath, 2004). Conversely, the use of impersonal “winking” seems to be encouraged by Match.com as it is a free service for any person who has a profile posted on the website. Winks are therefore free to send to and receive from any other online dater, whereas private messaging is not. Research has suggested that the relational progression of media use in online dating starts with a “wink,” then moves on to a personal message, and escalates from there to other types of media: “Users write each other with the private messaging system to find out whether they want to proceed to contact via email, phone, or face-to-face interaction” (Fiore & Donath, 2004, p. 1397). Thus a wink would be seen as the most impersonal, followed by a message sent within the Match.com private messaging channel, followed by an email sent to a personal email account (i.e. one that is not moderated or hosted by a third party), content aside.

In addition to the socially constructed usage patterns surrounding email and online dating websites, certain mechanical features present in dating websites could also change how receivers perceive rejection messages delivered using each medium. Although both a messaging service and email are personal, one-to-one correspondences, the fact that private email addresses are not typically posted content in online dating profiles would make messages sent via email more personal (i.e., the sender has to search for the receiver’s email address through some other means). If one receives a private email from another online dater, it is perceived as more tailored, personal, or individualistic (in comparison to website messaging) due to the increased effort needed to locate the address. Though the use of personal email is not a communicative option within Match.com, extending the comparison beyond the website, to consider other messaging forms as well is not unreasonable. Because it lacks the more mechanical or

automated reply features of Match.com messaging systems and requires original content, an email sent to a person's private email account should be seen as the most personal correspondence of all.

Thus the degree of personal fit that different media afford (both alone and in combination with the degree of social distance) should affect the reported reason for refusal, the degree of facework, and the number and type of politeness strategies used in the message. The increased impersonal aspects of dating websites allow rejectors to selectively attend to requests from those who interest them but reject those that do not. Rejectors responding to a message in the Match.com channel may craft less polite messages because of the high degree of anonymity and heightened aspects of depersonalization that may be associated with the routinized and impersonal communication that this type of CMC promotes. However, those responding to an email message may be more likely to respond with a polite refusal to attend to the more personal nature of the correspondence reflected in this medium and the increased importance placed on face. As such a main effect for CMC type is hypothesized:

H3: Rejection messages delivered using email contain more politeness strategies than rejection messages delivered via the Match.com messaging system.

CMC itself may change the reported reason for rejection offered in different dyads. Given the existing research on date request rejection, it is known that rejectors will often give a reason with an impersonal locus regardless of the fact that the actual, privately held reason for rejection had a personal locus. Folkes (1982) suggested this pattern was due to concerns for presentation of self and other's feelings, but newer CMC dynamics change how individuals manage such concerns. Additionally, using CMC may

provide a new reason with which to reject the requester (i.e., “this online dating profile wasn’t really my idea”, “This dating profile is kind of old, my interests have changed”, etc.) or even lying about receiving the date request altogether (i.e. “I must have deleted your message! I’m sorry...”). Rejectors can put the blame on the use of media (an external factor) rather than using an internally-based reason such as the requester’s incompatibility. Because of these new processes, it is expected that CMC will impact the rejector’s disclosure of reasons under different media conditions; however, exact predictions of effects are unknown. As such, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: How does the type of CMC affect the publicly reported reason for date rejection?

Rejection Choice in CMC and Social Distance

As online dating expands in popularity and usage, CMC users are beginning to find novel ways to address the communicative goals accompanying romantic rejection that were not previously available in FtF situations. The choices that rejectors make depend upon the degree of social distance that they share with the target of rejection and the options that exist within the selected media of correspondence. On one hand, if rejectors share a low degree of social distance with the target, it follows that they would choose a rejection method that would allow the fulfillment of both relational and functional goals. Alternatively, if social distance is greater and relational goals are less important, rejectors may choose methods that focus only on functional goals. Another option that online daters can use for refusal in CMC but not in FtF, is to remain unresponsive. Each rejection option and the implications surrounding its use is explored below.

Remain Unresponsive. When high social distance rejectors receive requests from an unknown other, it is plausible that they may simply *not respond*. Requesters use online dating websites to generate impersonal request messages (such as a “wink” or quick hello message) have a higher chance of receiving more BOR rejections, or simply no response to their online date requests, for two reasons. BOR rejections are expected because attending to the competing functional and relational goals present in the refusal message is cognitively taxing. As cognitive misers (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) communicators will find ways to minimize the amount of cognitive effort needed in message construction. Thus strangers who have no relational goals to accomplish (i.e., preserve face, self-presentation) have the opportunity to reduce their cognitive load by shifting their attention to the functional goals of the refusal.

Secondly, the relatively high social distance coupled with the impersonality of online dating websites suggests that increased volume of date requests from strangers may lead some profile-owners not to respond at all. In one context Limaye (2001) suggests applicants who apply to organizations of their own volition have no right to expect a reply since the applicants were the ones to initiate the communication: “In fact, one common method of rejection is keeping silent; no news in such cases is bad news....if people decide to apply, they are expending their time, effort, and money voluntarily without any external inducement and, as such, have no moral right to expect reasons for rejection” (p. 103). While Limaye (2001) frames his analysis within an organizational context, the idea remains the same: Those who choose to initiate contact with a profile-owner (who may expect but has not directly asked for such attentions) do so at their own risk of being rejected.

The choice to disregard undesired attention becomes an enticing one to save time and reduce cognitive load. Because such impersonal contact is so prevalent in online dating sites, some users complain of being inundated with impersonal “winks” and “collect calls”: “...some women are so deluged with collect calls that they indicate in their profiles that they will not respond to them, often criticizing the stinginess of those who do not pay for full privileges but still want a response” (Fiore & Donath, 2004, p. 1397). The impersonal nature of online dating communication promotes these “winks” and “collect calls” and (female) online daters can feel overwhelmed by advances from strangers. In this case, they may exercise the option to simply not respond to such advances. Therefore the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Those receiving requests from a stranger (high degree of social distance) utilizing the Match.com messaging system are less likely to construct a refusal message with original content than those receiving requests from a stranger via email.

