AFFECTIONATE EXPRESSIONS AS FACE-THREATENING ACTS: RECEIVER ASSESSMENTS

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Although expressions of affection may be regarded as a form of support between relational partners, affectionate communication has the potential also to be threatening to senders' and receivers' face needs, especially in nonromantic relationships. On the premise that a given communicative act can support positive face needs while simultaneously threatening negative face needs, this study applied politeness theory to the task of predicting receivers' responses to affectionate messages from adult platonic friends. Results indicated that direct, unequivocal affectionate messages were the most supportive of positive face and also the most threatening to negative face, while indirect, equivocal messages supported positive face and threatened negative face the least. A curvilinear relationship emerged between the directness of affectionate messages and receivers' intentions to reciprocate them, with the most direct and most indirect messages being most likely to be reciprocated. The implications of these findings both for affection research and for politeness theory are discussed.

Few would dispute the importance of affection exchange to human well-being. Affection is generally regarded as a fundamental human need (Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972; Schutz, 1958, Schutz, 1966), and it has been shown to be critical to human development (Bowlby, 1953; Harlow, 1974) and in therapeutic interventions (Frank, 1973; Koch, 1959). The communication of affection is also important to the development of personal relationships. Indeed, affectionate expressions often serve as critical incidents by which relational development is gauged (for example, relational partners often remember the first hug, the first kiss, or the first time the words "I love you" were spoken; Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Owen, 1987). Affectionate communication is defined as the intentional display of intense positive regard for a living target. Despite the many benefits of affection, however, increasing empirical attention is being paid to the potential negative outcomes of affectionate communication. For instance, affectionate expressions are likely to be negatively evaluated and invoke unfavorable assessments of the sender when they are seen as inappropriate for the situation (Floyd & Morman, 1997), when they are interpreted as sexual advances in nonromantic relationships (Morman & Floyd, 1998), when they are negative expectancy violations (Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999a), when they go unreciprocated (Floyd & Burgoon, 1999), and when they invoke self-threatening attributions (Floyd, 1999; Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999b).

Considered in concert, research suggests that affectionate communication has the potential to invoke both positive and negative outcomes, even within the same interaction. A perspective with the potential to account for this apparent paradox is provided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Although affectionate behavior often supports receivers' positive face needs, leading to positive cognitive and behavioral outcomes, it may simultaneously threaten receivers' negative face needs. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examanine the politeness implications of

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affectionate expressions. Below, we explain the tenets of politeness theory and apply its principles in an experiment on the communication of affection in platonic, nonromantic adult friendships.

POLITENESS THEORY

Face

A fundamental assumption of politeness theory is that all individuals have, and are concerned with maintaining, *face*. As first articulated by Goffman (1959, 1967), face refers to a person's desired public image. Brown and Levinson (1987) identified two types of face needs to which individuals are assumed to attend. Positive face refers to one's desire for acceptance and approval from others. Later work by Lim and Bowers (1991) expanded the concept of positive face to include two distinct desires: the desire for inclusion and affection (fellowship face) and the desire for respect (competence face). Negative face, by contrast, refers to one's desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition or constraint. Face needs are assumed to operate in all cultures and are posited to affect both senders and receivers in an interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Face-Threatening Acts

Behaviors that run contrary to the face needs of senders and/or receivers are referred to as face-threatening acts (FTAs). For instance, communicative acts such as insults or criticisms can threaten receivers' positive face by conveying disapproval, while requests for favors can threaten receivers' negative face by constraining receivers' behaviors and imposing on their autonomy. Other behaviors can threaten senders' own face needs; a confession of wrongdoing can threaten senders' positive face because it may elicit disapproval from others, while a promise of help can threaten senders' negative face by obligating senders to engage in certain behaviors in the future. FTAs are often linguistic in form (e.g., criticisms, request, apologies), although Trees and Manusov (1998) recently examined the face-threatening characteristics of nonverbal behavior.

