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It doesn't hurt to smile ...Or Does It? Tend and Befriend Reactions to Stress During Hookups

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“It doesn’t hurt to smile!” ..Or Does It? Tend and Befriend Reactions to Stress During Hookups

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Abstract

When encountering an uncomfortable sexual situation, it could be difficult to acquire firm consent from a partner. Previous research suggests that when under stress, humans engage in a “Fight or Flight” response. However, “tend and befriend” was recently coined to describe how many people, mainly women, actually respond to dangerous or stressful encounters. With this information in mind, we looked at gender differences to see if there were any discrepancies in stress reactions when it comes to hook-up situations.

Introduction

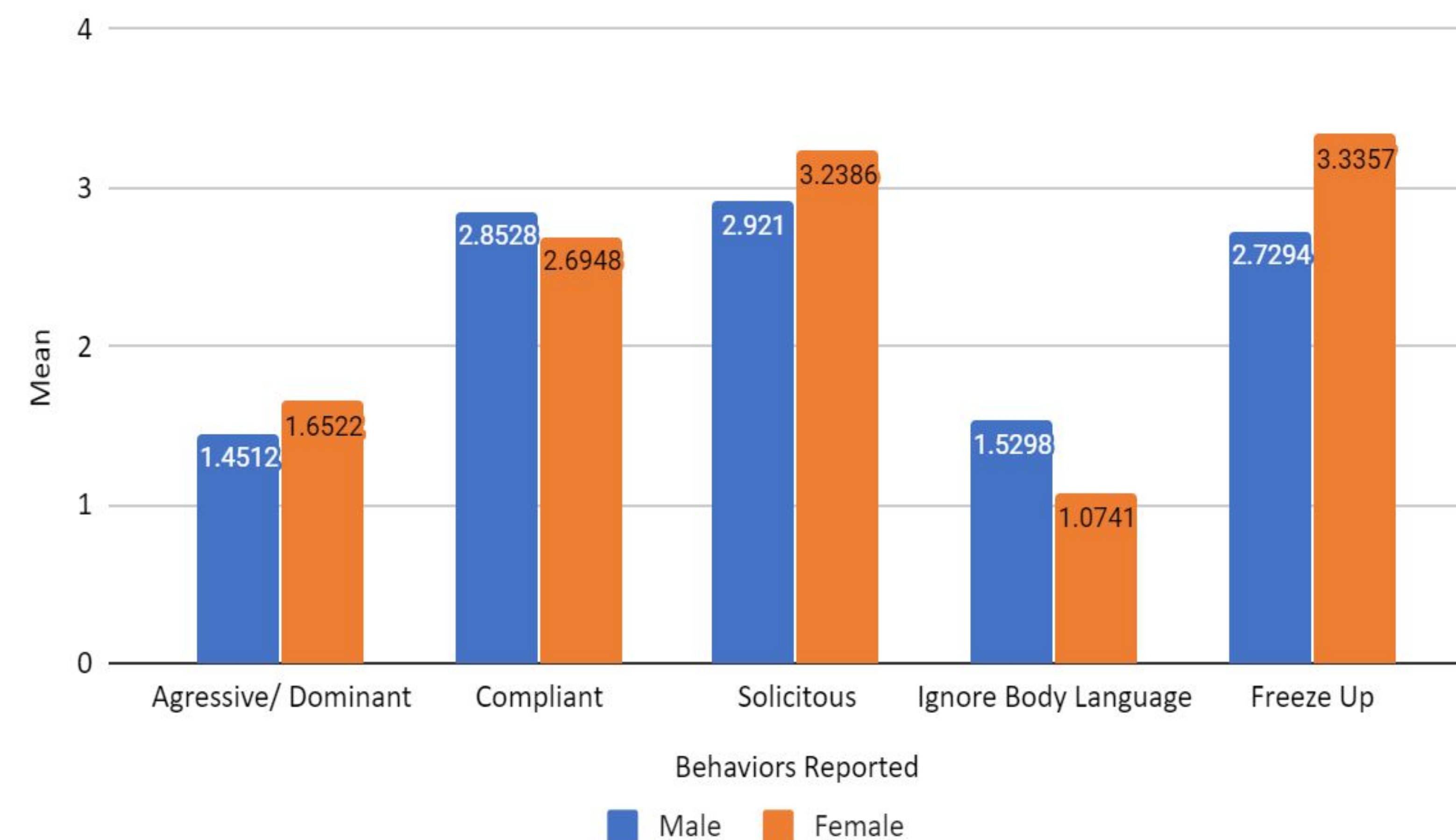
In 1929, the fight or flight model was introduced as a way to explain behaviors exhibited during stressful situations by studying male participants (Bracha et al., 2004). Recent research has discovered that the SRY gene on the Y chromosome may be responsible for the behaviors associated with the fight or flight response, suggesting that women without the Y chromosome may not react with the same behaviors in stressful situations (Lee & Harley, 2012). A “tend and befriend” model was suggested in 2000 by Taylor to describe the way many women react in stressful encounters. Such behaviors include nervous smiling and being overly compliant. Another behavioral response by women would be to “freeze.” Some research has concentrated on “freezing” behaviors: a stop, look, listen response (Bracha et al., 2004). Acquiring consent during uncomfortable hookup encounters in college can be stressful. Retrospective analysis highlighting what people engaging in a hookup encounter did while feeling stressed could show insight into how the tend and befriend response plays a role in hookup encounters, and how those behaviors differ between genders.

