This research explored competing predictions for the relation between uncertainty and interpersonal attraction. Two studies investigated whether uncertainty regarding another person’s interest is associated with an increase or decrease in attraction. Study 1 revealed that when participants evaluated people whose expressed attraction was either certain or uncertain, participants experienced more liking for those who were associated with certainty. In Study 2, compared to a control condition, uncertainty produced more attraction but the greater attraction was mediated by a desire to reduce uncertainty. We conclude by proposing an explanation for why different research paradigms have produced different conclusions regarding uncertainty and the situations necessary for uncertainty to produce interpersonal attraction.

Key words: uncertainty, attraction, initial interactions, reciprocity of liking effect

INTRODUCTION

Recent research on the reciprocity of liking effect has proceeded in different directions. On the one hand, research has applied the principles of uncertainty to the reciprocity effect and concluded that uncertainty generates attraction to those who “create uncertainty about how much they like” the person (Whitchurch, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2011, p. 174). On the other hand, research has proposed that the reciprocity effect is based on trust (e.g., Boone & Buck, 2003), in which attraction results when one’s belief in the other person’s expressed attraction is certain. In this research, we investigated this apparent inconsistency and explored the possible motives and consequences of expressed attraction under uncertainty. We begin by outlining the two accounts for the reciprocity effect and discussing how each approach explains attraction when confronted with uncertainty of expressed attraction.

Approaches to the reciprocity effect

Uncertainty leads to attraction. One approach to the reciprocity effect posits that there can be positive consequences to the experience of uncertainty. This approach proposes that uncertainty about a future event can produce more positive affect than...
and in the case of interpersonal attraction, uncertainty produces liking through the propagation of positive thoughts (Kurtz, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2007; Wilson et al., 2005). Via a self-perception process, the number of positive thoughts indicates to the perceiver that s/he feels positively about the other person, which then results in romantic interest and attraction for the potential admirer (see Pennebaker, 1997). This approach also asserts that uncertainty may produce interpersonal attraction after an initial interaction. Specifically, when people meet other people about whom they know little, they infer positive information to fill in the missing information (i.e., via the person positivity bias; Sears, 1983), resulting in romantic attraction toward those other people. Norton, Frost, and Ariely (2007), for example, asked participants to report their knowledge of, and their liking for, their dating partner before and after their date. Consistent with expectations, although knowledge of their dating partner after the date was greater (i.e., the date reduced uncertainty), their liking for their dating partner dropped, providing evidence that reduced uncertainty was associated with reduced romantic attraction.

In short, when people think an unpredictable event is probable, they will attend to it to try to understand it. When that event is potentially positive (e.g., being liked by an attractive person), the uncertainty is pleasurable and translates to romantic interest and attraction.

Trust leads to attraction. A second approach focuses on trust. This perspective posits that people are oriented to seek new relationships to (a) satisfy their need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and (b) identify other people with whom they can reliably exchange material goods (Cosmides & Tooby, 1989). For this to occur, people first require some belief that a potential partner is inclined toward the interaction and that the partner is likely to maintain a harmonious relationship (i.e., individuals need to trust that the other person will uphold his or her side of an interaction; for a review, see Montoya & Horton, 2012).

From this perspective, expressed attraction represents the admirer’s intent to act in a trustworthy and benevolent fashion during a future social exchange (Boone & Buck, 2003; Frank, 1988, 2001). Indeed, liking is associated with perceptions of trust (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Nicholson, Compeau, & Sethi, 2001; Rotter, 1980) and people view those who like them as more trustworthy (Hawes, Mast, & Swan, 1989; Swan, Trawick, & Silva, 1985). When the possibility of a positive interaction is made available (e.g., by the expression of liking), people are inclined to develop such relationships (Gable, 2006) and increase efforts to explore the relationship as a possible avenue for future relations (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Leary, 2010).

