An Exploration of the Association between Relational Framing Theory and Politeness Message Strategies: A Study of First Date Requests

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The pretest was presented to the International Association of Relationship Research convention in Madison, WI. A previous version of the paper was presented to the Communication and Social Cognition of the National Communication Association at the convention in San Antonio, TX.
Abstract
The paper presents a study that tests the association between relational framing theory (Dillard, Solomon, & Samp, 1996) and politeness super-strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) in the context of date requests. Participants (N = 222) were asked to evaluate the relational framing scales (i.e., dominance, affiliation, and involvement) and then report their likelihood of using the super-strategies to make a date request of an attractive target. The results indicated that activated relational frames were associated with message strategies. The study shows an important association between relational framing theory and politeness message super-strategies.
Date initiation research, although a growing area of investigation (for review, see Mongeau, Carey, & Williams, 1998), has been investigated in largely atheoretical studies (but for exceptions, see Mongeau & Carey, 1996; Kunkel, Wilson, Olufowote, & Robson, 2003). Requests for first dates are attempts at interpersonal influence (Berger & Bell, 1988; Kellerman, 2004; Mongeau, Serewicz, Henningsen, & Davis, 2006). All requests, including asking another person on a date, are inherently face threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Knobloch, 2006) because at a minimum the request imposes on the other person’s autonomy. Theories of interpersonal influence (for review, see Dillard, Anderson, & Knobloch, 2002; Wilson, 2002), then, should be relevant to the investigation of requests for first dates. The goal of this study is to apply two existing theories to the study of first date requests.

An opus of communication scholarship has been devoted to understanding the dimensions that define relational judgments (e.g., Burgoon & Hale, 1984, 1987). Born out of this tradition is a new, parsimonious theory to describe evaluations of interpersonal communication: relational framing theory (RFT: Dillard, Solomon, & Samp, 1996). Consistently, research on RFT has found that dominance and affiliation are the fundamental content evaluations of previously generated messages (e.g., Lannutti & Monohan, 2002; Solomon, Dillard, & Anderson, 2002 and see also Edwards, 2000). In the present study, relational frames are used as a guide to understanding the existing relational context but also as the impetus for constructing requests for first dates. The present investigation attempts to extend RFT by associating activated relational frames with the generation of future communication. Specifically, the paper presents a study that relates relational frames to the politeness super-strategies defined by Brown and Levinson (1987) in the context of first date requests.

Relational Framing Theory

According to Dillard et al. (1996) social reality has two content dimensions: dominance-submission and affiliation-disaffiliation. In addition, communication is guided by an intensifier variable: involvement. Thus, dominance and affiliation determine the meaning of messages and involvement determines the interlocutors’ level of engagement within the interaction.

Dillard et al. (1996) argued that the content frames are differentially salient (see also Dillard, Solomon, & Palmer, 1999; Solomon et al., 2002). The differential salience hypothesis proposes that either the dominance or the affiliation frame will primarily guide the interpretation of the relational message in communication. When the dominance frame is activated, then, affiliation should not be relevant to the interaction and vice versa. Generally, research supports the differential salience hypothesis (e.g., Dillard et al., 1996; Dillard et al., Henningsen, Henningsen, Cruz, & Morrill, 2003; Lannutti & Monohan, 2002; Solomon et al., 2002).

The second hypothesis of RFT is the general intensifier hypothesis (Dillard et al., 1996; Solomon et al., 2002). Dillard et al. (1996) argued that involvement is related to both the dominance and the affiliation content frames. Involvement intensifies the activated frame (Solomon et al., 2002). To clarify the role of involvement, Dillard et al. (1996) provide the analogy that involvement acts like the volume on a radio. Involvement controls how loud or soft the station plays but not the content of the radio program. Like the differential salience hypothesis, the general intensifier hypothesis has garnered empirical support (Dillard et al., 1999; Dillard et al., 1996; Henningsen et al., 2003; Lannutti & Monohan, 2002; Solomon et al., 2002).

Date initiation is a new context of application for relational framing theory. Date requests are both instances of liking (presumably) and influence (e.g., Cody, Canary, & Smith, 1994; Kunkel et al., 2003). In the context of existing relationships, Knobloch (2006) suggested that
Date requests function as a form of persuasion because the share activity goal is a common goal derived in typologies of influence goals. Knobloch (2006) also argued that date requests are forms of communication that bolster existing levels of intimacy within a relationship. Based on the application of the theory to a new context, the first research question is presented.

Research Question 1: Is the dominance-submission or affiliation-disaffiliation frame salient to understanding date requests?