One-Click Rejection. Another communicative choice for rejection in online dating is the reply button called “Say ‘No, thanks’”. Match.com has streamlined the rejection process into one click of the mouse, making refusals easier to deliver. By clicking on the “say no thanks” button, an automated message is generated and sent to the requester. The presence of this option may alter the process of online rejection and the likelihood of a response bearing original content. Automated rejection messages would most likely be utilized by high social distance individuals, or those who are looking for an efficient way to fulfill the functional goals of rejection but are not concerned with relational goals. In contrast, low social distance rejectors consider both goals to be important and are more

willing to spend a greater amount of effort to do so, thus reducing their preference to use the “say no thanks” button. Given these assumptions, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Within the Match.com messaging system, those receiving a request from a stranger (high social distance) utilize the “say no thanks” option more than those receiving a request from an acquaintance (low social distance).

Tailored Rejection Messages. Although online daters have more options in how they refuse date requests compared to FtF daters, they are undoubtedly influenced by the relationship they have with the target of rejection. Given that high social distance rejectors in Match.com might be (a) more likely to remain unresponsive or (b) more likely to respond using the one-click option, it is assumed that when they *do* choose to respond, they will construct a refusal message with the fewest number of overall politeness strategies when compared to low social distance rejectors in Match.com and either type of dyad (acquainted or strangers) communicating via email.

The effect of social distance may be more subtle among email users. Email is a much more personal medium of interaction, and a difference between the number of strategies directed to either known or unknown targets of rejection may be minor. However a greater number of politeness strategies may be used by low social distance dyads who are focusing more closely on relational goal fulfillment. The condition where the most politeness strategies would be expected is among low social distance rejectors using Match.com. Because other choices exist for Match.com users to (a) simply not respond or (b) respond using the “say no thanks” option, when Match.com rejectors are motivated to respond to the date request, they are prepared to expend cognitive effort and

compose a message that fulfills both functional and relational goals. As such, these messages must be tailored to the target in such a way that must not only complete relational goals, but must also override the apparent impersonality of the Match.com medium. Thus the interaction of media type and social distance is expected to be much greater in Match.com than email.

H6: Rejectors who refuse a date request from an acquaintance (low social distance) in Match.com use more politeness strategies in their rejection messages than rejectors using email with known targets, while strangers (high social distance) communicating in email use more politeness strategies in their rejection messages than rejectors using Match.com.

Chapter 4: Method

Sample

A sample of 199 undergraduate students from a large Midwestern university voluntarily participated in this research in exchange for course credit. Only those who had prior experience with both email and online dating were utilized in this research. These restrictions were set in order to identify those participants who were familiar with the technology and the social norms surrounding their use. Subjects answered standard demographic items (age, gender), questions regarding email (number of accounts, amount of time spent on email) and online dating use (number of dating websites visited, amount of time spent in websites, and activity of membership). After removing those subjects who failed to follow experimental instructions, 190 subjects remained in the sample.

Analyses revealed the sample sex (52 percent female) and age ($M = 19.8$, $SD = 1.95$, mode = 19). With regard to email, the average number of email accounts a given

subject subscribed to was 2.3 ($SD = 0.97$) (email account information is presented in Appendix A). Time spent on email varied within the sample and is presented in Appendix B. Online dating usage patterns showed that although only 4.2 percent of the sample was actually comprised of active online daters at the time of data collection, approximately 84.8 percent of subjects had previously been an active member of an online dating website. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority of subjects (95.3 percent) had visited at least one online dating website, ($M = 1.49$, $SD = 1.06$) (4.7 percent of the sample failed to report a specific dating website they had visited in the past). Approximately 30 percent of the sample reported either visiting or using Match.com currently or in the past, making Match.com the frequently visited and used online dating website (the reported website activity can be found in Appendix C). The amount of time subjects reported having spent on online dating websites is presented in Appendix D.

Procedure

Participants (Ps) received a WWW address and were instructed to complete the research on their own. Ps therefore were able to complete the tasks in a realistic environment where they would normally use the Internet. After providing their informed consent, Ps clicked on a link which randomly redirected them to one of the sixteen stimulus conditions containing a hypothetical scenario embedded with experimental inductions (see Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong, 2008). They were instructed to read the scenario and then proceed to the questionnaire by clicking another link (examples of experimental stimuli and scenarios are presented in Appendix E).

Ps received the reason induction (the reason that they must reject the date request). After reading the reason induction, Ps proceeded to the questionnaire section. Ps

indicated their likelihood of responding to the date request, and those in the Match.com condition also indicated the likelihood of response using the automated “say no thanks” reply option. Ps then responded to the date request by writing a rejection message: “Please write out WORD FOR WORD exactly what you would say to respond to the date request.” Ps were reminded that their rejection message would be communicated via the same type of CMC the requester initially used. After composing their rejection message, Ps reported any discrepancies between the privately-held reason for rejection given in the scenario and the publicly-reported reason they utilized in their rejection message and any motivations for those discrepancies. A written debriefing occurred upon completion of the experimental procedure.

Design

The experiment was a mixed groups, factorial design involving four independent variables creating a 2 (gender of initiator: male or female) x 2 (CMC type: email or match.com) x 2 (social distance: high or low) x 2 (reason for rejection: personal or impersonal locus) design. Following Mongeau et al. (2004), participants were nested within sex of initiator and were then randomly assigned the conditions of CMC type, social distance, and the reason for rejection. They were told that the purpose of the experiment was to explore how individuals communicate in romantic dating situations using online technologies.

Independent Variables

Following Besson et al.’s (1998) and Mongeau et al.’s (2004) methodology, participants received one of sixteen hypothetical scenarios in which they imagined receiving a request for a romantic date from an individual of the opposite gender.