Research that focuses on the importance of trust to attraction has also produced predictions regarding the presence of uncertainty. Seminal works by Heider (1958) and Kelley (1973), among others (e.g., Jones & Davis, 1965), assert that people are motivated to predict and understand other peoples’ behavior. Specifically, when uncertainty is aroused, people are motivated to increase their approach oriented behavior (e.g., behavioral attraction) to determine the viability of a potential relationship, usually via efforts to monitor the other person’s behavior (Berger & Douglas, 1981; Berger & Perkins, 1978),
seeking out and asking the target person more questions, among other strategies (Berger, 1979; Berger & Bradac, 1982). For example, in a series of field studies investigating attraction of preoperative and postoperative hospital patients, Kulik and colleagues (Kulik & Mahler, 1989; Kulik, Mahler, & Moore, 1996; Kulik, Moore, & Mahler, 1993) found that patients facing surgery opted to spend time (as a measure of behavioral attraction) with those who were capable of meeting their desire for information (i.e., post-operative patients), compared to those who were less capable (i.e. pre-operative patients). Such research indicates that uncertainty produces an approach-orientation (e.g., behavioral attraction) with the goal of reducing the uncertainty.

However, this perspective also indicates that uncertainty does not result in more affective attraction (i.e., how positively someone feels). From this approach, compared to certainty, uncertainty is considered to be aversive (Berger, 1979; Byrne, 1971). For example, Gudykunst and colleagues (Gudykunst, 1985; Gudykunst, Yang, & Nishida, 1985) identified an inverse relation between uncertainty and attraction, and Roberts, Boone, Wurtele, and Turner (1982) found that attraction for a confederate covaried positively with reductions in uncertainty.

In summary, this approach posits that uncertainty regarding another person’s expressed attraction produces an approach-oriented response (e.g., behavioral attraction) to determine whether the potential relationship is viable. However, because uncertainty is considered to be aversive, such uncertainty should not result in more affective attraction.

Definition of Interpersonal Attraction

Close inspection of the uncertainty literature reveals that some research speaks to the relation of uncertainty to the emotional component of the attraction construct (affective attraction), whereas other research focuses on the behavioral assessment (behavioral attraction; tendency to approach or avoid). The distinction is far from trivial. In general, affective attraction aligns closely with behavioral attraction, as Byrne (1971), Montoya and Insco (2008), and Montoya and Horton (2004), have all observed correlations above .73 (for a review, see Montoya & Horton, 2014). However, behavioral attraction responds differently than affective attraction when any one of a host of self-relevant considerations are salient. Indeed, research has observed that affective attraction and behavioral attraction are differentially affected by the uncertainty-aroused need for information (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), the salience of self-interest considerations (Davis, 1981), and by the fear of rejection (Herbst, Gaertner, & Insco, 2003). These findings indicate that the two dimensions need to be considered as distinct, but correlated, processes (e.g., Michinov & Monteil, 2002; Montoya & Horton, 2014).

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDIES

The purpose of this research was to compare predictions generated from the two competing theoretical accounts regarding the role of uncertainty on the experience of interpersonal attraction. On the one hand, one theoretical approach posits that due to
operations that covary with uncertainty (e.g., self-perception processes), uncertainty generates attraction (the positive-consequences approach). On the other hand, a second perspective proposes that attraction results from the possibility of a new interaction partner (the trust-based approach). Importantly, these approaches make different testable predictions regarding (a) whether uncertainty or certainty produces more attraction, (b) which motives underlie any increase in attraction, and (c) whether affective or behavioral attraction is affected by uncertainty.

Given the above, we generated specific hypotheses based on the predictions of the two approaches. First, a trust-based approach hypothesizes that an individual would select (as an index of behavioral attraction) most frequently a partner associated with certainty of liking, whereas the positive-consequences approach hypothesizes that an individual would select most frequently those persons associated with uncertainty (Hypothesis 1). Second, the trust-based approach posits that uncertainty should not necessarily produce affective attraction, whereas the positive-consequences approach posits that uncertainty produces “romantic attraction,” which manifests itself as affective and behavioral attraction (Whitchurch et al., 2011; Hypothesis 2). And third, whereas the positive-consequences approach submits that such behavioral attraction is mediated by romantic desires/interests, the trust-based approach posits that any increase in behavioral attraction is mediated by a motivation to reduce uncertainty (Hypothesis 3).