Although only a small body of research exists to test the theory (Dillard et al., 1996; Dillard et al., 1999; Henningsen et al., 2003; Lannutti & Monahan, 2002; Solomon et al., 2002; Solomon, 2006), research supports the premises explicited by Dillard and his colleagues. Date initiation research should benefit from the application of RFT. Requests for first dates, by definition, contain influence and liking in the request. Consistently, RFT has been used to understand a communication stimulus (i.e., a previous message, scenario, script, or conversation) after the communication has occurred. In the present investigation, however, we are attempting to understand how requesters select and formulate request strategies. This goal is not antithetical to the theory but moves it beyond its original scope. We propose that an activated relational frame, dominance-submission or affiliation-disaffiliation, should lead a requester to construct date requests in keeping with the activated frame. Previous research on politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) defines the association between activated frames and the construction of messages.

There were three primary reasons that politeness theory was evoked to describe date request messages. First, Dillard, Wilson, Tusing, and Kinney (1997) argued that positive and negative politeness closely parallel dominance and affiliation frames. Second, Kunkel et al. (2003) have applied the notion of face work to date initiation contexts. Third, the fundamental message characteristic in politeness theory, baldness of the message, is similar to the notion of message explicitness. Explicitness of date requests is related to relational intimacy and involvement (Knobloch, 2006; Solomon, 1997). Based on this rationale, politeness theory should provide a predictive framework to help understand the connection between relational frames and date request communication.

Politeness Theory

The basic premise of politeness theory is that speakers construct messages to redress face threats to the hearer and the speaker of a message (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) define two types of face: negative face and positive face (see also see, Cupach & Metts, 1994; Goffman, 1967, Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998). Negative face focuses on one’s desire for autonomy. Negative face roughly parallels the dominance content frame of RFT (Dillard et al., 1997). Positive face, on the other hand, deals with people’s needs for social approval. Positive face roughly parallels the affiliation content frame of RFT (Dillard et al., 1997).

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), all adults have face wants and a desire to maintain face during interaction. Face threatening acts (FTAs) jeopardize either the negative or positive face of the speaker or hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Date requests are face threatening because the requests impose on the hearer’s autonomy and potentially on the hearer’s desire for social approval. As such a date request is a FTA.

Speakers have a number of options for constructing FTAs. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), people try to minimize the amount of threat in a message when delivering FTAs. They propose five super-strategies used to redress face threats: do not do the face threatening act, off-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and bald on record.
According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the strategies vary in level of concern for face from no attention to face (i.e., bald on record) to complete concern for face (i.e., do not do the FTA). Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that the seriousness of a face threat results from the closeness of the relationship, the power relationship, and the degree to which a particular face threat is an imposition.

In the context of first date requests, the super-strategies should allow the requester to address the concerns for positive and negative face of the hearer. One option for managing face is to not do the face threatening act. This super-strategy is used when the threat is too high. If the other person has expressed dislike of the request or hinted that a dating relationship is unappealing, then the requester may decide to not make the request. The off-record strategy involves making the date request in an ambiguous enough way that it would be hard to attribute intent to the speaker and the speaker would have plausible deniability. Negative politeness uses statements that enable the hearer to partially satisfy his/her need for autonomy. For example, a requester may phrase a message noting that the hearer should go on a date when his/her schedule is less busy. Positive politeness shows social approval for the hearer by emphasizing shared group membership and/or equality in terms of rights and expectations. In using positive politeness to make a date request, the hearer may embed the message with complimentary statements or shared group activities like classes. The bald on record strategy is the most explicit. It would involve making a date request directly with no attention to face.

**Relational Frames and Politeness Statements**

Associating activated relational frames with politeness super-strategies is an important advance to research on relational framing theory and politeness theory. Previous research on relational framing theory has largely described prior interactions. For example, Dillard et al. (1996) and Solomon et al. (2002) presented participants with short compliance-goal or affinity-goal scenarios. Dillard et al. (1999) provided participants with a conversational recall prompt phrased to evoke dominance, affiliation, and a variety of levels of explicitness within past conversations. Lannutti and Monohan (2002) asked participants to read interaction scenario scripts. Henningsen et al. (2003) measured dominance, affiliation, and involvement after a group discussion. In all cases, the theory describes past communication behavior. The current investigation uses activated frames to predict the possible use of future message strategies. Providing an initial test of the applicability of relational frames as a predictor of future communication extends the scope of the theory.

Politeness theory also benefits from the marriage of relational framing theory and politeness message super-strategies. In particular, politeness theory has been the subject of a number of conceptual and operational criticisms (for reviews, see Wilson, 2002, pp. 226-230; Wilson et al., 1998). Both the concept of face (Lim & Bowers, 1991) and the concept of rankings of the politeness super-strategies (Baxter, 1984; Dillard et al., 1997; Lim & Bowers, 1991) have been questioned. Using activated relational frames as the precursor to message strategies addresses many of these criticisms. Given the initial nature of the investigation, the following research question was presented.

**Research Question 2:** Do activated relational frames predict the likelihood of using politeness message strategies?

**Contexts of Date Requests**

One feature of politeness theory that is evident through both its conception (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and application (e.g., Kunkel et al., 2003) is that the theory defines the importance of the context of communication. In dating research, two contextual variables have
important implications for the nature of date requests: workplace versus social contexts and sex of the requestor. In the following sections, we review the importance of these two contextual factors.

