The Effect of Rejections in Online Dating

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Resumo
Online dating facilitates both daters interactions and rejections. Given the large number of potential mating offers and daters limited time, many different rejections come up. In online dating platforms, most of these rejections are simply the absence of reply. This paper compares the impact of implicit rejection (ignoring) versus explicit rejection (declining) on dater’s behavioral intentions, taking into account the moderation role of self-esteem. Across two experiments, I show evidences that implicit rejections generate higher behavioral intentions than explicit ones. Both daters (study 1) and observers of the dating scenario (study 2) indicated higher intentions to revise their profiles (study 1) or recommend a profile revision when implicit (vs. explicit) rejection from interaction partners have been received. In addition, both studies demonstrated the moderation role of self-esteem, whereas higher levels of self-esteem eliminate, and lower levels of self-esteem intensify the effect of the extent of rejection on behavioral intentions. I also show that observers’ recommendations based on the extent of the rejection are dependent to rejected dater’s gender.
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Abstract

Online dating facilitates both daters interactions and rejections. Given the large number of potential mating offers and daters limited time, many different rejections come up. In online dating platforms, most of these rejections are simply the absence of reply. This paper compares the impact of implicit rejection (ignoring) versus explicit rejection (declining) on dater’s behavioral intentions, taking into account the moderation role of self-esteem. Across two experiments, I show evidences that implicit rejections generate higher behavioral intentions than explicit ones. Both daters (study 1) and observers of the dating scenario (study 2) indicated higher intentions to revise their profiles (study 1) or recommend a profile revision when implicit (vs. explicit) rejection from interaction partners have been received. In addition, both studies demonstrated the moderation role of self-esteem, whereas higher levels of self-esteem eliminate, and lower levels of self-esteem intensify the effect of the extent of rejection on behavioral intentions. I also show that observers’ recommendations based on the extent of the rejection are dependent to rejected dater’s gender.

Keywords: online dating, rejection, ignoring, self-esteem.

1. Introduction

According to GlobalWebIndex (2019), 45% of unmarried internet users from 16 to 34 years old use online dating and 16% of global population have used online dating apps in the last month. Tinder has about eight million active users in the US (Statista, 2019) and over 50 million users worldwide (Neyt, Baert, & Vandenbulcke, 2020). While mobile dating applications are continuously growing in popularity among numerous types of users (Coduto, Lee-Won, & Baek, 2020), more research opportunities arise to investigate consumers’ interactions into these platforms.

Consider the following scenario: a man, who just got single, downloads Tinder in his mobile and start seeking potential mates. After half an hour of swiping, he gets a match with an interesting woman and he decides to send her a message for starting a conversation. On the very next day, the app notifies him that the message has been read, yet not replied. What conclusion is he likely to draw? Is she not interested? What if she had at least replied him with a clear no, would he feel or behave differently later on?

Online dating phenomenon has both lowered the barrier for people to initiating contact and increased the number of available mating options (Frost, Chance, Norton, & Ariely, 2008). On the other hand, rejecting potential partners, has also became more trivial and less painful. Despite declining and ignoring offers to interact take place in wider contexts beyond online dating, I showcase that such behavior is especially habitual and more relevant to this particular setting. In online dating, when people receive a message by a potential mate, there are three possible follow-up behaviors: accepting (replying and continuing the conversation), declining (replying, but ending the conversation) or yet, ignoring (not replying and simply ignoring the sender).
Although psychology and consumer behavior literature distinguish between the understanding of the extent of rejection (ignoring vs. declining) (i.e. (Blackhart, Nelson, Knowles, & Baumeister, 2009; Goodboy & Brann, 2010; Sinha & Lu, 2019), little is known about how daters behave after being explicit or implicit rejected. Freedman, Williams and Beer (2016) suggest further research to better understand the effect of rejection on online daters, arguing that relationship characteristics might play a role. Hitsch, Hortacșu and Ariely (2010) data shows that ignoring holds the biggest share of follow-up behaviors, where 71% of men’s and 56% of women’s first-contact e-mails from online dating site do not receive a reply. Thereby, I postulate that online dating is a very prolific setting for ignoring behavior (implicit rejections) comes up. In offline settings, on the other hand, people have to physically ignore others, literally turning the “cold shoulder”.