Manipulations of all four variables were embedded in the scenarios which were assigned to subjects according to gender. The request message content was pre-written, and judged on dimensions of realism by a group of college-aged raters before being introduced into the current research.

Sex of rejector. Male and female participants were matched to scenarios featuring date requests initiated by opposite-sex requestors. Previous research examining cross-sex dating patterns found that date requests were primarily initiated by men and so consequently focused more attention on the male requester-female rejector half of cross-sex dyads (Berger & Bell, 1988; Folkes, 1982). However, more recent research suggests that female date requests are becoming more common (Mongeau, Hale, Johnson, & Hillis, 1993). Such research warrants the examination of both female and male rejectors although no specific effects are hypothesized in this research.

CMC type. The date request message was embedded in either a Match.com or email format. The email format was the academic email system format that all participants were familiar with; however, future research could test whether or not different types of email (commercial, academic, or corporate) addresses have an impact on message construction.

Social distance. In the high social distance condition, participants were told that the date request came from a complete stranger. Low social distance conditions describe the request coming from an acquaintance that the participant supposedly knows as a former classmate. In addition, the social distance induction was strengthened with the addition of *anticipated future interaction* which was used to reflect acquaintanceship. High social distance rejectors were told that the date requester had already graduated

from the university, thus the chances of seeing the requester in a common meeting place were reduced (low anticipation of future interaction). Those in the low social distance condition were told that the requester was still attending classes at the university, thus increasing the probability of a chance meeting (high anticipation of future interaction).

Reason for rejection. The scenarios also provided one of two different reasons for rejection. The personal locus condition indicated that the reason for refusal is *because the requester is a geek* while the impersonal locus condition indicated the reason is *because the rejector's parents are coming into town*. This initial reason was the privately held reason for refusal, however participants were told that they could write any reason they wished in the actual message, regardless of the reason given in the original scenario.

Manipulation Checks

Manipulation checks for social distance and anticipated future interaction were conducted to assess the adequacy of experimental inductions. Both scales consisted of three, 7-point semantic differential items. Participants indicated how familiar they felt with the requester: “complete stranger/ well acquainted,” “best friends/ no relationship,” and “not familiar at all/very familiar” ($\alpha = .75$). Secondly, subjects’ anticipation of future interaction with the requester was assessed using items from Walther (1994). On 7-point scales, subjects answered the following items reflecting their expectations of future interaction “anticipate/ would not anticipate future interaction,” “expectation of future interaction whether you would want to or not,” and “to what extent would you like to communicate with requester again” ($\alpha = .85$) (Survey items can be found in Appendix F).

To check the reason for rejection manipulation, subjects were asked to (a) identify the reason for rejection given in the scenario, (b) compare this reason to the one they used

in the refusal they constructed, and (c) then report any discrepancies between the scenario reason and the reason they used in their actual message in an open ended response. The reasons subjects used in their actual refusals were then compared to the original induction to see if subjects were aware of the initial reason induction.

Content Analysis

A content analysis was conducted on the rejection messages created by those participants who indicated they would respond to the request message. Following procedures used by Roloff and Janiszewski (1989) and Besson et al. (1998), coding was executed in a two-step process. First, two coders worked independently to unitize the written discourse into idea units. Coders exhibited high unitizing reliability (male subjects, average agreement = .81, Guetzkow's $U = .003$; female subjects, average agreement = .85, Guetzkow's $U = .003$). All disagreements between coders were resolved by a third coder. After unitizing, two more coders (blind to hypotheses) categorized each unit as one of five politeness strategy categories defined in Table 1.

All disagreements were resolved by a third coder. Inter-coder reliability was acceptable for female subjects (average agreement = .80, Scott's $pi = .76$) and male subjects (average agreement = .81, Scott's $pi = .78$). Lastly, the reason clauses were further coded to identify the attribution used in the rejection message. Reasons were coded as containing either an internal, external, or ambiguous attribution. Inter-coder reliability was acceptable (average agreement = .98, Scott's $pi = .94$). Definitions of reason attributions are listed in Table 2.

Table 1

Politeness Strategies

Codes	Definition	Exemplars
Rejection	Statements directly refusing the date request	"I just can't go out this weekend"
Reason	Statements that give reason for why respondent can't go on date	"I'm so busy with work/ school." "My parents are in town this weekend." "We're just not that compatible."
Apologies	Statements indicating apology	"Sorry about this" "I apologize."
Appreciation	Statements of appreciation for (a) the message or date request (b) complimenting the respondent	"Thanks for your message." "I'm so flattered that you're interested in me." "Thanks for saying all those nice things about me."
Concern	Expressions of concern for requester's potentially hurt feelings	"This may be too harsh, but..."
Encouragement	Statements that bolster requester's self-confidence in the face of rejection	"You sound like a great person." "I'm sure you can find someone else."
Future Contact	Suggestions for future contact or relationship between respondent and requester	"I hope we can still be friends." "We should get to know each other better."

Note. All exemplars are taken from actual data.

Dependent Variables

Overall length was computed by summing the total number of words utilized in the entire rejection message. To determine the difference in the use of politeness strategies, the total number of all strategies used in each rejection message was summed and compared across conditions. Reason attributions were coded as internal, external or ambiguous and were analyzed according to hypothesis 2.

Table 2

Reason Attributions

Code	Definition	Exemplars
Internal	Those reasons in which the requester is responsible for the rejection	"Your interests are very different than mine."
External	Those reasons in which certain circumstances prohibit the respondent from accepting the date request	"I'm currently seeing someone." "I've got lots of studying to do this weekend."
Ambiguous	Reasons in which no clear attribution can be inferred from the respondent's message	"I'm really busy, but let but let me check my schedule and get back to you."

Note. All exemplars are taken from actual data. Ambiguous reason attributions were dropped from the following analyses as they were not relevant to hypothesis testing.