**Workplace and Social Contexts**

An advantage of the current marriage of relational framing theory and politeness super-strategies relates to the conditions of requests. Politeness theory presents clear evidence that the context of the interaction should influence the importance of the interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Wilson et al. (1998) also argue that the nature of a specific request creates demand characteristics about the request. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that people select message strategies based on the seriousness of the FTA. The seriousness of a face threat results from the closeness of the relationship, the power relationship, and the degree to which a particular face threat is considered an imposition. In dating relationships, one clear contextual factor that relates to the magnitude of face threat is whether the relationship is a workplace romance or not.

Workplace romance is common (Dillard & Witteman, 1985; Pierce & Aguinis, 2001; Powell & Foley, 1998). The motivations for dating and flirting in the workplace are, however, idiosyncratic. Just as men and women flirt for a variety of reasons (Henningsen, 2004), members of an organization enter into romantic relationships for a range of romantic and instrumental reasons (Dillard, Hale, & Segrin, 1994). Thus, it is important to determine the effect context may have on the activation of relational frames. The research question is stated formally:

**Research Question 3:** Do contexts of requests affect the activated relational frames relevant to understanding date requests?

Social-sexual communication has the possibility of being interpreted as flirting or as sexual harassment (Mainiero, 1989; Pierce & Aguinis, 2001; Solomon, 2006; Solomon & Williams, 1997a; Solomon & Williams, 1997b). As such, more care is likely to be taken with date request messages in workplaces than in social contexts. The research on social-sexual communication at work (e.g., Solomon, 2006; Solomon & Williams, 1997a; Solomon & Williams, 1997b) suggests that dominance is an important evaluation of the message. There is little basis for comparison with the social context. The research on workplace romance does suggest that date requests at work should be constructed in ways that allow for multiple interpretations or easy refusal. Based on this logic, the following research question and hypothesis is posited.

**Hypothesis 1:** Participants will endorse more equivocal date request strategies in workplace than in social contexts.

**Sex of the Date Requester**

Research on female-initiated first dates (e.g., Mongeau & Carey, 1996; Mongeau, Hale, Johnson, & Hillis, 1993; Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; Mongeau, Yeazell, & Hale, 1994; Morr & Mongeau, 2004) shows that the sex of the initiator of date requests influences the process, goals, and expectations about dates. Much of the research on female-initiated first dates is related to expectations about intimacy and sexual activity on the date. For example, Mongeau and Johnson (1995) found that participants reported less sexual intimacy on female-initiated as opposed to male-initiated first dates. The implication of this line of research is that men and women frame requests for first dates differently when a man or a woman makes the date request. No previous research has directly tested the activated relational frames in the context, therefore, the following research question is offered.

**Research Question 4:** Do men and women differ in their perceptions of the activated relational frames relevant to understanding date requests?
Research also indicates that men and women differ in the types of strategies that they use to initiate romantic relationships (Clark, Shaver, & Abrahams, 1999). Flirting research as well as research on strategies to requests dates (e.g., Abrahams, 1994; Clark et al., 1999) shows that women use indirect means to initiate relationships compared to men. Women, then, should endorse equivocal date request strategies compared to men. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is offered.

Hypothesis 2: Women will endorse more equivocal date request strategies than men.

Pretest

Before testing the research questions and hypotheses, it was prudent to conduct a pretest to develop ecologically valid exemplars of the politeness message strategies in the contest of first date requests. The goals of the pretest were (a) to identify common manifestations of politeness strategies and (b) to provide an initial test of the association among dominance, affiliation, and involvement in the contest of first date requests.

Pretest Participants

Participants, \( N = 193 \), were men, 43.5%, and women, 56.0%, enrolled in communication courses at a large, Midwestern university. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 47, \( M = 21.46, SD = 2.92 \).

Table 1

Pretest Regression Results for the Politeness Date Request Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>( F )</th>
<th>( p )</th>
<th>( R^2 )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not do the FTA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>( F (3, 183) = 3.01 )</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>( F (7, 179) = 3.81 )</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>( F (3, 183) = 0.34 )</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>( F (7, 179) = 0.54 )</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative politeness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>( F (3, 183) = 0.13 )</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>( F (7, 179) = 0.29 )</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive politeness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td>( F (3, 183) = 0.77 )</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>( F (7, 179) = 0.94 )</td>
<td>.48</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pretest Procedures

Participants were recruited in courses by asking if they would complete a survey on requests for first dates. Participants signed up to complete the survey in small groups. When the participants arrived at the research lab, a short description of the study was read. Next the participants were asked to complete a consent form and retain a copy for their records. The participants returned the consent form to the researchers and were provided with a copy of the questionnaire. After completion, any questions about the study were answered; the participants were thanked, and provided a short description of the goals of the study.