We conducted two studies. To test the first two hypotheses, Study 1 manipulated uncertainty and explored whether participants would explicitly select a target person associated with either certainty or uncertainty. To test the third hypothesis, Study 2 manipulated uncertainty and explored whether the motives for behavioral attraction supported either the trust-based or positive-consequences approach.

**STUDY 1**

*Purpose of the Study*

Study 1 tested predictions from the competing approaches by giving participants the opportunity to explicitly select between individuals who expressed either certainty or uncertainty of liking. In this study, female participants were asked to evaluate Facebook profiles of men who had ostensibly evaluated their Facebook profiles. Women learned they were viewing profiles of men who had liked them most (liked-best condition), liked them an average amount (liked-average condition), and either liked them most or an average amount (uncertainty condition). After viewing the profiles, participants completed measures assessing affective and behavioral attraction. As a second measure of behavioral attraction, we included one additional question: “Of the 12 people you viewed, select the four individuals you would most like to meet.”

A trust-based approach hypothesizes that women should opt to meet men from the liked-best condition, and experience more affective attraction for men in the liked-best condition than men in the uncertainty condition. Alternatively, a positive-consequences approach proposes that women should both select most frequently and experience more affective attraction for men who are associated with uncertainty.

*Participants*

Forty-two female undergraduates ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.70$, $SD = 0.72$; 89% White) at a Midwestern university participated in partial fulfillment of an introductory psychology class requirement.
Materials

Affective attraction. Three items adapted from Montoya and Insko (2008), each on a 9-point scale, were used to assess the affective evaluation of the target men. Ratings on the three items (e.g., “How much do you like him?”) were averaged to form an index of affective attraction (α = .94).

Behavioral attraction. Five items adapted from Montoya and Insko (2008), each on a 9-point scale, assessed the participant’s approach orientation toward the men. Items included, “I would like to spend time with him.”, “I would like to meet this person.” and “I would like to go out on a date with him.” We averaged the items to form a behavioral attraction index (α = .92).

Procedure

Our manipulation of uncertainty was based on the procedure outlined by Whitchurch (2009). Each participant consented to have her Facebook profile viewed by students at other universities two days before the laboratory session began. During the laboratory session, participants were told that several male students had viewed their Facebook profiles (among 15–20 other profiles). Participants then viewed the profiles of men who had ostensibly viewed their profile. The Facebook profiles of the men were created by the experimenters to reflect realistic profiles of men of above-average attractiveness (to be consistent with Whitchurch’s method). Participants were told that some of the men from the Facebook profiles had given them the highest ratings (the “liked-best” condition), some of the men had given them average ratings (the “liked-average condition”), and some of the men were described as men who either liked the participant the most or gave her an average rating (the uncertainty condition). For each profile, participants completed measures of affective attraction and behavioral attraction. All participants viewed profiles from all three conditions (uncertain, liked-best, and liked-average). Target profiles were randomized across condition and in the order in which they were presented. After women had viewed all 12 profiles (i.e., four from each condition), they were asked to indicate the four individuals they would most like to meet.

Results

Affective attraction. The means for affective attraction by uncertainty are presented in Table 1. A one-way within-subjects ANOVA with uncertainty as the independent variable was significant, \( F(2, 82) = 22.84, p < .05 \). We created two orthogonal contrasts to test the predictions of the trust-based and positive-consequence approach. First, we tested the predictions of both the positive-consequence and trust-based approach by comparing the liked-best condition to the uncertainty condition. The second contrast was created to test the basic prediction that the possibility of liking from another person—whether or not associated with uncertainty—should result in greater attraction. Contrasts revealed that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Attraction assessment</th>
<th>Choices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behavioral attraction</td>
<td>Affective attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>5.36 (1.20)</td>
<td>5.15 (1.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked-best</td>
<td>5.92 (1.19)</td>
<td>5.70 (1.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked-average</td>
<td>4.92 (1.02)</td>
<td>4.67 (1.25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( N = 42 \). Greater values indicate more attraction or more choice selections.
men from the liked-best condition were associated with more affective attraction than men from the uncertainty condition, \( t = 3.37, p < .05 \). The second contrast indicated that a combination of the liked-best and uncertainty conditions was associated with more affective attraction than the liked-average condition, \( t = 6.19, p < .05 \).