Politeness theory originally assumed that positive and negative face threats are mutually exclusive, in that a given communicative act threatens one and only one type of face. Empirical research has challenged this notion, however, demonstrating that some acts threaten both types of face simultaneously (see, e.g., Penman, 1990; Wilson, Kim, & Meischke, 1991). For instance, criticism can threaten positive face by conveying disapproval, but it may also threaten negative face by implying that the behavior being criticized should be changed, thereby imposing on the autonomy of the receiver. Extending this line of reasoning, we argue that a given communicative act (in this case, an affectionate expression) can support one type of face while simultaneously threatening the other type.

Facework Strategies

Senders concerned about the potential face threats inherent in their messages often engage in various redressive actions designed to mitigate such threats. Politeness theory elucidates five forms of "facework," or superordinate strategies by which senders can mitigate threats they perceive their messages will have to the face needs of themselves and their receivers. The five strategies are theorized to be hierarchically ordered on their degree of politeness, or the extent to which they mitigate face threats.

The least polite strategy is to use a *bald-on-record* statement in which the message is encoded as directly as possible, with no attempt to mitigate potential face threats. A professor who, when handing back a student's paper, says "This essay is terrible" is employing such a strategy.

The next strategy is known as *positive politeness* and involves crafting the message to minimize threats to the receiver's positive face. For example, since receiving a poor grade on an essay might make a student feel incompetent or unvalued (i.e., threaten her positive face), a professor might say "You're a good writer but this paper is not your best work." Such a statement is meant to reinforce the student's competence ("you're a good writer") and to isolate the incident as an apparent anomoly ("this paper is not your best work"), both of which are intended to lessen the positive face threat of receiving a bad grade. Closely related is the next strategy, *negative politeness,* which involves formulating the message to minimize threats to the receiver's negative face. In the example above, the student may perceive that a large amount of work is required to make her paper acceptable, which may be an unwelcomed obligation (i.e., a negative face threat). To mitigate such a threat, the professor might say "This paper needs just a bit more work."

The fourth strategy is to make one's statement *off-the-record,* which means that the message is implied but never explicitly stated. For instance, when handing back the paper the professor may say to the student, "You must've had a busy weekend." The statement, made in context, could suggest to the student that her paper was not well written, but that message is only implied in the professor's statement. Moreover, using an off-the-record strategy would allow the professor to deny that such a message were implied by the statement if he or she so chose. The last strategy in politeness theory is simply to *forego the FTA* altogether. This would be employed when the potential face threats of a message outweigh the benefits of it to such a degree that the FTA is simply not worth articulating.

Although Brown and Levinson originally proposed that a single act could threaten *either* positive or negative face, subsequent investigations have demonstrated that some acts threaten *both* positive and negative face simultaneously. As in the example above, a criticism of one's work can threaten positive face by making the receiver feel incompetent, and can also threaten negative face by making the receiver feel obligated to redo the work. Thus, some have extended politeness theory by proposing that both positive and negative politeness strategies must be employed in a message when both types of face are potentially threatened.

The Present Study

The purpose of the present investigation is to examine the politeness implications of affectionate communication. Although affectionate expressions are often supportive of receivers' positive face needs, they may simultaneously threaten receivers' negative face needs in platonic (nonromantic) relationships, by a) implying that the sender is romantically interested in the receiver; and/or b) making the receiver feel manipulated. These potential negative face threats are examined relative to affectionate expressions employing three different facework strategies.[1]

Previous research on facework strategies are extended in two ways. First, while prior research has investigated the moderating effects of closeness, power, and magnitude of imposition that are predicted by politeness theory, individuals' own trait positive and negative face needs have not been examined for their potential moderating effects. However, it is probable that one's individual-level needs for positive and

negative face affect the extent to which a given behavior is perceived to threaten those needs. Second, in addition to examining the extent to which receivers perceive various communicative acts to be face threatening, this study examines receivers' intentions to reciprocate such expressions in kind (i.e., by saying the same thing back to the sender). A major risk of expressing affection is the possibility that one's expression will not be reciprocated, an outcome that compromises the sender's positive face. In the current investigation, we address how the face-supporting and face-threatening nature of affectionate behaviors will influence receivers' intentions to preserve or threaten the face needs of senders in the next conversational "turn." The specific predictions and questions are detailed below.