Pretest Survey Design

Independent variables. The design was a 2 (sex of the initiator: male or female) x 2 (context: workplace or social network) x 2 (past relationship: friends or strangers) factorial. All of the independent variables were induced in a short, hypothetical scenario in the questionnaire. The scenarios described a cross-sex dyad interacting at a gathering. The scenario then implied that the man or woman was interested in a dating relationship, the function was a work function or a social function, the dyad had either just met or had known each other for a few years.

The first two independent variables were included in the design to represent the conditions of interest for testing the research questions and hypotheses of the primary study. The third independent variable was included for two reasons. First, Solomon (1997) has shown that date requests vary in explicitness as a function of intimacy over time. Given this finding, it seemed important to include an induction of the prior relationship in order to represent natural conditions of date requests. Second, it seemed important to represent the naturally existing variation in length of the prior relationship in the scenarios. In the primary study, participants will identify an attractive target for a date request. The relation between target and participant could vary in length. All scenarios can be found in Appendix A.

Relational framing scales. To measure relational frames, the method reported in Dillard et al. (1996) was used. Specifically, participants were asked to evaluate how relevant (on a 5-point scale anchored from 1 = irrelevant to 5 = relevant) a series of dimensions were. The dominance-submission scale was reliable, $\alpha = .85$, $M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.85$. The affiliation-disaffiliation scale was measured reliably, $\alpha = .79$, $M = 2.15$, $SD = 0.39$. The involvement scale was also reliable, $\alpha = .72$, $M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.67$.

Politeness strategy coding. A pair of trained coders first unitized the date requests into independent thought units (i.e., unitizing agreement 95%). The coders were trained to code each of the five strategies. The unitized requests were coded by the pair, $\kappa = .87$. Unitizing and coding disagreements were settled by the first author. Definitions of coding categories and examples are included in Appendix B.

Pretest Analyses

The goal of the pretest was to develop a pool of statement that are date requests that represent each politeness message strategy. In addition, however, it was possible to test the association between activated relational frames and politeness strategies in date requests.
Hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted. The number of times a date request strategy was used in a participant's constructed request served as the dependent variable for each analysis and dominance, affiliation, and involvement were entered as the first block of independent variables. In the second step, the interaction terms of all the independent variables were also entered into the model. The independent variables were mean centered and the interaction terms computed from the mean centered variables. Table 1 presents the omnibus step results for all analyses.

In this experiment, the only politeness date request strategy that was associated with activated frames was the do not do the FTA strategy. To clarify the relationship between the do not do the FTA strategy and the dominance-submission, affiliation-disaffiliation, and involvement frames, follow-up correlation analyses were conducted. The do not do the FTA strategy was uncorrelated with the dominance-submission frame, $r = .05, p = .49$. Both the affiliation-disaffiliation frame, $r = -.20, p = .006$, and involvement, $r = -.19, p = .01$, were negatively correlated with the generation of do not do the FTA strategies. The implication is that the more engaged the participant perceived the requestor and the more affiliation-disaffiliation was relevant to interpreting the interaction, the more likely the participant was to suggest a date request. Participants did not make a nuanced judgment, however, about the level of politeness within the request.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants, $N = 222$, were men, 48.6%, and women, 51.4% recruited by students enrolled in communication courses at a large, Midwestern university. The students recruited participants to complete the survey as part of an assignment for a research methods course. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 59 with the majority clustered around 21 to 24 years of age, $M = 23.81, SD = 6.60$. The majority of the sample worked full time, 42.3%, or part time, 41.4%. Most of the participants, 70.0%, were enrolled at the university.

**Survey Design**

The survey was constructed to induce the context of association (i.e., workplace or social network association) and measure relational frames (i.e., dominance, affiliation, involvement), date request strategies (i.e., do not do the face threatening act, off-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and bald on record), background information about the target of the date request (e.g., level of psychological and physical attraction, sex of the target of the request), and demographic information. For both versions of the questionnaire, the measured variables were the identical. The instructions provided to participants varied the context of relational association. Participants in the workplace condition were provided the following instructions:

To complete the survey, please think of a person you find attractive from your workplace. For the sake of this research, it is important that the person NOT be someone with whom you have already had a romantic relationship (for example, an ex-partner, someone who you fool around with occasionally, or someone who you are currently dating). In addition, please identify someone from your workplace NOT from your social network. For the purpose of the research, you need to think of someone with whom you have not had romantic involvement at this point, but you should think of someone you find attractive.

Participants in the social network were provided the same instructions except that they were asked to identify a person from their social network. The instructions were:
To complete the survey, please think of a person you find attractive from your social network. For the sake of this research, it is important that the person NOT be someone with whom you have already had a romantic relationship (for example, an ex-partner, someone who you fool around with occasionally, or someone who you are currently dating). In addition, please identify someone from your social network NOT from your workplace. For the purpose of the research, you need to think of someone with whom you have not had romantic involvement at this point, but you should think of someone you find attractive.