**Behavioral attraction.** A one-way within-subjects ANOVA with uncertainty as the independent variable was significant, \( F(2, 82) = 26.26, p < .05 \). Orthogonal contrasts revealed that women expressed more behavioral attraction for men from the liked-best condition compared to the men from the uncertainty condition, \( t = 3.88, p < .05 \). The second contrast indicated that a combination of the men from the liked-best and uncertainty conditions was associated with more attraction than men from the liked-average condition, \( t = 6.22, p < .05 \).

**Behavioral choice.** We began by determining the condition in which the four selected men appeared. We then tabulated the number of men selected from each condition. The means for behavioral choice are presented in Table 1. A one-way within-subjects ANOVA revealed a main effect for uncertainty, \( F(2, 80) = 13.21, p < .05 \). Orthogonal contrasts revealed that women selected more men from the liked-best condition than from the uncertainty condition, \( t = 2.05, p < .05 \). The second contrast revealed that the women selected more men from a combination of the liked-best/uncertainty conditions than from the liked-average condition, \( t = 5.42, p < .05 \).

**Discussion**

The results were consistent with expectations of the trust-based approach. Specifically, we found more behavioral attraction for the liked-best condition compared to the uncertainty condition or liked-average condition. Furthermore, when women were given the explicit choice to select men from the different conditions, they selected more men from the liked-best condition than from the uncertainty condition.

The results were consistent with the trust-based approach and uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), such that both theoretical accounts hypothesized that uncertainty should be preferred less than certainty. Furthermore, these results differ from what was expected by the positive-consequences approach. Specifically, we found that men from the liked-best condition were preferred to the men from the uncertainty condition. One possible explanation for this finding is that our study used a within-participant design (all participants were told that they would rate twelve profiles) rather than a between-participant design (in which participants only rated participants from either the liked-best, liked-average, or uncertainty conditions). As is relevant to any study of attraction in which the self has been evaluated by other people, there are concerns regarding inclusion/acceptance by other people (e.g., Huston, 1973; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman).

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1 We conducted additional post hoc analyses to determine whether the liked-average condition was greater than the uncertainty condition. As expected, targets in the uncertainty condition, compared to those in the liked-average condition, were the focus of more affective attraction \( t = 3.16, p < .025 \), behavioral attraction \( t = 3.13, p < .025 \), and were selected more frequently \( t = 2.51, p < .025 \).
Considerable research indicates that self-protective motives are chronically accessible but are particularly active in the face of threat to the self (Fromkin, 1972; Sedikides, 1993; Sigall & Landy, 1973). In a between-subjects design, after knowingly being evaluated by a group of men (and arousing the need to be accepted), liked-best participants would likely have had any need for acceptance satisfied by being exposed to four men who liked them best. However, for those in the uncertainty condition, their needs would not have been met. It may have been this concern for acceptance that aroused motives to affiliate with people who they knew would accept them. In other words, greater affiliation in the uncertainty condition may have been motivated out of a desire to be accepted by anyone (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Indeed, research has noted that those who have been rejected are cautiously interested in finding other people who are seen as likely to accept them (Gardner, Pickett, & Brewer, 2000; Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007). Note that this explanation also indicates that those in the liked-average condition did not experience more attraction because they never viewed others who were seen as likely to accept them.

In summary, a strength of Study 1 was that it allowed for an explicit comparison of preferences for uncertainty to certainty relative to behavioral and affective attraction. But this study did not fully test (a) participants’ possible motives for their attraction to the target persons (Hypothesis 3) or (b) whether a manipulation of uncertainty—without the arousal of motivations to affiliate—generates more attraction than certainty. Thus, in Study 2, we explored the relation between uncertainty and attraction by implementing a between-participant design and testing the motives for attraction to those individuals who expressed uncertainty versus certainty.

**Study 2**

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of Study 2 was to compare predictions of the positive-consequences approach and the trust-based approach by exploring the motives for any increase in attraction. In Study 2, we used the procedure as outlined in Study 1 to manipulate uncertainty, but used a between-participant design to place participants into one of three conditions (liked-best, liked-average, or uncertainty). After viewing the profiles, participants completed measures assessing the motives for any increased behavioral attraction to the target men.