Chapter 5: Results

Manipulation Checks

A series of *t*-tests was used to test the adequacy of the social distance and anticipated future interaction manipulations. Analysis revealed a significant difference between high and low social distance conditions, $t(188) = 6.38, p < .001$. Low social

distance rejectors ($M = 2.95$, $SD = .88$) reported feeling more acquainted with the requester than high social distance rejectors ($M = 2.12$, $SD = .91$). Analysis also showed a significant difference for anticipated and unexpected future interaction $t(188) = 8.79$, $p < .001$. Consistent with expectations, low social distance interactants reported a greater expectation of future interaction with the requester ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.28$) than high social distance interactants ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.19$).

To check the reason of rejection manipulation, the initial reason given in the scenario was compared to the actual reasons that subjects used in their messages. Results showed that 48.9 percent of participants used the reason given in the scenario, 46.2 percent of participants used a different reason, but were able to identify and explain their motivations for the discrepancy, and 4.9 of subjects used a different reason from the original, but did not provide an explanation for their actions. Consistent with expectations, 95 percent of the sample was able to recall the original reason for rejection given in the scenario.

Due to the length and focal concerns, results from the reason of rejection manipulation will be reported in a separate manuscript. However, to ensure that the effects of this variable did not interact with the hypothesized factors, analysis of variance was conducted on the total number of politeness strategies. Results showed no significant three-way interaction among reason type, media type, and social distance, $F(1, 182) = 1.83$, $p = .18$. A reduced model initially showed a significant interaction between media type and reason type $F(1, 186) = 9.98$, $p = .002$. Post-hoc analysis determined that this effect was due to a significant difference within email although scores in the Match.com conditions did not differ. These results will accompany a future manuscript.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 predicted that low social distance acquaintances would use more politeness strategies (apologies, appreciation, expressions of concern, encouraging statements, suggestions for future contact, and longer length) in their rejection messages than high social distance strangers. To test for differences in the length of messages, a word count was calculated for each rejection message and an independent sample *t*-test was performed to see if differences existed between high and low social distance conditions. Analysis revealed that there were no differences in message length, $t(188) = .12, ns$. Low social distance rejectors ($M = 66.62, SD = 33.54$) did not significantly differ in the length of their messages from high social distance rejectors ($M = 67.23, SD = 35.44$).

To test overall use of politeness strategies, the total number of politeness strategies used in each message was summed and compared across conditions. Data were consistent with this hypothesis $t(188) = 2.22, p = .01, \eta^2 = .03$. Low social distance rejectors ($M = 2.70, SD = 1.32$) used significantly more strategies than high social distance rejectors ($M = 2.11, SD = 1.29$). To find which of the politeness strategies was most utilized by rejectors, individual chi-square tests were conducted to see if there were differences among each politeness strategy. Results for *statements of appreciation*, $\chi^2(1, n = 175) = .02, ns$, and *concern for partner's feelings*, $\chi^2(1, n = 15) = .57, ns$, indicated that both low and high social distance rejectors used both strategies equally within the sample of rejection messages. Surprisingly, *apologies* were more likely to be utilized by high social distance rejectors, $\chi^2(1, n = 59) = 8.32, p < .005, \phi = .38$. Low social distance rejectors were more likely to *make suggestions for future contact*, $\chi^2(1, n = 179)$

= 4.92, $p = .03$, $\phi = .17$. Additionally, it was found that anticipation of future interaction was significantly correlated with overall use of politeness strategies $r(188) = .47$, $p < .001$. The more a rejector expected to potentially meet or interact with the target of rejection in the future, the more politeness strategies he or she used in the refusal message.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that low social distance rejectors would utilize reasons with external locus of rejection more than high social distance rejectors. Of the 187 reasons coded as either internally- or externally-based, it was found that all subjects overwhelmingly used external reasons for rejection more often than internal reasons, $\chi^2(1, n = 187) = 120.2$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .87$, regardless of social distance conditions. Examinations of the proportions of externally-based reasons showed that in the low social distance condition, 63 of the 91 reasons reported were externally-based in this condition (proportion = .69) while 78 of 96 reasons in the high social distance condition were externally-based (proportion = .81). Contrary to hypothesis 2, a binomial test of proportions revealed that high social distance rejectors were significantly more likely to utilize externally-based reasons for rejection than low social distance rejectors, $z = -2.00$, $p = .04$.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that email rejections contain more politeness strategies than rejections written using Match.com. An independent sample t -test showed that Match.com ($M = 68.2$, $SD = 33.93$) and email ($M = 65.8$, $SD = 35.0$) users did not differ significantly in the length of their messages, $t(188) = .49$, ns . An independent sample t -test did not reveal any differences between email and Match.com rejectors when all strategies were collapsed $t(188) = .49$, ns . However, there were differences in the use of

individual politeness strategies as revealed by a set of individual chi-square tests, which were consistent with the hypothesis. Email users were significantly more likely to utilize *apologies*, $\chi^2 (1, n = 59) = 5.78, p = .02, \phi = .31$ and *expressions of concern for the requester's potentially hurt feelings*, $\chi^2 (1, n = 14) = 4.57, p = .03$. There were no significant differences between email and Match.com rejectors in the use of *statements of appreciation*, $\chi^2 (1, n = 175) = .57, ns$; *statements of encouragement*, $\chi^2 (1, n = 62) = .58, ns$; *suggestions for future contact* $\chi^2 (1, n = 179) = .99, ns$.

An independent sample *t*-test was used to test hypothesis 4 which predicted that those individuals receiving date requests initiated by strangers would be less likely to construct a refusal message in Match.com than in email. Data were not consistent with this hypothesis, $t (97) = .81, ns$. Match.com rejectors ($M = 3.70, SD = 1.82$) and email rejectors ($M = 3.40, SD = 1.87$) were equally likely to construct a refusal message with original content.