**Relational frames.** Five item Likert scales were used to assess dominance, affiliation, and involvement. Responses were provided on a five-point response scale. All variables were coded such that a higher score reflected more of the measured variable. The variables were reliably measured. Specifically, the dominance (e.g., I have influence over the person I find attractive) scale was measured reliably, $\alpha = .85$, $M = 2.92$, $SD = 0.78$. The affiliation (e.g., I feel positive regard for the person I find attractive) scale was measured reliably, $\alpha = .80$, $M = 4.00$, $SD = 0.58$. The involvement (e.g., I am motivated to maintain a good relationship with the person I find attractive) scale was also reliably measured, $\alpha = .82$, $M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.72$.

**Date request strategies.** Seven item Likert scales were created to measure date request strategies (i.e., do not do the face threatening act, off-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and bald on record). Open-ended responses from the pretest were coded into the strategy categories. Examples from each strategy were then phrased as a Likert item. Responses were provided on a five-point response scale. All variables were coded such that a higher score reflected more of the measured variable. The variables were reliably measured. Specifically, the do not do the face threaten act (e.g., I would not make a date request) scale was reliable, $\alpha = .88$, $M = 2.61$, $SD = 0.88$. The off-record (e.g., I would flirt with her/him) scale was reliable, $\alpha = .77$, $M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.59$. The negative politeness (e.g., Given the person, I would ask in a way that allowed her/him an easy was to say no) scale was reliable, $\alpha = .88$, $M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.66$. The positive politeness (e.g., I would compliment the person as I asked her/him out) scale was reliable, $\alpha = .82$, $M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.65$. Similarly, the bald on record (e.g., I would straightforwardly ask the person out on a date) scale was also reliable, $\alpha = .95$, $M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.99$.

**Attraction.** Five item Likert scales were used to assess physical attraction and psychological attraction to the target. Responses were provided on a five-point response scale. All variables were coded such that a higher score reflected more of the measured variable. The variables were reliably measured. The physical attraction (e.g., I find the person sexy) scale was reliable, $\alpha = .89$, $M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.70$. The psychological attraction (e.g., I find the person interesting) scale was also reliable, $\alpha = .79$, $M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.52$.

**Procedures**

Participants were asked to complete a survey on requests for first dates. After the participants agreed, a short description of the study was read. Next the participants were asked to complete a consent form and retain a copy for their records. The participants returned the consent form to the researchers and were provided with one of the versions of the survey. After completing the survey, any questions about the study were answered; the participants were thanked, and provided a short description of the goals of the study.

**Results**

Preliminary analyses were conducted to determine if the independent variables of the study (i.e., context of the request and sex of the requestor) influenced the selection of the target
of the request. The level of physical attraction was used as the dependent variable in an ANOVA. There was no effect for the context of the request, $F(1, 218) = 2.51, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$ or for the interaction of context and sex of the requestor, $F(1, 218) = 0.13, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$. There was, however, a statistically significant main effect for the sex of the requestor, $F(1, 218) = 25.24, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .10$. Results indicated that men, $M = 4.46, SD = 0.59$, were more physically attracted to their date request targets than women, $M = 4.00, SD = 0.72$.

A second analysis was performed using the measure of psychological attraction as the dependent variable in an ANOVA. No statistically significant effects for context, $F(1, 218) = 1.92, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$, sex of the requestor, $F(1, 218) = 0.004, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$, or for the interaction were found, $F(1, 218) = 0.12, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$.

The purpose of the preliminary analyses was to determine if the independent variables had a systematic effect on the type of target that the participants recalled. Based on the analyses, the social versus workplace recall did not influence the nature of the attraction between the participants and the potential dating partners. The sex of the requestor did influence the level of physical attraction that was reported. Specifically, men reported that they were more physically attracted to their targets than women. Given a wide range of studies performed on dating (e.g., Buss, 1994; Trost & Alberts, 1998), these results are neither alarming nor do they merit concern about the independent variables in the study.

The analyses showed, however, that men and women in workplace and social contexts selected possible targets with whom they were already involved. Activation of frames is determined by levels of involvement. The results of the preliminary analyses showed frames were activated in the context of the study. The reported levels of involvement, $t(221) = 14.23, p < .001$, physical attractiveness, $t(222) = 26.10, p < .001$, and psychological attraction, $t(222) = 36.59, p < .001$ were all significantly above the scale mid-points for each measure. One of the key features of RFT is that involvement activates the importance of the dominance or affiliation frame. The preliminary analyses demonstrate that the participants’ level of involvement was already high.

### Table 2

**Correlation Matrix of the Relational Frame Measures and Date Request Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dominance</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
<th>Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do not no the FTA</td>
<td>-.18**</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-record</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative politeness</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive politeness</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bald on record</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.23**</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Asterisks denote statistically significant two-tailed Pearson correlation coefficients.