HYPOTHESES AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Affectionate Expressions as Face-Supporting Acts

Perhaps the most evident connection between affection and politeness is that affectionate messages should support one's positive face need. By their nature, affectionate expressions tend to convey a sense of acceptance and approval from sender to receiver (see Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999a). All other things being equal, affectionate messages that are more direct (i.e., less qualified, less ambiguous) should be construed by receivers as more strongly supportive of their positive face than affectionate messages that are less direct. Thus, a main effect of message strategy on receivers' perceptions of positive face support is predicted:

H1:   For receivers of an affectionate expression, positive face support is greatest when the expression employs a bald-on-record strategy, less when the expression employs a negative facework strategy, and least when the expression employs an off-the-record strategy.

Affection Expressions as Face-Threatening Acts

As previous investigations (e.g., Floyd, 1997) have suggested, however, the communication of affection is not without its own associated risks. Several such risks implicate the face needs of senders. For instance, if Doug tells his friend Kim that he loves her, he runs a risk that she may not reciprocate the expression, or that she may reciprocate the expression in such a way as to make it clear that she does not share the sentiment, both of which would threaten his positive face. On the other hand, she may interpret the expression to be of greater intensity than he intended—thinking he loves her romantically when he meant it platonically—which at the very least obliges him to the uncomfortable task of qualifying his remarks and his intentions. Even if the expression were not misinterpreted, it may create an expectancy whereby Doug feels obligated to regularly make such expressions again in the future. Both of these latter situations may threaten Doug's negative face.

All of these potential face threats to the sender are in some way contingent on the receiver's response. However, there are potential face threats to the receiver that are more immediate. Because affection communicates value and appreciation to the receiver, and because it is, as such, a common positive facework strategy, it should not create an evident threat to a receiver's positive face. At least two negative face threats are possible, however. First, if Kim interprets Doug's statement as a romantic gesture rather than an expression of platonic love, she may experience a great deal of pressure to process the implications of such a gesture. That is, she would have to determine whether she desires a romantic relationship with Doug: if so she is obligated to deal with the opportunity she perceives, and if not she is obligated to "let him down." In

either case, her negative face need may be threatened by the obligation to attend to relational boundary ambiguity. Second, Kim may perceive that Doug's expression is not sincere but is spurred by an ulterior motive, such as an attempt to persuade her toward some desired action. For instance, she may believe that Doug's expression of love was intended to persuade her into sleeping with him, or loaning him money, or forgiving him a major transgression. In such instances, her perception that she is being used or manipulated by Doug's expression may also threaten her negative face.

Although Brown and Levinson originally posited that affectionate behaviors could be used to support a receiver's positive face, we suggest that affectionate expression can simultaneously threaten the negative face of the receiver and the positive and/or negative face of the sender. In the current preliminary analysis, we address the former of these issues, the potential negative face threats to the receiver. Based on Brown and Levinson's hierarchical conceptualization of facework strategies, we hypothesize that expressions of affection that are direct and unqualified (i.e., bald-on-record messages) produce greater negative face threats to hearers than do affectionate expressions employing more equivocal strategies. This investigation addresses the two negative face threats described above: relational boundary amgibuity and perceived manipulation. Thus, the second hypothesis is:

H2:   For receivers of an affectionate expression, negative face threats due to (a) relational boundary
       ambiguity and (b) perceived manipulation are greatest when the expression employs a
       bald-on-record strategy, less when the expression employs a negative facework strategy, and
       least when the expression employs an off-the-record strategy.

Politeness theory recognizes that the amount of face threat inherent in a given behavior is not solely accounted for by the facework strategy employed. Rather, the main effect of facework strategy is thought to be moderated by three additional variables: 1) the closeness of the relationship between sender and receiver (such that face needs are generally more difficult to threaten in closer relationships); 2) the degree of power imbalance between sender and receiver (with superiors afforded greater freedom to threaten subordinates' face needs than vice versa); and, in the case of requests or directives, 3) the magnitude of the request (with greater negative face threat accompanying larger requests than smaller requests). The second and third of these moderator variables are less relevant to the present investigation, since friendships are generally peer-like, egalitarian relationships and since expressions of affection are generally not requests or directives.