Although hypothesis 4 revealed no differences in the likelihood of replies bearing original content to unknown requesters in Match.com compared to email, results of hypothesis 5 revealed that social distance manipulations were important predictors of reply likelihood within the Match.com condition. Hypothesis 5 predicted that Match.com users receiving date requests from strangers would be more likely to use the “say, no thanks” button than those receiving date requests from acquaintances. Data were consistent with this hypothesis $t (91) = 1.97, p < .03, \eta^2 = .04$. Analysis showed that Match.com users who were unacquainted with the date requester ($M = 4.43, SD = 1.99$) were significantly more likely to utilize the “say no thanks” button as a form of rejection than those who were acquainted with the requester ($M = 3.61, SD = 1.94$).

Hypothesis 6 predicted an interaction effect of media type and social distance on the overall use of politeness strategies. As predicted, a planned contrast test revealed that acquainted Match.com rejectors used the most politeness strategies ($M = 3.00, SD = 1.16$) whereas acquainted email rejectors used more strategies ($M = 2.45, SD = 1.35$) when compared to unacquainted email rejectors ($M = 2.42, SD = 1.40$), and lastly unacquainted Match.com rejectors used the least amount of politeness strategies ($M = 2.09, SD = 1.21$), $t(186) = 2.99, p = .001$.

The results for RQ1 showed that media type did make a difference in the reasons rejectors used in their message. Although results showed that all rejectors were more likely to use an external reason for rejection regardless of media type $\chi^2(1, n = 187) = 5.36, p = .02, \phi = .17$, analysis of the proportions of externally-based reasons showed that for Match.com rejectors, 61 out of 90 reasons were externally-based (proportion = .73) whereas for email rejectors 82 out of 97 were externally-based (proportion = .87). A binomial test of proportions revealed this difference in proportions was significant, $z = 3.52, p < .001$. Conversely, Match.com users had a higher proportion of internally-based reasons for rejection (proportion = .27) than email rejectors (proportion = .13). The binomial test of proportions also showed that this difference was significant, $z = 2.71, p = .003$. Thus media type did impact the publicly reported reason for rejection. A very small percentage of the sample (5 percent) specifically used media as the reason for their rejection, and thus was not large enough for statistical analysis (Results of hypotheses 1 through 6 and research question 1 can be found in Appendix G).

Gender and Media Use

Although no specific gender effects were hypothesized, analysis revealed that men ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.71$) were more likely to respond with rejection messages than were women ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.90$), $t(188) = 2.31$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Additionally, some differences were found in the use of specific politeness strategies. Individual chi-square tests revealed that female rejectors were more likely to incorporate *statements of encouragement*, $\chi^2(1, n = 62) = 3.16$, $p = .08$ and *statements of appreciation for the date request*, $\chi^2(1, n = 174) = 11.17$, $p < .001$ into their messages than male rejectors. Regarding reasons for rejection, women were significantly more likely to utilize internally-based reasons for rejection than men, $\chi^2(1, n = 34) = 5.76$, $p = .02$.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The purpose of this research was to determine how relational dynamics and media can affect the use of politeness strategies in romantic rejection message construction. It was assumed the degree of acquaintanceship—social distance—between requesters and rejectors would be reflected in the types of politeness strategies used in romantic refusals. It was also expected that the social norms surrounding the use of new media would alter the rejection process when compared to other existing forms of CMC such as email.

Relational Effects. In line with prior research on the subject, low social distance rejectors constructed refusals with a proportionately higher number of politeness strategies overall than did high social distance rejectors (hypothesis 1). This was largely due to the fact that those acquainted with the target of rejection were more likely to incorporate *suggestions for future contact* into their refusals.

Subjects that experienced high expectations of future interaction with the target integrated more politeness strategies into their messages. Some subjects in the low social distance condition explained that they were motivated to be more polite by the possibility of future contact: “First off I said I wasn’t interested because it is the truth, secondly because i have to interact with this person in class, and i don’t want her to think im [sic] an ass.” Social distance was also found to have an impact on the reasons rejectors used in their messages, although not in the hypothesized direction. High social distance rejectors used more external reasons for rejection while low social distance rejectors used more internally-based reasons (hypothesis 2). After analyzing subjects’ explanations regarding their reason choice, it became clear that low social distance rejectors utilized internal reasons more often to avoid any “false hope” or “leading on” that could occur in future meetings with the requester:

I found his message in the first paragraph some what creepy, saying he thought i [sic] was “hot”. If a guy wrote that to me it would be a “no thanks” right away, however since he wrote me a personal message and has been nice and an acquaintance in the past I couldn't say no to everything without telling him the truth.

Others stated that they would “let the individual down nicely” but would also “tell the truth so there would be no misunderstandings,” or take care to “not hurt his feelings and rejecting him so harshly after he put so much time into a nice note, but be firm—quite firm—in my stance.” Results also revealed that all high social distance rejectors were equally likely to respond to the target regardless of media type (hypothesis 4).

Media Effects. When Match.com rejectors did compose their own original messages they didn't differ significantly from email users in their use of politeness strategies (hypothesis 3). Although Match.com users reported that they would be equally likely to respond to the target as email users, results indicate that they tend to choose options that (a) are not extant in FtF encounters and (b) are not extant in email. These results indicate that the social norms surrounding the use of new and existing forms of media play a large role in the construction of polite rejection messages. It was found that Match.com users receiving date requests from unknown others would rather respond using the automated reply option than creating a tailored message with original content (hypothesis 5). When given the option, online daters will take advantage of the "say, no thanks" one-click rejection button in Match.com. In this case, the Match.com messaging system and others like it have given online daters a new option with which to deliver romantic rejection, one that seems to be very appealing for users as a way to reduce the cognitive effort and stress of relational goal fulfillment.