**$p < .01$**
Tests of Research Questions

Frame activation. To test the applicability of RFT to the context of date requests, the first research question was offered. The first research question asked if the dominance-submission or the affiliation-disaffiliation frame would be more salient to the interpretation of date requests. To answer the question, a paired-sample t-test was performed, \( t(219) = -18.29, p < .001, r = .20 \). The results showed that affiliation, \( M = 4.00, SD = 0.58 \), was more relevant than dominance, \( M = 2.92, SD = 0.78 \). In support of RFT, there appears to be differential salience of activated frames.

Frames and message strategies. Research question 2 was posed to attempt to determine if activated relational frames were associated with the endorsement of different politeness message strategies. Specifically, the question asked if relational frames predicted likelihood of using do not do the face threatening act, off-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and bald on record strategies. Table 2 presents a correlation matrix of the association between relational frames (i.e., dominance, affiliation, and involvement) and the date request strategies. In answer to the research question, the activated frames are related to the likelihood of using date request strategies. Dominance is positively associated with the use of off record and bald on record strategies and negatively associated with the do not do the FTA strategy. Affiliation is positively associated with three date request strategies (i.e., off record, positive politeness, and bald on record) and negatively associated with the do not do the FTA strategy. Involvement is positively associated with the off record and positive politeness strategies and negatively associated with the do not do the FTA strategy. Overall, the pattern of association implies that the more important, the more liking, and the more interest in the target of the request, the more explicit the form of the date request.

Sex differences in activated frames. The final research questions addressed the possibility that the independent variables in the study differentially activated relational frames. Research question 3 asked if the context of the request (i.e., workplace versus social network) influenced frame activation. Research question 4 addressed possible sex differences in frame activation. To address these research questions, three ANOVA analyses were performed using the measures of dominance, affiliation, and involvement as dependent variables. The results are presented grouped by dependent variable.

For dominance, the main effect of the context, \( F(1, 217) = 1.651, p > .10 \), partial \( \eta^2 = .01 \), and the main effect for sex of the requestor, \( F(1, 217) = 0.87, p > .10 \), partial \( \eta^2 < .01 \), were not statistically significant. The interaction of context and sex of the requestor was statistically significant, \( F(1, 217) = 5.28, p = .02 \), partial \( \eta^2 = .02 \). In the workplace context, men reported higher activation of dominance, \( M = 3.03, SD = 0.78 \), than women, \( M = 2.70, SD = 0.78 \). In contrast, in social contexts, women reported higher activation of dominance, \( M = 3.07, SD = 0.75 \), than men, \( M = 2.93, SD = 0.76 \). The results suggest that the dominance frame activation is related to both the context of the date request and the sex of the requestor.

The results of the second analysis were related to the activation of the affiliation frame. Context of the date request had a statistically significant main effect on the activation of the affiliation frame, \( F(1, 217) = 5.01, p = .03 \), partial \( \eta^2 = .02 \). Affiliation was more relevant to social network date requests, \( M = 4.09, SD = 0.61 \), than workplace date requests, \( M = 3.91, SD = 0.55 \). Sex of the requestor also had a statistically significant main effect on the activation of the affiliation frame, \( F(1, 217) = 9.90, p = .002 \), partial \( \eta^2 = .04 \). Men reported that affiliation was more relevant to a date request, \( M = 4.13, SD = 0.60 \), than women, \( M = 3.88, SD = 0.54 \). The
interaction effect for context and sex of the requestor was not statistically significant, $F(1, 217) = 0.01, p > .10, \text{ partial } \eta^2 < .001$.

The role of involvement was also assessed. The context had a statistically significant main effect on perceptions of involvement, $F(1, 217) = 10.77, p = .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$. Participants reported that involvement was more relevant to social network date requests, $M = 3.85, SD = 0.69$, than workplace date requests, $M = 3.53, SD = 0.71$. The main effect for the sex of the requestor, $F(1, 217) = 1.46, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$, and the interaction effect, $F(1, 217) = 0.13, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$, did not have a statistically significant effect on perceptions of involvement.

Overall, the tests of the frame activation imply that both context of the request and the sex of the requestor influence perceptions of relational frames. In particular, the interaction of context and sex had a statistically significant effect on the activation of dominance. Context of the request and the sex of the requestor had statistically significant effects on the activation of affiliation. Finally, the context of the request had a statistically significant effect on the level of involvement. The results clearly indicate that the context of date requests and the sex of the requestor influence perceptions of the interaction.

Tests of Hypotheses

The hypotheses in the study related the independent variables to selections of date request strategies. Hypothesis 1 stated that participants would endorse more equivocal date request strategies in workplace than in social contexts. Hypothesis 2 stated that women would endorse more equivocal date request strategies than men. To test the hypotheses, ANOVA analyses were conducted with the context of the request and sex of the requestor as independent variables and the five date request strategies as the dependent variables. The results are presented by strategy.