We included three motives to assess why participants expressed any behavioral attraction toward the target persons: (a) to reduce uncertainty about how he feels about her, (b) to get him to like her, and (c) out of romantic interest. These motives were not necessarily designed to be an exhaustive list of possible motives, but to align with the possible motives associated with the positive-consequences and trust-based approaches. Specifically, for the trust-based approach, greater behavioral attraction should be associated with the desire to reduce uncertainty and the desire to convince the potential admirer to like her. Alternatively, for the positive-consequences approach, behavioral attraction should be associated with more romantic interest.

In summary, from the positive-consequences approach, the uncertainty condition, compared to the liked-average and liked-best conditions, is proposed to result in more attraction. This approach submits that uncertainty results in greater affective and behavioral attraction, and that such attraction results from participants’ romantic interest. From the trust-based perspective, however, uncertainty should not necessarily result in more attraction per se, but should result in a greater desire to determine whether the person really liked her (or to get him to like her), and that such a desire should be responsible for any increase in behavioral attraction.
Participants
Seventy-eight female undergraduates (Mage = 18.91, SD = 0.90; 95% White) at a Midwestern university participated in partial fulfillment of an introductory psychology class requirement.

Materials
Affiliative motives. Eight questions assessed three reasons for approach-oriented behavioral tendencies. Desire to reduce uncertainty was measured using four items (e.g., “I want to figure out the degree to which he is truly interested in me.”, “I want to determine whether he would be interested in me romantically.”; \(a = .95\)). Desire to generate interest in him was assessed using two items (“I want to show him that I am good enough for him.”, “I want to see if I could get him to like me.”; \(a = .86\)). The third motive, romantic interest, was assessed with two items (“I want to spend time with him to enjoy his company.”, “I want to spend time with him ‘out of romantic interest.’”; \(a = .81\)).

Procedure
As with Study 1, participants consented to have their Facebook profile viewed by students at other universities two days before the laboratory session began. Next, participants in the “liked-best” condition were led to believe that the men from the four Facebook profiles they viewed had given them the highest ratings. Participants in the “liked-average condition” believed that the men had given them average ratings. Finally, those in the uncertainty condition read in part: “The profiles you will see might be the participants who saw your profile and liked you the most. Or, the profiles you see might be the participants who saw your profile and gave you an average rating.” For each profile, participants completed a measure of affective attraction, behavioral attraction, and affiliative motives.

Results

Affective attraction. The means for affective attraction are included in Table 2. A one-way ANOVA with uncertainty as the independent variable revealed that the effect for affective attraction was not significant, \(F(2, 75) = 2.63, p = .08\).

Behavioral attraction. A one-way ANOVA with uncertainty as the independent variable was significant, \(F(2, 75) = 3.27, p < .05\). We used the same orthogonal contrasts as those defined in Study 1. Contrasts revealed that the uncertainty condition did not differ from the liked-best condition, \(t(75) = 0.37, p = .71\). The second contrast revealed that a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Attraction assessment</th>
<th>Motive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affective attraction</td>
<td>Behavioral attraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>5.42 (1.36)</td>
<td>5.45 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked-best</td>
<td>5.31 (1.23)</td>
<td>5.34 (0.97)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked-average</td>
<td>4.68 (1.14)</td>
<td>4.74 (1.06)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \(N = 78\). Greater values indicate more attraction or increased motivations. Sample sizes per condition varied between 25 and 27.
combination of the liked-best and uncertainty conditions was greater than the liked-average condition, \( t(75) = 2.53, p < .05 \).

Affiliative motives. A one-way ANOVA with motive to reduce uncertainty as the dependent variable revealed a main effect for uncertainty, \( F(2, 75) = 3.61, p < .05 \). Orthogonal contrasts revealed that participants in the liked-best condition did not differ from those in the uncertainty condition, \( t(75) = .30, p = .76 \). A second contrast revealed that an average of the liked-best and uncertainty conditions was greater than the liked-average condition, \( t(75) = 2.67, p < .05 \). For the two other motives, romantic interest and “get him to like me,” neither main effect was significant, \( F(2, 75) = 0.49, p = .61 \) and \( F(2, 75) = 1.08, p = .34 \), for romantic interest and “get him to like me,” respectively.