Signaling and encompassing a human’s mating value is a well-established individual concern, and those who are in the mating market have the most information possible to accurately assess their own market value (Whyte, Brooks, & Torgler, 2019). Individuals are also aware of the need to adjust their estimations and behavior based on past interaction (Pawlowski & Dunbar, 1999). In fact, through offline and online interactions, individuals receive feedback information with which to assess, score, and rank themselves relative to their potential mates (Whyte et al., 2019), even when they do not receive any responses (De Vries, 2016).

In this paper, I investigate individuals’ behavioral intentions after being implicit (vs. explicit) rejected in the context of online dating. Considering that people do not always reply e-mails or text messages right away but might reply later, it is possible to state that when online daters have not yet received any replies from potential partners, the rejection is not yet assured. Surprisingly, recent works have showed that consumers attribute higher value to a negative than a no-reply (Alba & Slongo, 2020) and activate distinct mindsets, resulting in different preferences (Sinha & Lu, 2019).

Across two experiments, this paper examines how extent of rejection affect behavioral intentions. Using the online dating environment, I highlight that explicit and implicit rejections lead people to different outcomes. The explicit rejection situation is where daters send a message and the potential partner send a reply, declining to continue the interaction. The implicit rejection situation is where daters send a message and receive nothing back from potential partner. I also extend the findings to the observers’ perspective of the dating scenario.

Throughout the studies, I provide four main contributions to the existing literature. First, implicit (vs. explicit) rejections lead people to stronger behavioral intentions. Second, the effect is not restricted by daters’ self-perception. Observers of the dating interaction presented stronger recommendations behavior to implicit (vs. explicit) rejected daters. Third, self-esteem moderates how both daters and observers react to a rejection scenario. Fourth, consistent with evolutionary perspective, the effect of the extent of the rejection on observers’ recommendations behavior depends on the daters’ gender, holding only for men.

Declining or ignoring others are ordinary behaviors in the mating market, especially online. This paper extends the current literature providing a better understanding of how individuals react according to the extent of rejection. In both studies, I created hypothetical dating interactions to investigate effects of implicit and explicit rejections from two consumer standpoints (daters and observers).
2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Online Dating Interactions

Recent studies of the online romantic interactions include a wide range of subjects as mating preferences (Coduto et al., 2020; Hitsch et al., 2010; Neyt et al., 2020; Thai, Stainer, & Barlow, 2019), attraction (Ong & Wang, 2015; Taylor, Fiore, Mendelsohn, & Cheshire, 2011), initiation strategies (Sharabi & Dykstra-DeVette, 2019), impression management (De Vries, 2016; Van der Zanden, Schouten, Mos, & Krahmer, 2020), emotions (Xun, 2014), signaling (Lee and Niederle, 2014), uncertainty (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2011), experience information (Frost et al., 2008), attachment (Mende, Scott, Garvey, & Bolton, 2019), trust (Hallam, De Backer, & Walrave, 2019) and interpersonal rejection (Ford & Collins, 2010; Hitsch et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2011).

The modern experience of romantic love is increasingly related with consumption and also includes journeys such as using dating services (Mende et al., 2019). Online dating has developed into a $2 billion industry with substantial economic relevance (Cesar, 2016; Dechant, Spann, & Becker, 2019). This market has become the mainstream facet of consumers’ romantic journeys (Cesar, 2016) where almost 60% of adults consider online dating a good approach to meet potential partners (Belton, 2018). In this way, the online dating setting provide a rich context for understanding how present-day relationships are formed (Sharabi & Dykstra-DeVette, 2019), as well as for testing theories and assumptions about romantic and consumer interactions.

People looking for potential partners online can download smartphones applications and seek through a large dating pool anywhere at any time (Coduto et al., 2020). Although many individuals have the behavioral intentions to online interactions, applications function as an intermediate step toward having face-to-face communication (Hallam et al., 2019). Online dating apps facilitate people interactions, especially because both the number of options available and the relative ease with which contact can be initiated (Frost et al., 2008).

The dynamics of online dating embrace continuous profile construction and image management (Ward, 2017) because daters imagine how potential romantic partners will respond to their profile (De Vries, 2016). Also, daters often engage in an active process of rewriting their profiles to better appeal to potential partners (Gibbs et al., 2011) and improve their chances in the relationship initiation process. Lee and Niederle (2014) assume three possible outcomes after contacting the potential partner for the first time: accepting, declining and ignoring. When a person is effective at this process of making a positive impression on others (i.e. attractive profile, good initiation strategy), this can prevent rejection (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

2.2. Extent of Rejection

Although the term rejection has been used to describe a broad set of phenomena, it refers specifically to a refusal of social connection (Blackhart et al., 2009; Freedman et al., 2016). Interpersonal rejection is often a painful and threatening experience (Ford & Collins, 2010), where one person seeks to form and maintain at least a temporary alliance or relationship with someone else, and that other person says no (at least implicitly) (Blackhart et al., 2009).