Do not do the FTA. The context of the request had a statistically significant main effect on the likelihood of not making a date request, $F(1, 216) = 4.69, p = .03$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. Participants endorsed the do not do the FTA strategy more in workplace, $M = 2.75, SD = 0.95$, rather than social contexts, $M = 2.48, SD = 0.80$. The sex of the requestor also had a statistically significant main effect on likelihood of not making a date request, $F(1, 216) = 9.37, p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Women were more likely to endorse the do not do the FTA approach, $M = 2.79, SD = 0.85$, than men, $M = 2.43, SD = 0.88$. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(1, 216) = 0.62, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$.

Off-record. Neither the context of the date request, $F(1, 217) = 0.23, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$, nor the sex of the requestor, $F(1, 217) = 2.84, p = .09$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$, had a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of using the off-record request strategy. The interaction effect was also not statistically significant, $F(1, 217) = 0.36, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$.

Negative politeness. The context of the date request did not have a statistically significant effect on the use of the negative politeness strategy, $F(1, 214) = 0.36, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$. The sex of the requestor also did not have a statistically significant effect on the use of the negative politeness strategy, $F(1, 214) = 1.26, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .006$. The interaction effect was also not statistically significant, significant effect on the use of the negative politeness strategy, $F(1, 214) = 0.14, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$.

Positive politeness. The context of the date request had a statistically significant main effect on the likelihood of using the positive politeness request strategy, $F(1, 217) = 5.32, p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. Participants reported that they were more likely to use positive politeness in social, $M = 3.57, SD = 0.66$, compared to workplace contexts, $M = 3.35, SD = 0.63$. 

Do not do the FTA
The sex of the requestor also had a statistically significant main effect on the effect on the likelihood of using the positive politeness request strategy, $F(1, 217) = 14.78, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. Men were more likely to endorse the use of the positive politeness strategy, $M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.68$, compared to women, $M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.58$. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(1, 217) = 0.10, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 < .001$.

**Bald on record.** The context did not have a statistically significant main effect on the likelihood of using a bald on record date request strategy, $F(1, 217) = 0.13, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$. The sex of the requestor did have a statistically significant main effect on endorsing bald on record strategies, $F(1, 217) = 22.37, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$. Men were more likely to endorse the use of a bald on record request, $M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.88$, than women, $M = 3.16$, $SD = 1.00$. The interaction effect was not statistically significant, $F(1, 217) = 0.48, p > .10$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$.

**Summary.** The results are generally supportive of both hypotheses. Participants discriminate among strategies based on the context and the sex of the requestor. In workplace contexts, participants endorsed more equivocal strategies than in social networks. Sex differences also emerged in the use of strategies. Particularly, men were more likely to endorse direct date request strategies. Overall, the results support both hypotheses.

**Discussion**

The goal of the study was to investigate the possible relationship between activated relational frames in relational framing theory (Dillard et al., 1996) and the message strategies explicated in politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). To understand the association, a study of date requests was performed. Additionally, the effect of workplace versus social contexts of the date request and the sex of the requestor were considered.

There were three primary groups of findings in the study. The first describe the applicability of RFT to the context of date requests. The second relate to the association between activated relational frames and politeness message super-strategies. The third address the contextual features of date requests and politeness super-strategies.

First, the results of the study demonstrated that RFT is a possible theoretical tool for understanding date request messages. Within the context, the frames were differentially salient. Affiliation was more activated by the date request context than dominance. Moreover, the context of the request (i.e., workplace versus social) and the sex of the requestor affected the importance of dominance, affiliation, and involvement. Romantic relationship initiation research has been criticized for both being generally atheoretical (e.g., Mongeau et al., 1998) and sparse (Clark et al., 1999). The application of RFT to this context addresses both concerns.

Second, the results of the study showed that activated relational frames can be associated with the explicitness of a message strategy. Previous research on RFT (e.g., Dillard et al., 1996; Lannutti & Monohan, 2002; Solomon et al., 2002) has used RFT as a device for interpreting past communication. The association between activated frames and the likelihood of using a variety of date request strategies implies that frame activation may motivate message construction and not just message interpretation.

Third, consistent with several previous studies (e.g., Knobloch, 2006; Kunkel et al., 2003; Solomon, 1997), one fundamental characteristic of date requests appears to directness. The study found support for the prediction that workplace contexts would be associated with more equivocal message strategies. Additionally, women endorsed less direct forms of date request strategies.
Perhaps the most important outcome of the study is the tentative link between activated relational frames and politeness super-strategies. Prior research has argued that explicitness is an important feature of communication across a variety of contexts (Dillard et al., 1997). The association of relational frames with message strategies that vary in directness allows for theoretical predictions about when people may select more or less explicit forms of communication.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One limitation of the study related to the measurement of the politeness strategies. Specifically, the politeness super-strategies were measured in a questionnaire that allowed a participant to select any or all of the message strategies. This type of measure is similar in some ways to compliance-gaining research based on a likelihood of use (e.g., Marwell & Schmitt, 1967). In other words, participants were asked to report how likely they were to use a type of strategy to ask out the target. The compliance-gaining research has a detailed and robust body of criticisms for this type of likelihood of use data (for review see Wilson, 2002). Generally, scholars object to likelihood of use data because the participant may not have naturally generated with a strategy without the prompt of the pre-formulated list (Burleson, Wilson, Waltman, Goering, Ely, & Whaley, 1988; Kellerman & Cole, 1994). In this context, however, the operationalization was useful to address some objections within research on politeness theory.