With respect to closeness, however, politeness theory predicts that individuals are afforded greater freedom of imposition in their close relationships than in relationships that are less close. This suggests that the closeness of one's friendship moderates the main effect of facework strategy on perceived negative face threats, such that the face threats will be more salient in less-close than in close friendships.

By extension, we predict further that a receiver's own negative face need also moderates the main effect of facework strategy. Previous research on face-threatening communicative behaviors has tended to ignore this individual-level variable, presuming instead that once closeness, power, and magnitude of request have been accounted for, individuals will react to the same behavior with the same level of face threat. However, we posit that at the individual level, people's own perceived face needs affect how they react to FTAs, such that those with higher negative face needs will perceive greater negative face threat. To account for the moderating effects of closeness and negative face need, hypothesis three is:

H3:   The effect of facework strategy on perceived negative face threats of affectionate expressions is moderated by (a) the closeness of the target relationship, and (b) the receiver's negative face need, such that closeness is negatively related to perceived face threat and face need is positively related to perceived face threat.

Effects on Intention to Respond in Kind

Among the most apparent risks in expressing affection is the risk that the receiver will fail to reciprocate the gesture, or will at least fail to respond with an expression of equal magnitude. These potential outcomes are considered risky because they would entail subsequent threats to the speaker's positive face. For instance, if Heather says to Max, "I think I'm falling in love with you," and Max replies, "I like you, too," Max's response will likely convey to Heather that although he feels positively toward her, he does not share her sentiment. Receiving such a response may be nearly as threatening to Heather's positive face as if Max had said nothing at all.

Because of this risk and its implications for senders' own positive face needs, it is informative to examine receivers' intentions to respond in kind to an affectionate expression. Although politeness theory does not address this issue specifically, we proposed that receivers' own positive face need would predict their intention to respond in kind to an affectionate expression. This prediction follows the reasoning that those with high needs for approval and acceptance from others should be likely to reciprocate affectionate gestures, since reciprocation should indicate that the sentiment is shared and should help ensure that the gesture will be repeated in the future. Stated as a hypothesis:

H4:   Receivers' intentions to respond in kind to an affectionate expression are positively related to their positive face need.

In addition, it is unclear what effect, if any, facework strategy would have on receivers' intentions to reciprocate an affectionate expression. One could make the argument that since more direct expressions are hypothesized to be more positive-face supporting (H1), they should also be the most likely to be reciprocated. However, we also predict that more direct expressions are the most threatening to negative face (H2), which may make them less likely to be reciprocated. Thus, one research question is advanced:

RQ: What effect, if any, does facework strategy have on receivers' intentions to respond in kind to an affectionate expression?

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 235 adults (64% female) who were recruited from communication courses at a medium-sized university in the Midwest. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 63, with a mean age of 24.33 years ($SD = 8.10$). Most (66%) were Caucasian, while 23% were African-American, 3.4% were Hispanic, 2.6% Asian, 2.1% Native American, and 4.7% were of other ethnic origins. Most (81.3%) were never married, while 8.9% were married, and 9.8% were separated or divorced at the time of the study. All but nine participants identified themselves as being exclusively heterosexual. Participants earned extra credit in exchange for their participation.

Procedures and Manipulation

Participants were asked to consider one friend on whom to report. Approximately half reported on a same-sex friend ($n = 117$) and the remainder reported on an

opposite-sex friend ($n = 118$). In all instances, participants were directed to choose someone who was a close friend but not a best friend, not a relative, and not a former, current, or potential romantic partner. The target friendships ranged in duration from one to 384 months, with a mean duration of just over six years ($M = 75.18$ months, $SD = 65.32$). Participants completed a written questionnaire with respect to the target friendship and returned it anonymously to the researchers.

In the questionnaire, participants were presented with one of three written descriptions of an affectionate expression and were asked to evaluate the expression as if their target friend had directed it toward them. The three descriptions corresponded to the three politeness strategies of bald-on-record ($n = 62$), negative politeness ($n = 90$), and off-the-record ($n = 83$). The bald-on-record expression read: "I want you to know I really care about you. You're very important to me and I will always value our friendship. I feel very close to you right now and I just wanted you to know that." The negative politeness message used the same statements but included qualifiers intended to mitigate face threats due to relational boundary ambiguity and perceived manipulation: "I don't mean this in a romantic way, but I want you to know I really care about you. *You don't have to say anything back—* but, you're very important to me and I will always value our friendship. I'm not trying to get anything here, but I feel very close to you right now and I just wanted you to know that." Finally, the off-the-record message used a nondescript verbal statement accompanied by descriptions of nonverbal behaviors: [Makes a fist and nudges you in the arm. Smiles and says, jokingly] "You're pretty cool. I guess I'll keep you around!"