The last 20 years have seen the rise of experimental approaches to understand the experience of rejection. Most of the empirical work on rejection has focused on the adverse consequences of social rejection for emotional well-being, cognitive functioning, and social
behavior (Ford & Collins, 2010). Gerber and Wheeler (2009) highlighted three broad concerning issues in rejection literature: the effect of rejection on internal states; behavioral effects of rejection, and; procedural issues regarding rejection. This work is especially concerned about behavioral effects of rejection on online daters.

Rejection has often been used generically to describe any situation in which people perceive some kind of threat to belonging (Leary, 2005) including those in which it has been clearly and directly communicated (e.g., Buckley, Winkel, and Leary 2004), as well as those in which it has merely been indirectly implied (e.g., Twenge, Catanese, and Baumeister 2003). In this way, the extent of rejection involve being directly rejected or passively ignored (Molden, Lucas, Gardner, Dean, & Knowles, 2009). Overall, consumers will perceive explicit rejection experiences as psychologically closer and ignored experiences as psychologically distant (Sinha & Lu, 2019).

Dechant, Spann, and Becker (2019) assume that ignoring messages causes customer reactions similar to declining, and that unreciprocated interactions and explicit rejections reflect the proposed argument of exerting power, whereas both add to customers’ dissatisfaction. However, recent works have demonstrated that people differ in how they construe and respond to rejection (Alba & Slongo, 2020; Sinha & Lu, 2019). Being ignored is unilateral and provides no control mechanism unless the attention is gained (Lee and Shrum 2012) and has been linked to being invisible and having no existence (Williams, 2009). In opposition, being explicit rejected allows rejected person to attempt to argue with a rejection decision, asserting more control over the situation (Lee and Shrum 2012).

The current research investigates the effect of implicit rejection (ignoring) and explicit rejection (declining) behaviors on the online daters after their first contact with potential partners. While on the one hand, online dating makes people less fearful of rejection because anonymity, on the other hand, rejection is very common behavior in online dating (Hitsch et al., 2010). Finally, even though is intuitive that every rejection lead to dissatisfaction, I propose that being ignored ignites stronger behavioral intentions than being declined.

Notwithstanding, I expect an interaction between the daters’ gender and the extent of rejection. According to evolutionary perspective, where females have the higher reproductive rate and are the predominant sexual competitors (Clutton-Brock & Parker, 1992), the typical male will, more often, try to complete a reproductive venture before the typical female (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994). While the typical man want sex more often (Baumeister, Reynolds, Winegard, & Vohs, 2017) and have greater readiness for reproduction (Clutton-Brock & Parker, 1992; Symons, 1979), the typical woman has greater situational control (Waller & Hill, 1951) and power advantage (Baumeister et al., 2017). Thus, I hypothesize that dater’s gender moderates the effect of rejection on behavioral intention. Specifically, as women are perceived as having more control over mating interactions, they might be associated with weaker behavioral intentions based on rejection contingencies.

2.3. Moderation Role of Self-Esteem

Molden et al. (2009) propose that the psychological experience of rejection varies in terms of how explicitly such an exclusion is conveyed. Research has demonstrated that the function of the self-esteem system is to monitor the degree to which an individual is being socially rejected or
excluded (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Nevertheless, self-esteem and self-views may influence online daters' self-assessment (Taylor et al., 2011).

According to Murray et al. (2003), people with low self-esteem (LSE) show a specific vulnerability to social rejection and heightened sensitivity for detecting rejection. Additionally, self-doubts and expectations of rejection make the LSE individuals experience rejection more painful because they pose a greater proportional loss to a more vulnerable sense of worthiness. Ford and Collins (2010) also demonstrated that LSE people are at risk for over-perceiving threat from often subtle and ambiguous rejections. In contrast, high self-esteem (HSE) individuals rationalize any esteem-threatening decision less than LSE individuals (Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993). Moreover, HSE individuals have less need for a defensively calibrated social alarm system because specific rejections pose a smaller proportional loss to a rich resource (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006).