Researchers (e.g., Lim & Bowers, 1991) have argued that politeness strategies are not mutually exclusive as portrayed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Researchers (e.g., Dillard et al., 1997) have also argued that the order of strategies from most to least polite may not be absolute. Both of the criticisms are not relevant to super-strategies measured in a scale. Participants may select as many possible strategies as the context requires. The criticism about the order of strategies is also irrelevant when all five strategies are measured independently. Although there were a number of valid reasons to use scaled measures of politeness super-strategies, the operationalization presents avenues for future research.

One further direction for future research is evoked by the nature of the study. In particular, the study asked participants to think of an attractive person and rate strategies based on that person. The implication from RFT is that an activated frame should cause a person to select a date request strategy. That causal relationship can not be tested without experimental control. Future research should use an experimental design to ensure that the activation caused message strategies.
References


Appendix A

Pretest Scenarios

1. Mike and Jenn, who have been friends for a few years, are at a party through work. Mike and Jenn have exchanged casual glances with each other. At one point, close to the end of the evening, they met by the drink table and began to talk. The conversation went really well. Mike realizes how attractive Jenn is. He decides to ask her out on a first date.

2. Mike and Jenn, who have been friends for a few years, are at a party at a mutual friend’s house. Mike and Jenn have exchanged casual glances with each other. At one point, close to the end of the evening, they met by the drink table and began to talk. The conversation went really well. Mike realizes how attractive Jenn is. He decides to ask her out on a first date.

3. Mike and Jenn, who have been friends for a few years, are at a party through work. Mike and Jenn have exchanged casual glances with each other. At one point, close to the end of the evening, they met by the drink table and began to talk. The conversation went really well. Jenn realizes how attractive Mike is. She decides to ask him out on a first date.

4. Mike and Jenn, who have been friends for a few years, are at a party at a mutual friend’s house. Mike and Jenn have exchanged casual glances with each other. At one point, close to the end of the evening, they met by the drink table and began to talk. The conversation went really well. Jenn realizes how attractive Mike is. She decides to ask him out on a first date.

5. Mike and Jenn, who have just met, are at a party through work. Mike and Jenn have exchanged casual glances with each other. At one point, close to the end of the evening, they met by the drink table and began to talk. The conversation went really well. Mike realizes how attractive Jenn is. He decides to ask her out on a first date.

6. Mike and Jenn, who have just met, are at a party at a mutual friend’s house. Mike and Jenn have exchanged casual glances with each other. At one point, close to the end of the evening, they met by the drink table and began to talk. The conversation went really well. Mike realizes how attractive Jenn is. He decides to ask her out on a first date.

7. Mike and Jenn, who have just met, are at a party through work. Mike and Jenn have exchanged casual glances with each other. At one point, close to the end of the evening, they met by the drink table and began to talk. The conversation went really well. Jenn realizes how attractive Mike is. She decides to ask him out on a first date.

8. Mike and Jenn, who have just met, are at a party at a mutual friend’s house. Mike and Jenn have exchanged casual glances with each other. At one point, close to the end of the evening, they met by the drink table and began to talk. The conversation went really well. Jenn realizes how attractive Mike is. She decides to ask him out on a first date.
Appendix B

Politeness Strategy Coding Category Definitions and Examples

• Don’t do the FTA- This category applies if the participant stated that he or she would not make a request. Example: “I think that the friendship between Mike and Jen is too important to risk it by dating. I wouldn’t ask him out.”

• Off the record- For this category, any subtle or hinting strategies apply. Statements are included in this category if the statement is indirect, ambiguous, if the receiver could read a variety of different intents into the statement. Example: “Mike, we should hang out, or go to a movie or something.”

• Negative politeness- This category involves allowing the receiver of the request to partially fulfill his or her need for autonomy. Statements in this category may include hedges or qualifying statements that show the other person has a right to refuse the request. Examples: “I know you really wanted to be single, but I am interested in you…” “I know you are busy but if you could find time…” “It’s totally ok if you just want to keep things as they are…”

• Positive politeness- This category involves allowing the receiver of the request to partially fulfill his or her need for affiliation. Statements in this category may include direct affirmations of the other person and the relationship between the two. Examples: “I really like you and if you’d be interested, let’s get together.” “I’m very attracted to you…” “I think you are really an interesting person…”

• Bald on record- This category includes all direct, unqualified requests for dates. Example: “Excuse me, but I am interested in taking you out on a date to your place of interest.”