To explore the explanations for changes in behavioral attraction, we correlated the affiliation motives with behavioral attraction by uncertainty condition. As displayed in Table 3, a motive to reduce uncertainty was only correlated with behavioral attraction in the uncertainty condition. The desire to reduce uncertainty was correlated with behavioral attraction to a greater degree in the uncertainty condition than in either the liked-best condition (\( z = 2.27, p < .05 \)) or liked-average condition (\( z = 1.89, p < .05 \)). Furthermore, “get him to like me” was also correlated with behavioral attraction in all conditions, indicating that a desire to arouse interest in him may have also motivated the increased behavioral attraction. With respect to romantic interest, it was negatively correlated with behavioral attraction in both the uncertainty and liked-average conditions.

Mediation Analyses

We tested whether the motives to reduce uncertainty, romantic interest, and “get him to like me” mediated the behavioral attraction resulting from the uncertainty manipulation. We utilized the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) to estimate direct/indirect effects and confidence intervals using bootstrapping methods for the effect of the uncertainty condition on behavioral attraction through affiliative motive. The macro produces point estimates for the indirect effect and a 95% confidence interval based on the distribution of the 10,000 samples. Mediation is considered significant if the confidence interval does not include zero. We included all three mediators although not all differed significantly across uncertainty condition. As discussed by Hayes (2013), a significant relation between the independent and mediating variables is not a prerequisite for the inclusion in a mediation model.

### Table 3. Affiliative Motive Correlations with Behavioral Attraction by Uncertainty Condition, Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Reduce uncertainty</th>
<th>Get him to like me</th>
<th>Romantic interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>.66*</td>
<td>.73*</td>
<td>−.40*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked-best</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.52*</td>
<td>−.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked-average</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.56*</td>
<td>−.42*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *p* < .05.
Results revealed that when reducing uncertainty, romantic interest, and “get him to like me” were included simultaneously as mediators of the impact of uncertainty on behavioral attraction, neither “get him to like me” \( (B = -0.04, SE = .09, LLCI = -0.26, UCLI = 0.11) \), romantic attraction \( (B = -0.02, SE = .01, LLCI = -0.04, UCLI = 0.05) \), nor reduce uncertainty \( (B = 0.02, SE = .01, LLCI = -0.02, UCLI = 0.05) \), produced significant indirect effects. However, when the mediators were included individually, only reduce uncertainty produced a significant indirect effect, \( B = -0.11, SE = 0.06, LLCI = -0.28, UCLI = -0.01 \), with the direct effect of uncertainty on behavioral attraction falling to nonsignificance, \( B = -0.18, SE = 0.14, t = -1.24, p = .21 \).

**DISCUSSION**

At first glance, the results appear to support the positive-consequences approach, as affective and behavioral attraction for the uncertainty condition were both greater than the liked-best condition. However, inspection of the correlational and mediational analyses indicates that the results were largely consistent with the trust-based approach. Behavioral attraction was correlated with a desire to reduce uncertainty, to convince him to “like” her, and was *negatively* correlated with romantic interest. These findings provide evidence that behavioral attraction was positively related to a desire to reduce uncertainty regarding whether the person would be a viable interaction partner, an explanation consistent with a trust-based approach.

One notable finding was the negative correlation between behavioral attraction and romantic interest. The relation is consistent with models of parental investment (Trivers, 1972) and trust in close relationships (Rempel, Ross, & Holmes, 2001). Specifically, a romantic relationship, compared to a more platonic relationship, involves a greater level of investment, and thus, should be associated with a greater need for assurances of reciprocal investment before one invests psychological and material resources.

Finally, we also found that participants experienced more affective and behavioral attraction to the target men in the uncertainty condition compared to the liked-average condition. This finding is consistent with the notion that individuals should prefer those who express the possibility of a new trustworthy interaction partner over someone who offers no such possible promises (e.g., Caldwell & Peplau, 1982).