Ford and Collins (2010) indicates that self-esteem is a moderator of the effect of rejection on psychobiological system, regulating and coping with threats to social acceptance. Self-esteem regulates how motivated people would be to act in ways that minimize rejection experience (Gyurak & Ayduk, 2007), which activates physiological and neural activity as an adaptive response to acute social threat (Ford & Collins, 2010). As implicit rejections signal potential danger specially for LSE daters, these individuals might undergo in higher behavioral intentions than HSE individuals. Because LSE motivate individuals to act in ways that minimize rejection (Gyurak & Ayduk, 2007), I hypothesize that the effect holds only for those who experience rejections which can be minimized, such implicit ones. Ultimately, while implicit rejection leads to stronger behavioral intentions for LSE daters, the effect fades away for HSE daters.

3. Study 1

The first study assessed participants’ behavioral intentions after sending a message to a potential partner and being rejected. The hypothetical situation was designed to test a typical rejection scenario with a similar dynamic to online dating app Tinder. Participants had to imagine that they have send a message after being matched with someone. They were then randomly assigned to one of the three conditions manipulating the extent of rejection (implicit vs. explicit vs. control [no rejection]).

3.1. Participants and Design

Participants were 115 workers between 18 and 34 years old (73 males, \(M_{\text{age}}=26.7\) years) recruited from Amazon M-Turk participated in the experiment in exchange for 0.20 US Dollars. These range was selected since GlobalWebIndex (2019) showed that individuals older than 34 years correspond to less than 18% of the online dating users. The experiment employed a single-factor between-subjects design, manipulating the extent of rejection after participants send a message to a potential partner. The extent of rejection was manipulated through two different rejections (implicit and explicit) and one control (no rejection).
3.2. Procedure and Stimuli

Amazon M-turkers agreed to participate in a study about online dating experiences. Participants were redirected to a Qualtrics survey and received a unique code at the end of the survey to validate their participation which qualified them for the compensation. Before starting the experiment, participants answer the Rosenberg (1979) self-esteem scale. The 10-item scale produces a score ranging from 10 (lowest self-esteem) to 40 (highest self-esteem).

Participants in all three conditions were told to imagine that they have started using an online dating app like Tinder to find a potential partner. They were asked to assume that they created a profile, the app matched them with someone whose profile they liked, and they sent a message to this potential partner. Participants in all three conditions received a confirmation that the potential partner read their message. In the implicit rejection (ignoring) condition, participants read a scenario where the potential partner do not reply the message. In the explicit rejection (declining) condition, participants read a scenario where the potential partner declines, saying that s/he is not interested. In the control condition (no rejection), participants read a scenario where the potential partner replies them and both start chatting.

After reading one of the scenarios, participants were asked to indicate their likelihood to revise their personal information in the app in a 7-point likert scale. As Gibbs, Ellison, and Lai (2011) points out, rewriting the profile is how daters better appeal to potential partners and consequently, how daters change behavior at the first place. Then, participants reported gender, age and checked any all applied marital status (single, married, have boy/girlfriend, currently in a happy relationship).

3.3 Results

Participants did not show any difference in self-esteem across three experimental conditions (M=28.7; F(2,112) = 1.75, ns). Also, none of the analyses below varied by gender and marital status of participants (all ns). A one-way between-subjects ANOVA followed by planned contrasts confirmed the effect of the extent of rejection on behavioral intentions (F(2,112) = 4.48, p<0.05). Post-hoc tests showed that ignored participants were more likely to revise their personal information on the online dating app (M = 3.94) than explicit rejected ones (M = 3.06, p<0.05) and control condition participants (M = 2.85, p<0.01). Surprisingly, no differences were found between explicit rejection and control condition participants.

I also examined whether the behavioral intentions were contingent upon the participants’ self-esteem scores. Because the self-esteem score is a continuous variable, I conducted a regression analysis in which (0 = implicit rejection, 1 = explicit rejection), self-esteem score, and their interactions were all included to predict participants’ intentions to revise profile information. This analysis revealed two significant effects. Self-esteem was a significant predictor (b = -.23, SE=.10; t(65)= -2.24, p<0.05), and it was qualified by its interaction implicit/explicit rejection manipulation (b=.13, SE=.67; t(65) = 2.05, p < .05).