Independent Measures

Relational closeness was assessed with the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). The IOS is a single-item measure consisting of seven pairs of circles in which one circle is labeled "self" and the other circle is labeled "other." The circles within each pair overlap to varying degrees and participants are asked to select the pair that best depicts how they feel about their target relationship. The greater the overlap between the circles in the pair selected, the closer the relationship is purported to be. The IOS has demonstrated high convergent, discriminant, and construct validity (see Aron et al., 1992). Although it is a single-item scale (and thus does not provide for tests of internal reliability), Aron et al. reported high test-retest reliability (.83) during a two-week stability assessment.

Trait positive and negative face needs were assessed with two scales developed for this study. The 12 items on the positive face needs scale assess participants' needs for approval, respect, inclusion, and affiliation, while the 11 negative face needs items address participants' needs for autonomy, freedom from imposition, and freedom from constraint. Factor loadings for positive and negative face needs are provided in Table 1. A principal components factor analysis with oblique rotation, which was reparameterized after dropping one item from the negative face needs scale for a low primary loading, produced the expected two-factor structure with high primary loadings, no complex items, and internal reliabilities of .82 for positive face needs and .72 for negative face needs. The two factors were moderately correlated, $r (218) = .20$, $p = .004$. The correlation indicates that people's positive face needs are moderately associated with their negative face needs, as one might anticipate. However, the magnitude of the coefficient suggests that, while the two scales are related, they are indeed measuring different constructs. To assess the scales' construct validity, we also had participants complete three continuous measures of their attachment style dimen-

TABLE 1

FACTOR LOADINGS FOR POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE FACE NEEDS

Item	I	II
It is very important to me that people think I am competent at what I do	.54	.11
If I thought someone didn't respect me, it would really bother me	.53	.09
I usually don't care whether or not people like me*	.48	.13
It makes me very unhappy when I feel like I don't belong	.66	.18
It bothers me a lot when people dislike me	.74	.11
I really hate it when someone is disappointed in me	.62	.05
It is very important to me that people respect me	.59	.07
I don't take very kindly to criticism	.29	.14
It doesn't bother me when someone disapproves of me*	.58	.09
I have a strong need to feel like I belong	.73	.01
It is very important to me that people think well of me	.74	.04
There is nothing worse than feeling like an outsider	.58	.22
I get impatient when someone in front of me in line is holding things up	.08	.66
I really hate it when someone imposes on me	.24	.46
It makes me mad when other people volunteer me for things	.07	.53
I don't like it when I feel obligated to do things	.14	.58
I don't mind other people imposing on me*	.05	.62
People have a right to use my time and my talents*	.19	.50
If I have a green light but another car is blocking the intersection, I get angry	.12	.71
I hate it when I feel like I *have* to do something	.05	.64
It irritates me when other people plan my time for me	.14	.59
I hate it when I feel like I don't have control over my own life	.11	.62
It is important to me to be able to choose how I spend my time	.18	.51

Notes. * reverse-scored. I = positive face need; II = negative face need. KMO test of sampling adequacy = .77. Bartlett test of sphericity χ^2 (153) = 1380.29, $p < .001$.

sions adapted from Guerrero (1996; see also Feeney, Noller, & Hanrahan, 1994): preoccupation with relational success (*alpha* = .80), fear of intimacy (*alpha* = .67), and viewing relationships as of secondary importance (*alpha* = .35).[2] We reasoned that people with strong positive face needs should give importance to their personal relationships; thus, we expected positive face need to be positively related to preoccupation with relational success and negatively related to perception of relationships as secondary. Because negative face need should indicate an apprehension to indebt oneself to others, we expected negative face need to be positively related to fear of intimacy and to perception of relationships as secondary. As anticipated, participants' positive face needs were positively related to their preoccupation with relational success, r (218) = .68, $p < .001$, and negatively related to their perception of relationships as secondary, r (218) = −.15, p = .012. Negative face needs were positively related to fear of intimacy, r (218) = .26, $p < .001$, and to perception of relationships as secondary, r (218) = .24, $p < .001$.