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

The goal of this research was to compare predictions generated by a positive-consequences and trust-based explanation for the relation between uncertainty and interpersonal attraction. To this end, in Study 1, when liked-best and uncertainty were directly pitted against one another, results revealed that the liked-best condition resulted in more behavioral and affective attraction than the uncertainty condition. Furthermore, when women were given the choice via a direct comparison of men from the uncertainty
and liked-best conditions, they preferred men from the liked-best condition. Alternatively, Study 2 investigated whether uncertainty led to more behavioral attraction and the possible reasons for it. Although uncertainty was associated with (descriptively) more attraction relative to the liked-best condition, mediational analyses were consistent with the notion that the behavioral attraction was motivated by desires to reduce uncertainty regarding whether the other “really” liked the person. In addition, romantic interest was negatively correlated with behavioral attraction in the uncertainty condition. These findings provide compelling evidence in support of a trust-based explanation for attraction under conditions of uncertainty of liking.

Why did we find support for a trust-based approach, whereas past research has found support for a positive-consequences approach? We propose two plausible explanations: (a) inconsistency in the measurement of attraction and (b) the role of self-evaluations in dyadic relations. First, the current findings speak to the importance of accurately specifying and operationalizing the interpersonal attraction construct. Specifically, uncertainty management theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) proposes that uncertainty in interpersonal interactions should produce more information seeking (e.g., behavioral attraction), but reduced affective attraction. However, although Whitchurch et al. (2011) concluded that uncertainty led to “romantic attraction,” their measure was primarily a measure of behavioral intentions. Of their six questions, four were behavioral (interest in class project, friend, hook up with, and potential boyfriend), one was affective (how much do you like), and one is best considered as a precursor to attraction (perception of similarity). In this case, it may be more accurate to state that uncertainty led to more behavioral attraction (compared to a control condition), but not necessarily more romantic attraction. Other researchers have similarly used affiliative desires and romantic desires interchangeably (e.g., Luo & Zhang, 2009), while other researchers have not differentiated between behavioral attraction and affective attraction (e.g., Litt, Khan, & Shiv, 2010). Thus, it may be that the trust-based approach and the positive-consequence approach are measuring the same dependent variable (affiliation), but are calling it and concluding different things from it (e.g., “affiliative motives” versus “romantic attraction”).

Second, with respect to the role of self-evaluations, Study 1 observed that the liked-best condition was preferred more than the uncertainty condition. As discussed earlier, one viable explanation for this effect was the role of anticipated rejection from a future interaction partner. Specifically, uncertainty regarding potential acceptance/rejection can arouse affiliation motives that can produce attraction not just to the potential admirer, but to anyone who we view as likely to accept them. Thus, for uncertainty models to accurately model attraction processes, consideration of the role of the self in interpersonal relations is necessary.

Despite the aforementioned issues, we continue to believe it is possible for uncertainty to generate attraction beyond the predictions of a trust-based approach. Specifically, we would expect it only for behavioral attraction and only when two specific situations are present: (a) in the presence of a highly attractive other and (b) when fears regarding inclusion have been aroused. Indeed, under conditions of uncertainty, it is likely that additional desires to affiliate are aroused (Murray et al., 2006) that can lead to more
behavioral attraction toward those who are seen as likely to accept him/her. This pattern might best be understood by considering evolutionary explanations for why women engage in one-night stands (with someone they might meet at a discotheque), encounters in which the possible benefits (in the form of a quality genetic contribution) outweigh the costs of potentially raising a child alone (e.g., Kruger & Fitzgerald, 2011). Put another way, affiliation with another person about whom one is uncertain is more risky and should only be pursued when the possible benefits are great.

In summary, we conclude that certainty is preferred in interactions with other people, but uncertainty under certain circumstances can also generate more attraction. Results from the present studies revealed that the nature of the increased attraction under uncertainty is primarily behavioral and that uncertainty produces a desire to understand whether the potential admirer can be a viable interaction partner.

REFERENCES


(Manuscript received 10 June, 2014; Revision accepted 18 January, 2016)