To explore the meaning of this interaction effect, we conducted spotlight analysis at one standard deviation greater and less than the mean self-esteem score. A spotlight analysis (see fig. 1) examined the effect of implicit rejection compared with the explicit rejection condition at high and low levels of self-esteem. The relationship between implicit rejection and behavioral intentions was significant for LSE participants (b = -1.70, t(65) = -2.77, p < .05); compared with the explicit rejection condition at low levels of self-esteem.
rejection condition, ignoring led to greater behavioral intentions. This relationship was not significant for HSE participants (b = .08, t(65) = .13, ns). In fact, floodlight analysis showed that the effect was only significant when participants’ self-esteem scores were lower than 29 (Johnson-Neyman significance region). This analysis revealed that implicit rejection produces stronger behavioral intentions to change only for participants with self-esteem scores below 29, and the effect intensifies as the self-esteem scores decrease.

Fig. 1 – The moderating role of dater’s self-esteem on the extent of rejection based on spotlight analysis

3.4. Discussion

In online dating, the ultimate outcome of implicit and explicit rejections appears to be the same: a failure to establish communication and consequentially, a date. However, the results of the study 1 show that an implicit rejection produces stronger behavioral intentions than an explicit one. I demonstrate that daters are more likely to revise their personal profile when facing an ignored message vs. declined message. This finding is consistent with Molden et al. (2009), which state that concerns about being ignored (vs. explicit rejected) evoke general motivations for growth and advancement (vs. safety and security), creating a state of eagerness (vs. vigilance). In this way, implicit rejected are more motivated than explicit rejected daters to revise their profile information to avoid the absence of positive outcomes. Notwithstanding, being ignored produce more attention-getting responses (Lee and Shrum 2012), that in turn can boost the active and dynamic process of profile construction and reconstruction (Gibbs et al., 2011; Ward, 2017).

In addition, moderation analysis shows that the effect only holds for LSE individuals. This interaction is aligned with Williams (1997) and Gerber and Wheeler (2009) works combined.
While Williams (1997) showed that ignored people report worsened mood, Gerber and Wheeler (2009) pointed out that lower self-esteem and mood indicates a situation that requires action. In the first study, the LSE participants in the ignored condition presented stronger behavioral intentions.

Nonetheless the study 1 showcase an interesting phenomenon, further evidence is needed to broaden the findings. Study 2 was designed to advance the phenomenon beyond the participant’s own behavioral tendency, extending the findings to the observer’s perspective of the online dating rejection.

4. Study 2

This study aims to broaden the scope of the first study findings, employing two important changes. First, participants evaluated a situation involving another person, rather than themselves. This design aimed to extrapolate the findings to a scenario where self-impression management motivation would not affect the evaluation. Second, participants were assigned to evaluate a rejection suffered by a man or a woman. The experiment assessed participants’ recommendations to the fictional dater immediately after the hypothetical rejection. Participants had to imagine that a male/female dater was matched with someone and the following procedures were very similar to the first study, where the conditions vary by the extent of the rejection (implicit vs. explicit vs. control [no rejection]).

4.1. Participants and Design

Two hundred seventy-one students from an US based university from 18 to 32 years old (131 males, $M_{age} = 19.8$ years) participated in the experiment in exchange for course credit. The experiment employed a 3 (rejection: implicit vs. explicit vs. control [no rejection]) by 2 (rejected dater gender: male vs. female) between-subjects factorial design. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the six conditions.

4.2. Procedures and stimuli

Upon entering the lab, participants logged in with their lab identification and were redirected to a Qualtrics survey. Participants were told to imagine that a male (vs. female) person named Alex have started using an online dating app like Tinder to find a dating partner. The following procedures were similar as the study 1, except that participants were observers, rather than daters. Participants were assigned to one of the three rejection conditions (implicit vs. explicit vs. no rejection) that the fictional dater Alex faced. Then, they were asked the likelihood they would recommend that Alex should change her/his profile picture and revise her/his personal information in the app in a 7-point likert scale. The average of the two scores represented the recommendation to behave from the observer to the dater. Then, participants reported their own gender, age, and marital status (single, married, have boy/girlfriend, currently in a happy relationship). As the first study, participants answered the Rosenberg (1979) self-esteem scale before the presentation of the scenario.
4.3. Results