Interaction of Relationship and Media. Anonymous Match.com users were less likely to construct tailored rejection messages containing large numbers of politeness strategies. The impersonal nature of Match.com in combination with their disregard of relational goals prompted lower levels of politeness strategies. Contrastingly, low social distance rejectors who were concerned with fulfillment of relational goals had to redouble efforts to overcome the impersonal environment of Match.com, and produced the most polite messages. Because email is a much more personal medium rejectors did not have to work as hard as Match.com users to fulfill both relational and functional goals,

although low social distance rejectors were shown to use more politeness strategies within email when compared to their high social distance counterparts (hypothesis 6).

The implications of results suggest a middle ground between prior CFO assumptions, and more recent theory. Individuals who deliberately choose to use the one-click rejection may have found an optimal way to balance the levels of interpersonal involvement and relational separation. By weighing their concerns for the target's feelings and personal self-presentational needs against their desire to maximize cognitive (and communicative) efficiency, rejectors may find themselves attracted to one type of media or rejection style versus another. Using the one-click rejection allows rejectors to increase their involvement with the target (through their reciprocated response to the request message), while simultaneously maintaining a sense of "detachment" (by virtue of pre-generated content rather than an originally crafted message). The one-click refusal provides a compromise between being too involved with the target (e.g., composing a message with original content) and being too detached (simply not responding). Rejectors may be choosing the one-click option because it allows them to execute their primary goals without investing too much time, energy, or effort in the actual interaction itself, creating a kind of "goldilocks refusal" that is "just right" for the fulfillment of communicative, self-presentation, relational goals, and cognitive efficiency.

Media type was also shown to affect the publicly reported reason for rejection (research question 1). Match.com users were more likely to use internally-based reasons, while email users were more likely to use externally-based reasons. This could be due to the fact that because impersonal responses and automated messages are more widely used within online dating messaging systems, when Match.com users *do* choose to compose an

original message, they believe it necessary to compose a message that contains a more specific reason for rejection to allay any undesired future messages or contact from the requester. Alternatively, the impersonal norms of use for Match.com may be reflected in rejectors' willingness to sacrifice the relational goals of self-presentation, relationship concerns, or concern for other in an effort to fulfill the functional goals of rejection. In such an impersonal environment of communication, users may feel that "sugar-coating" the refusal with externally-based reasons is unnecessary. Although it is known that online daters take special care in the self-presentation of their online dating profiles to attract attention from potential suitors, they might not be so careful in their communicative self-presentation when rejecting or trying to avoid future contact with unwanted others. Further research should examine the motivations and expectations behind online daters' rejection reasons, and discover how messaging systems may impact those behaviors. It would also be of interest to analyze the structure of both rejection and acceptance of romantic interests and requests to see if communicative self-presentational styles differ with respect to different functional and relational goals.

The results of this study suggest that new media provide new options for daters to reject others, mainly (a) one-click automated rejection or (b) remain unresponsive. Online daters are not only aware of these new communicative choices, but are using to use them to simplify and streamline what can often be a difficult, painful, and stressful process of romantic refusal. Automated rejection is an opportunity that many online daters take full advantage of; indeed, it may be that part of the appeal of online dating websites is the ease with which rejection can be delivered.

Although only a small number of rejectors used the actual media as their reason for refusal, it seems that users do report the electronic media itself as a reasonable “scapegoat” for their rejection, and remained unresponsive: “[sic] i left the box for a response to Sam [the requester] blank, because I ...choose not to respond to her email, if she were to bring it up in class, I would say I must have accidentally [sic] deleted it.” In this case (and others like it) rejectors would blame the medium as their reason for refusal—something that cannot be done in FtF communication. Other users reported that “realistically, I would not respond” or “I would not respond at all” which leads to another option that is available in CMC but not FtF. The choice to remain unresponsive or communicatively “unavailable” is easy to do in mediated communication, less so in FtF.

In addition, because of the selective editing offered by online communication it is plausible that rejectors may create and use novel rejection strategies not found in FtF rejection where communication is much faster and immediate. Future research should examine the motivations for the reasons used by rejectors and how these refusal messages affect the targets of rejection.

Limitations. The limitations of this study include the use of a convenience sample. Only approximately 85 percent of the sample reported being active at some point with an online dating service, leaving 15 percent who may be frequent visitors or “browsers” but not active members. This means that these 30 subjects may never have actually sent or exchanged online communications with any other daters. Although this may be true, it is also notable that effects were found in spite of this limitation. It is unlikely that the trends of the one-click rejection are specific only to this sample. A replication involving a more representative sample of individuals who use online dating websites on a more regular

basis would most likely show the same (if not stronger) usage patterns of the one-click rejection, rather than a different trend. This is due to the fact that as users become more habituated to the procedures of online dating, they will find ways to streamline the rejection process by screening and rejecting others as quickly and efficiently as possible. Although the most efficient way to do this would be to simply delete the messages sent by those they find unattractive, it may be that as part of a community of online daters familiar with the norms surrounding these websites, these rejectors know (a) the level of civility expected by others and (b) how it feels to be on the receiving end of a refusal. Lack of response would be too impolite, whereas a lengthy message with original content would seem overbearing and odd. Thus the one-click rejection fulfills the functional goals of refusal, while also maintaining the optimal level of politeness expected by others.

Another potential limitation of this study could be the date request message itself. Before being introduced into the research, it was judged by a group of college-aged raters and found to be appropriate. However, both the scenario and message had the potential to seem overbearing or demanding, and for some, receiving such a request from a complete stranger could seem threatening. Subjects did not seem to be concerned however, and out of the 190 subjects, only three mentioned this in their response messages (one saying the request was “creepy,” the other mentioning that it was “stalkerish,” and the last saying “I guess we Spartans have a way of finding each other, but don’t worry, I’m not creeped out or anything”). It is possible that others had similar reactions to the experimental stimuli but did not express it. However, it did not seem to significantly impact the results of this study.