Dependent Measures

Negative face threats (boundary ambiguity and perceived manipulation), *positive face support,* and *intention to reciprocate* were each assessed with two- or three-item measures developed for this study. The items corresponding to each scale were subjected to principal components factor analyses to assess their dimensionality. In all instances, the analyses produced the expected factor structures, with strong primary loadings, no complex items, and acceptable internal reliabilities.[3] Items corresponding to boundary ambiguity were: "I would wonder if my friend was trying to 'come on' to me," "I would think that my friend might be wanting something different from our friendship than I

TABLE 2

Hierarchical Regression Predicting Positive Face Support $(N = 235)$

Predictor Variable	Zero-order r	B	SE B	β	ΔR^2
Step 1 Sex composition	.02	5.09	.17	.02	.015
Subject sex	.12	.34	.18	.12	.015
Step 2 Positive face need	.02	2.1	.10	.01	.001
Step 3 Facework strategy	-.25****	-.43	.19	-.25	.063****
Step 4 Strategy × positive face	-.23****	-.17	.14	-.51	.006

Note. Total R^2 = .079, adjusted R^2 = .063. $F(4, 234)$ = 4.90, $p < .001$. $* p < .05$, $** p < .01$, $*** p < .005$, $**** p < .001$.

want," and "I would wonder whether my friend meant this in a romantic way" (*alpha* = .86). Items corresponding to perceived manipulation were: "I would think my friend was just trying to get something from me," "I would think to myself, 'I wonder what he/she wants now," and "I would feel like my friend might be trying to manipulate me" (*alpha* = .87). Items corresponding to positive face support were: "I would feel as though my friend really cared about me," "I would feel like I was very important to this friend," and "I would realize that my friend feels like we have a close friendship" (*alpha* = .84). Items corresponding to intention to reciprocate were: "I would probably say the same thing in return," and "I would say the same thing back to my friend" (*alpha* = .89).

Consistent with other facework research (e.g., Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998), we do not expect our hypothesized effects to be moderated by biological sex. However, to allow for the possibility that the sex of the sender and/or the sex of the receiver interacts with any of the independent variables, we tested our predictions within a factorial design that was completely crossed with sex of sender and sex of receiver.

RESULTS

Predicting Positive Face Support

The first hypothesis predicted a main effect of message strategy on receivers' perceptions of positive face support, such that bald-on-record affectionate expressions produce the most positive face support, followed by negative politeness and off-the-record expressions. Due to the possibility that participants' own positive face need would confound the effects of message strategy, face need was controlled when examining the hypothesized main effect of message type. Controlling for participant sex, relational sex composition, and self's positive face need, message type, entered third into a hierarchical regression, was a significant predictor of positive face support, $\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$, accounting for 6.3% of variance. Message type was entered into the regression with the bald-on-record message coded as "1," the negative politeness message coded as "2," and the off-the-record message coded as "3;" thus, the significant negative beta indicates that the bald-on-record expression produces the most positive face support. The first hypothesis is supported. No significant interaction effects involving participant sex, sex composition, or participants' positive face need emerged. Beta weights, zero-order correlations, and significance tests are reported on Table 2.
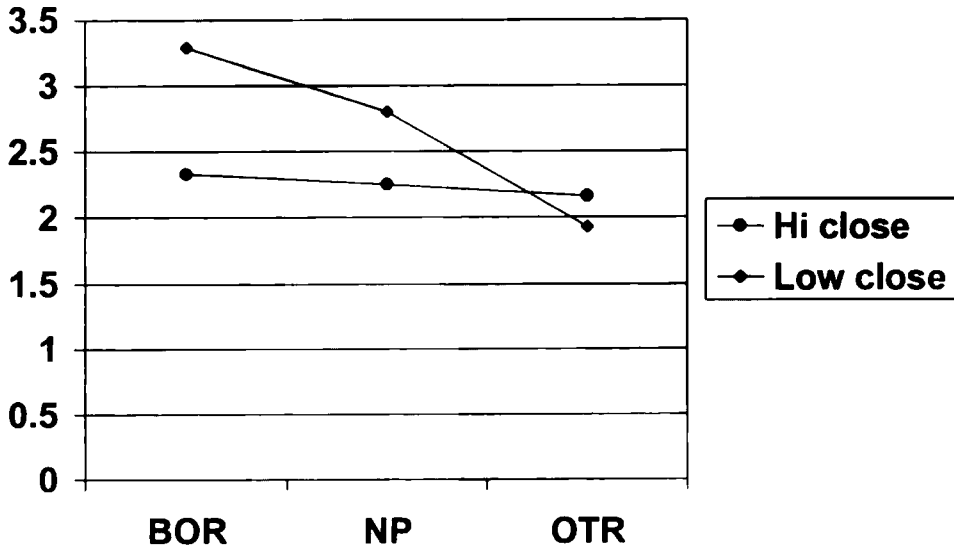
FIGURE 1
FACEWORK STRATEGY BY CLOSENESS INTERACTION ON NEGATIVE FACE THREAT DUE TO RELATIONAL
BOUNDARY AMBIGUITY