Gender of participants did not show any difference in self-esteem scores (M_{male} = 30.55, M_{female} = 29.89; t(270) = 1.01, ns). Also, marital status did not affect the results anyway (all ns). A two-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the extent of the rejection and the gender of the rejected dater on observers’ recommendation. I found a main effect of extent of the rejection (F(2,265) = 4.30, p<0.05) and an interaction between the rejection and the gender of the rejected dater (F(2,265) = 4.57, p<0.05). There is no main effect of the gender of the rejected dater (F(2,265) = .13, ns). Conditional effects (see fig. 2) show that people are more likely to recommend a profile change to implicit rejected males than females (b = .80, SE = 3.44; t(97) = 2.32, p<0.05) and less likely to recommend a profile change to no rejected males than females (b = -.73, SE = .37; t(83) = -1.96, p=0.05). In the explicit rejection condition, there is no conditional effect of rejected dater gender (b = .14, SE = .36; t(88) = .41, ns).

Replicating the pattern of the study 1 beyond the daters own behavior, the observers’ likelihood to recommend a behavioral were also contingent upon the participants’ self-esteem. Regression analysis between the extent of rejection, self-esteem score, and their interactions were all included to predict participants’ likelihood to recommend a profile revision. Again, the self-esteem was a significant predictor (b = -.07, SE=.03; t(265)=-2.18, p<.05), and it was qualified by its interaction with the implicit/explicit rejection manipulation (b=.11, SE=.05; t(265) = 2.50, p<.05).

In order to probe this interaction effect, I conducted a spotlight analysis (see fig. 3) at one standard deviation greater and less than the mean self-esteem score. It examined the effect of implicit rejection compared with the explicit rejection condition at high and low levels of self-esteem. The relationship between implicit rejection and behavioral intentions to change was significant for HSE participants (b = .74, t(265) = 2.05, p < .05); compared with the explicit rejection condition, ignoring led to lower intentions to change. This relationship was not significant.

![Fig. 2 – The moderating role of fictional dater gender on the extent of rejection](image-url)
for LSE participants (b = -0.55, t(265) = -1.55, ns). In fact, floodlight analysis showed that the effect was significant when participants’ self-esteem scores were lower than 23 and higher than 34 (Johnson-Neyman significance region). Consistent with the first study, implicit rejection produced stronger behavioral intentions only for participants with self-esteem scores below 23, and the effect intensifies as the self-esteem scores decrease. Additionally, the analysis also showed that the opposite is true for participants with self-esteem above 35.

**Fig. 3 – The moderating role of observer’s self-esteem on the extent of rejection based on spotlight analysis**

![Graph showing the moderating role of observer’s self-esteem on the extent of rejection based on spotlight analysis](image)

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**4.4. Discussion**

Study 2 broaden the findings from Study 1 by showing evidences that the difference between implicit and explicit rejection on daters also replicates to observers of a dating scenario. This finding is consistent with self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) argument that observers might share similar perceptions and reactions toward an actors’ external behavior. When consumers face failures, (Folkes, 1988) postulates that observer’s role displays the same pattern of self-serving biases than actor’s role. Even though, actors and observers may experience different meanings or emotions (Hung & Mukhopadhyay, 2012) for the same outcome, Bem (1972) maintains that explanations for the action may in fact have had no influence on that actions.

The second study demonstrated that observers’ self-esteem interacts with the extent of rejection received by a third-party on the likelihood to recommend a behavior. This finding extrapolates the power of self-esteem from influence actions in an experienced situation to
influence recommendations in an observed situation. Regarding these interactions between self-esteem and the extent of the rejection, past research has also demonstrated that LSE individuals show heightened sensitivity in detecting rejection (Murray et al., 2003) and being more motivated to act in ways that minimize it (Gyurak & Ayduk, 2007). Both studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that implicit rejection is more likely to motivate individuals to action (study 1) or recommend actions (study 2) for LSE than HSE individuals.

Additionally, when observing an implicit rejected male (female), people have higher (lower) likelihood of recommending daters to change their profiles. Thus, the rejection stimuli only produced differences in recommending behavior for those who evaluated a scenario experienced by a man. Based on different reproductive contingencies by males and females, these findings are consistent with an evolutionary explanation about differences in mating strategies (Baumeister et al., 2017).