Lastly, previous research has shown that online relationships seem to follow a very specific developmental trajectory in which dyads start with online correspondence, followed by other media (phone, webcam conferencing), and only then does it ever progress to an offline meeting. Each of these stages could last an indefinite amount of time, as each couple evolves and develops at its own rate. Therefore, while it may seem inappropriate to some for an individual to request an offline date so early in the developmental cycle, others may find it completely ordinary or normal. This research focused solely on the initial stages of dyadic development, but it may be that following the longitudinal development of an online couple would yield different rejection processes (e.g., more concern for the target of rejection). Future research may be able to demonstrate how rejection is delivered in the later stages of relational development.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has uncovered some of the norms surrounding the use of media in romantic rejection processes. This study contributes the findings that degrees of acquaintanceship and type of media both have a substantial impact on the linguistic composition of a romantic date rejection message. This study also showed that rejectors use different reason types for rejection, but further research could uncover the motivations involved in the selection of these reasons, and how media impact those motives. This study has shown that automated rejection is a widely used (and arguably new) practice among online daters. Because this is a new way to refuse romantic attentions, the effects of this type of refusal on the rejectee are unknown. Researchers should examine whether receiving this type of rejection heightens or dulls the pain of rejection from a recipient's perspective.

As research continues to examine how the romantic rejection works it should also focus on the way communication technologies alter these communication processes. Clearly, the use of CMC for romantic relationships is on the rise and as it continues, researchers must uncover how media change the way information is collected, conveyed, and understood in the rejection process.

Appendix A

Subscribed Accounts other than Campus email

Email Account	Frequency	Percent of Sample
Gmail	37	19.4
Hotmail	37	19.4
Yahoo!	55	28.8
MSN	2	1.0
AOL	26	13.6
Comcast	6	3.1
Other	5	2.6

Note. 22 individuals (11.5 percent of sample) indicated they only used their campus email account and are not included in this table.

Appendix B

Time Spent on email Daily

Time Spent	Frequency	Percent of Sample
Less than 1 hour	85	44.5
1 hour	67	35.1
2 hours	30	15.7
3 hours	5	2.6
More than 3 hours	4	2.1

Appendix C

Dating Websites Visted by Subjects

Website	Frequency	Percent of Sample
Match.com	55	28.8
eharmony.com	23	12.0
AllMSU.com	53	27.7
Yahoo!personals	16	8.4
chemistry.com	4	2.1
Other	31	16.3

Note. Nine individuals (4.7 percent of the sample) did not report visiting a website.

Appendix D

Time Spent in Online Dating

Time Spent	Frequency	Percent of Sample
Less than 1 hour	94	49.2
1 hour	25	13.1
2 hours	13	6.8
3 hours	0	0.0
4 hours	0	0.0
More than 3 hours	29	15.2

Note. 29 (15.7 percent of the sample) individuals indicated that they were never paying subscribers or active members of online dating websites, and had only visited an online dating website to “browse.”

Appendix E

Example Scenarios

Sam is a student at MSU. You have a class together this semester, and you've talked to him a few times—just casually about class. When he was absent from class last week, you let him copy the midterm review sheet that your professor handed out. Although he has a crush on you, he has never expressed it, nor has he ever asked you out. Recently, however, he came across your profile in the online dating website, Match.com, and has decided to ask you out on a date for this weekend. Using the Match.com messaging system, Sam sends the following date request message:

[\[click this link to see message\]](#)

Sam was a student at MSU, but graduated last year. You had a class together during his last semester, but you never noticed him. Recently, however, Sam found your email address in the MSU online directory. He decided to email you and ask you out on a date for this weekend with the following date request message:

[\[click this link to see message\]](#)

Sam is a student at MSU. You have a class together this semester, and you've talked to her a few times—just casually about class. When she was absent from class last week, you let her copy the midterm review sheet that your professor handed out. Although she has a crush on you, she has never expressed it, nor has she ever asked you out. Recently, however, she came across your profile in the online dating website, Match.com, and has decided to ask you out on a date for this weekend. Using the Match.com messaging system, Sam sends the following date request message:

[\[click this link to see message\]](#)

Sam was a student at MSU, but graduated last year. You had a class together during her last semester, but you never noticed her. Recently, however, Sam joined the online dating website, Match.com. She came across your profile, and decided to ask you out on a date this weekend. Using the Match.com messaging system, Sam sends the following date request message:

[\[click this link to see message\]](#)

mail.msu.edu**MSU@msu.edu****Message**

**Message 2 of 10**

From: SamSpartan@gmail.com[Trust] [Block]
To: MSU@msu.edu
Date: 25 Jan 2008, 11:53:26 AM
Subject: Hey!

Hi There,

I'm not sure if you remember me, but my name is Sam and we had a class together last year. I've been getting ready to move out of my apartment since I graduated from MSU, and I came across some old notes from that class we had together last year. It made me think of you...and how I always thought you were kinda hot, but I was just too shy to say anything! So I decided to look you up in the MSU email directory. I hope you don't mind me contacting you. If you don't remember me, I guess I should tell you a little about myself.

I'm 23 years old and originally from central Michigan (Owosso specifically), but I'm still living in Lansing even though I finished school. I have a few hobbies that I really like. Recently I learned how to knit, and I'm into baking, especially cake decorating. But I should probably cut back on that, since I eat too many of my own creations, which has caused me to gain a few pounds. :) (My new year's resolution was to lose about 10 pounds.) I have 2 cats named Farfalle and Tippy that I love a lot. I suppose I'm not really much of a partier, and I have to admit that I'm not much of an athlete. I'm ashamed to admit that never even went to a Spartan football game during my four years at MSU!

Since graduating, I've been looking for work, but haven't found anything I like yet. But I'm still in the East Lansing area, so I was wondering if you'd like to go out sometime? Maybe this weekend? I'd really like to go out and maybe talk about what you've been up to since last year. I look forward to hearing from you!