Predicting Negative Face Threats

The second hypothesis predicted that, for receivers of affectionate expression, negative face threats are greatest with the bald-on-record message, less with the negative politeness message, and least with the off-the-record message. The third hypothesis predicted that this main effect of facework strategy is moderated by relational closeness and by receivers' own negative face need. Separate hierarchical regressions were conducted to test these predictions for two negative face threats: relational boundary ambiguity and perceived manipulation.

Boundary ambiguity. To test H2a and H3, we performed a hierarchical regression that controlled for participant sex and sex composition. Relational closeness, entered second, was a nonsignificant predictor of negative face threat due to boundary ambiguity. Participants' negative face need, entered third, significantly predicted negative face threat due to boundary ambiguity, $\beta = .20$, $p = .001$, accounting for 4.1% of variance. Controlling for sex, sex composition, closeness, and negative face need, facework strategy, entered fourth, was a significant negative predictor of negative face threat, $\beta = -.19$, $p = .003$, accounting for 3.5% of unique variance. However, facework strategy also produced a significant interaction with closeness in the fifth block, $\beta = .56$, $p = .015$ accounting for 2.2% of variance beyond that accounted for by the main effects. The disordinal interaction, shown in Figure 1, indicated that for those reporting on close relationships, message strategy had no effect on negative face threat due to boundary ambiguity. However, those reporting on less-close relationships reported the most negative face threat when exposed to the bald-on-record message, less when exposed to the negative politeness message, and least when exposed to the off-the-record message, as H2a predicted. Thus, with respect to H2a and H3, negative face need had a direct effect on negative face threat and the effect of facework strategy was moderated by relational closeness. Beta weights, zero-order correlations, and significance tests are reported on Table 3.

TABLE 3

HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION PREDICTING NEGATIVE THREAT DUE TO RELATIONAL BOUNDARY AMBIGUITY ($N = 235$)

Predictor Variable	Zero-order r	B	$SE\ B$	β	ΔR^2
Step 1 Sex composition	.16*	.52	.20	.16	.068****
Subject sex	-.21****	-.65	.21	-.20	.068****
Step 2 Closeness	-.12	-9.90	.06	-.11	.011
Step 3 Negative face need	.18***	.45	.14	.20	.041****
Step 4 Facework strategy	-.22***	-.38	.12	-.19	.035***
Step 5 Strategy × closeness	-.18**	.18	.07	.56	.022*
Step 6 Strategy × negative face	-.14*	-.11	.19	-.27	.001
Step 7 Closeness × negati face	-.03	8.09	.08	1.03	.004
Step 8 Strategy × closeness × negative face	-.12	.12	.10	1.83	.005

Note. Total R^2 = .176, adjusted R^2 = .154. $F(6, 231)$ = 8.01, $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$, **** $p < .001$.