5. General Discussion

People that receive (study 1) or observe (study 2) an implicit rejection are more likely to take action (study 1) or recommend action to others (study 2), compared to those that receive/observe explicit rejections. Ignoring, a form of implicit rejections and explicit rejections take place very often in the dating environments, especially online. Recent works has shown that implicit and explicit rejections lead consumers to different interpretation processes (Molden et al., 2009) and behavior (Sinha & Lu, 2019), although the concrete utility for both rejections are equal (Alba & Slongo, 2020). My findings demonstrate that when implicit rejections occur, people consider that behavioral changes on rejected person are more necessary. These changes include their own behavior when ignored, or recommendations to others’ behavior when these are ignored.

The results from both studies evidenced the moderating role of self-esteem on the effect of the extent of rejection on actions and recommendations. These findings are similar to Murray, Holmes, and Collins (2006) research, where HSE individuals would have less need for a defensively calibrated social alarm system because specific rejections pose a smaller proportional loss to a rich resource. HSE individuals, however, rationalize any esteem-threatening decision less than LSE ones (Steele et al., 1993). LSE people are also more likely to quickly detects rejection, which motivates action (Murray et al., 2006), in ways that minimize rejection (Gyurak & Ayduk, 2007).

Finally, the second study showed an interesting interaction between the dater’s gender and the extent of rejection, from the observer’s perspective. Like most animals, human males are considered the predominant competitors for mates, because they have a greater readiness for reproduction (Clutton-Brock & Parker, 1992; Symons, 1979). Thus, it is reasonable to believe that observers in study 2 recognized that behavioral changes based on contingencies (i.e. the extent of rejection) are more useful for men than women. Considering that the typical man want sex more often and the typical woman has a power advantage (Baumeister et al., 2017) and greater control over the situation (Waller & Hill, 1951). As women have more control, less changing would be required.
6. Consumer and managerial implications

From a practical perspective, implicit rejections are not necessarily worse than explicit rejection or no rejections for daters, because it is an effective fuel for changing, especially for low self-esteem consumers. To exemplify, recall the anecdotal evidence provided in the introduction of this paper: “a man, who just got single, downloads Tinder in his mobile and start seeking potential mates. After half an hour of swiping, he gets a match with an interesting woman and he decides to send her a message for starting a conversation. On the very next day, the app notifies him that the message has been read, but not replied”.

In this example, the fact that the dater was implicit rejected could be a motivation to change, such improving social skills and mating interactions. In practical terms, it is more probable that the man would think about changing his behavior when ignored (e.g., rewriting his profile, refining his chat openers, improving his appearance, and so on). But what if he had received an explicit rejection or even an acceptation? At that time, he would probably feel better than not receiving anything, but he would be less probable to change and, probably perpetrate the same old behavior.

The findings of this research have implications for managers as well. Implicit rejections are a frequent practice by users from dating platforms (e.g., Match.com, Tinder, Happn). Although this paper has no direct evidences that implicit rejections are detrimental to companies, recent work from Dechant, Spann, and Becker (2019) provided additional evidences that daters who have received fewer messages than they have sent correspond to customers with higher likelihood of negative churn. In contrast, the authors advocate that online dating companies should encourage reciprocal interactions among daters, because they do not carry any negative implications.

After being ignored, online daters could venture into other platforms or other websites to find someone to date. Online dating apps could track the amount of unreciprocated interactions, and create strategies to facilitate profile writing/rewriting processes, and actual behavior as mating selection and opening lines creation. Moreover, when companies apologize for users’ no-replies, Alba and Slongo (2020) found that consumers attributed lower levels of self-responsibility, what could be useful to dissolve churn intention.

7. Limitations and future research

This paper has three main limitations. First, we used Amazon M-Turk workers and student population for data collection, which limits the degree to which the findings can be generalized. I state, however, that online samples tend to be more familiar with the online dating market, adding relevance to the findings. Second, even though offline dating shares some similarities with online dating interactions, I cannot assume that offline daters might have similar reactions regarding the extent of rejection. Finally, any of the experiments investigated daters’ real behavior and maybe, behavioral intentions do not match up to actual behavior.

Future research should consider investigate rejectors’ perspective. What are the drivers of implicit and explicit rejection behavior? Why do individuals choose ignoring versus declining others? Is ignoring the more desirable option if rejectors do not want further annoyance? Another interesting direction for future research would be to approach more sophisticated rejections. For instance, why daters stop replying after some or many reciprocal message exchanges? Even further, why some daters block potential partners? Finally, I state that rejection in online dating offers many venues of contribution to better understand contemporary mating patterns.
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