-Sam



My Match: [Connections](#) [Winks](#) **Email** [Favorites](#) [Removed Portraits](#)

Inbox 10 << [back to Inbox](#)

(0 new)

[Reply](#)  [Say "No, thanks"](#)  [Report a Concern](#)   [Delete](#) 

Sent 10

Trash 0

Don't let
your emails
get blocked

Forward
them to
your email
today!

From: samspartan 
Date Received: January 25
Subject: Hey!

[Forward to msu
mail](#)

Hi There,

I'm not sure if you remember me, but my name is Sam and we had a class together last year. I've been getting ready to move out of my apartment since I graduated from MSU, and I came across some old notes from that class we had together last year. It made me think of you...and how I always thought you were kinda hot, but I was just too shy to say anything! Lucky for me, I just came across your profile, so I hope you don't mind me contacting you. I guess I should tell you a little about myself.

I'm 23 years old and originally I'm from central Michigan (Owosso specifically), but I'm still living in Lansing even though I finished school. I have a few hobbies that I really like. I love playing video games—mainly stuff like Worlds of Warcraft. But I should probably cut back on that, since sitting so much in front of my computer has caused me to gain a few pounds. :) I suppose I'm not really much of a partier, but I like to sit in and watch movies. My favs are the Lord of the Rings trilogy, Jurassic Park, Star Wars. I'm a bit of a scifi buff—I really like Star Trek.

I have to admit that I'm not much of an athlete or a sports fan...I never even went to a Spartan football game during my four years at MSU! Since graduating, I've been looking for work, but haven't found anything I like yet. But I'm still in the East Lansing area, so I was wondering if you'd like to go out sometime? Maybe this weekend? I'd really like to go out and maybe talk about what you've been up to since last year. I look forward to hearing from you!

-Sam

[Reply](#)  [Say "No, thanks"](#)  [Report a Concern](#)   [Delete](#) 

<< [back to Inbox](#)

Appendix F

Survey Items

What is the likelihood that you would reply to Sam's message?

Not at all likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely likely

How likely would you be to respond to Sam's message by clicking on the "Say no thanks" reply option?*

Not at all likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Extremely likely

Please write out WORD FOR WORD exactly what you would say to Sam in your response message. You will be sending her a reply via the Match.com messaging system.

In this scenario, how well would you say you know Sam?

Complete Stranger 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Well Acquainted

In this scenario, how would you describe your relationship with Sam?

Best Friends 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 No relationship

In this scenario, how familiar do you feel with Sam?

Not Familiar at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very familiar

To what extent would you anticipate you'll have future interaction with Sam in the near future?

No Anticipation 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Certain of Future Interaction

To what extent would you expect to interact with Sam again whether you want to or not?

No Anticipation 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Certain of Future Interaction

To what extent would you want to communicate Sam again?

Do NOT want to communicate 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Definitely want to Communicate

What would be the likelihood you could have a chance meeting with Sam somewhere?

Entirely Likely 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Impossible

Think about the reason you gave to Sam as to why you couldn't go out on a date. Was the reason you wrote in your Match.com message the same reason we gave you (Sam is a geek) in the original scenario?

Yes

No

If you answered "no," please explain how the reason you gave differed from the original reason.

What was your motivation for using a different reason?

* Item used only in the Match.com condition

Appendix G

List of Hypotheses and Research Questions

H1: Low social distance pairs design rejection messages that contain more positive or negative politeness strategies than high social distance pairs.

Results: H1 supported. Overall, low social distance rejectors used more politeness strategies than high social distance rejectors $t(189) = 2.22, p = .01, \eta^2 = .03$. Suggestions for future contact were utilized more by low social distance rejectors than high social distance rejectors $\chi^2(1, n = 179) = 4.92, p = .03, \phi = .17$. Anticipated future interaction was positively correlated with use of politeness strategies $r(188) = .47, p < .001$.

H2: Low social distance rejectors will use externally-based reasons for rejection more than those with high social distance, regardless of the locus of the privately-held reason for rejection.

Results: H2 not supported. All rejectors were more likely to use externally-based reasons for rejection, regardless of social distance $\chi^2(1, n = 187) = 120.2, p < .001, \phi = .87$. Binomial test of proportions revealed results opposite of the hypothesized direction: High social distance rejectors were more likely to use externally-based reasons for rejection than low social distance rejectors, $z = -2.00, p = .04$.

H3: Rejection messages delivered using email contain more politeness strategies than rejection messages delivered via the Match.com messaging system.

Results: H3 not supported. However, individual chi-square tests were consistent with the hypothesis showing that email rejectors were significantly more likely to use *apologies*, $\chi^2(1, n = 59) = 5.78, p = .02, \phi = .31$ and *expressions of concern for the requester's potentially hurt feelings*, $\chi^2(1, n = 14) = 4.57, p = .03$.

H4: Those individuals receiving date requests from strangers would be less likely to construct a refusal message in Match.com than in email.

Results: H4 not supported, $t(97) = .81$, ns .

H5: Match.com users receiving date requests from strangers will use the “say no thanks” button more frequently than those receiving date requests from acquaintances.

Results: H5 supported, $t(91) = 1.97$, $p < .03$, $\eta^2 = .04$.

H6: Rejectors who refuse a date request from an acquaintance in Match.com use more politeness strategies in their rejection messages than rejectors using email with known targets, while strangers communicating in email use more politeness strategies in their rejection messages than rejectors using Match.com

Results: H6 supported. Planned contrast test significant in predicted direction, $t(186) = 2.99$, $p = .001$.

RQ1: Media type will impact the locus of the reported reason for rejection.

Results: RQ1 showed differences in reported reasons for rejection due to media type.

Binomial test of proportions showed that significant differences among the proportions of Match.com rejectors’ use of internally-based reasons over email rejectors, $z = 2.71$, $p = .003$, and email rejectors’ use of externally based reasons over Match.com rejectors, $z = 3.52$, $p < .001$.

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