Hypothesis

When female college students feel tense, nervous, or anxious in hook up situations, they will engage in the tend and befriend response, rather than the flight or fight response model.

Results

Response Factors to Hookup Stress



Rotated Factor Loading

Aggressive/Dominant ($\alpha=.89$)	
I tend to be more aggressive.	0.84
I tend to be more assertive.	0.74
I tend to be a little more (too) dominant.	0.70
Compliant ($\alpha=.81$)	
I try to please others more.	0.64
I’m more compliant.	0.62
I tend to say yes to things I wouldn't normally or don't feel comfortable doing.	0.60
I'm a little too suggestable.	0.56
I stay in the situation when I would prefer to leave	0.47
Solicitous ($\alpha=.79$)	
I tend to talk too much.	0.60
I tend to smile more.	0.58
I get overly friendly.	0.54
I tend to laugh nervously.	0.46
I share too much about myself.	0.45
Ignore Body Language ($\alpha=.86$)	
I ignore others' body language.	0.84
I don't pick-up on body language as much.	0.73
Freeze ($\alpha=.70$)	
I get quiet.	0.70
I tend to freeze up.	0.58

Note: Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation Method: Equamax with Kaiser Normalization.

Methods

Participants:

- 586 students were surveyed from a midsized Northeastern university psychology department subject pool and several large classes
- 46.5% of participants identified as males
- 58.4% of participants identified as females

Procedure:

- After supplying consent, participants completed an online survey using the program Qualtrics, followed by a debriefing page
- Participants answered a series of questions where they scaled 1 (*Never Applicable*)- 10 (*Always Applicable*) on questions regarding stressful hookup situations

Measures:

- Without manipulating the variables the responses grouped into five different measure

Analysis:

- We conducted a factor analysis and looked at which factors loaded together. They compiled into five different groups: Aggressive/ Dominance, Compliance, Solicitousness, Ignoring Body Language, and Freezing up.

Discussion

Our results did not support our hypothesis that females engage in the tend and befriend behavior when in a stressful hookup encounter (Geary et. al. 2002). However, it was found in stressful hookups, that women were more likely to freeze up, while men were more likely to ignore body language. These findings are relevant as they indicate that there is a gender difference in behaviors when in a stressful hook-up situation. This discrepancy in behavior makes it clear that explicit communication between a couple during a hookup is extremely important. Thus, education on the importance of communication must be implemented. For instance, when educating incoming college students on hookup scenarios, programs could stress potential miscommunication issues related to freezing up and the importance of paying attention to body language. We did not ask specifically about sexual assault when collecting our data, but we did inquire about stressful hook-up situations. We recognize that stress can vary in its interpretation, which may have resulted in participants of the study responding to varying definitions of a stressful hook-up situation. Future investigation could include studies of different sexual orientations for fight or flight vs tend and befriend responses.