Perceived manipulation. To test H2b and H3, we performed a hierarchical regression that controlled for participant sex and sex composition. Relational closeness, entered second, was a nonsignificant predictor of negative face threat due to perceived manipulation. Participants' negative face need, entered third, significantly predicted negative face threat due to perceived manipulation, β = .20, p = .001, accounting for 4.1% of variance. Controlling for sex, sex composition, closeness, and negative face need, facework strategy, entered fourth, was a nonsignificant negative predictor of negative face threat, contrary to H2b. Beta weights, zero-order correlations, and significance tests are reported on Table 4.

Predicting Intention to Respond in Kind

The fourth hypothesis indicated that a receiver's positive face need predicts intention to reciprocate an affectionate expression. In a hierarchical regression analysis, controlling for participant sex and sex composition, positive face need, entered second, was a significant predictor of intention to reciprocate, β = .23, $p < .001$, accounting for 5.2% of variance.

Since direct expressions of affection may support positive face yet threaten negative face, research question one sought to examine the effect of facework strategy on receiver's intention to respond in kind. Controlling for participant sex, sex composition, and positive face need, facework strategy, entered third in the regression, was

TABLE 4

HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION PREDICTING NEGATIVE FACE THREAT DUE TO PERCEIVED MANIPULATION ($N = 235$)

Predictor Variable	Zero-order r	B	$SE\ B$	β	ΔR^2
Step 1 Sex composition	.03	.11	.18	.04	.060
Subject sex	-.25****	-.69	.18	-.24	.060
Step 2 Closeness	-.07	-5.90	.05	-.07	.005
Step 3 Negative face need	.19***	.40	.12	.20	.041****
Step 4 Facework strategy	-.08	-7.59	.11	-.04	.002
Step 5 Strategy × closeness	-.07	8.80	.07	.32	.007
Step 6 Strategy × negative face	.00	4.33	.17	.11	.000
Step 7 Closeness × negative face	.01	-1.10	.07	-.07	.000
Step 8 Strategy × closeness × negative face	-.01	8.38	.10	1.41	.003

Note. Total R^2 = .106, adjusted R^2 = .091. $F(4, 231)$ = 6.76, $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$, **** $p < .001$.

TABLE 5
HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION PREDICTING INTENTION TO RECIPROCATE ($N = 235$)

Predictor Variable	Zero-order r	B	$SE\ B$	β	ΔR^2
Step 1 Sex composition	−.08	−.27	.23	−.08	.023
Subject sex	.13*	.48	.24	.13	.023
Step 2 Positive face need	.23****	.48	.13	.23	.052****
Step 3 Facework strategy	−.07	−.16	.14	.07	.005
Step 4 Strategy × positive face need	.05	.14	.18	.31	.002

Note. Total $R^2 = .075$, adjusted $R^2 = .063$. $F(3, 234) = 6.26$, $p < .001$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .005$, **** $p < .001$.

a nonsignificant predictor of intention to respond in kind. Beta weights, zero-order correlations, and significance tests for H4 and RQ1 are reported on Table 5.

We had originally proposed a research question on the effect of facework strategy instead of an hypothesis because our first and second hypotheses offered contradictory reasons for predicting an effect of facework strategy on intention to reciprocate. One might assert that because more direct expressions (e.g., bald-on-record) are more positive-face supporting, they should be the most likely to be reciprocated; however, one might also assert that because more direct expressions are more negative-face threatening, they should be the least likely to be reciprocated. The combination of these predictions caused us to advance an open-ended research question; however, we may instead have advanced the prediction that these competing effects, in combination, cause the effect of facework strategy on intention to reciprocate to be curvilinear, such that the most direct *and* the least direct messages are the most likely to be reciprocated, while the message in the middle (i.e., negative politeness) is the least likely to be reciprocated. To test this alternative hypothesis, we performed the regression again after having recoded message strategy so that the negative politeness message had the greatest value. After controlling for participant sex, sex composition, and positive face need, message strategy produced a significant effect, $\beta = -.23$, $p < .001$, accounting for 5.1% of unique variance. The negative beta on the recoded variable indicates that the negative politeness message is least likely to be reciprocated, while receivers are more likely to respond in kind to the bald-on-record and off-the-record messages.

DISCUSSION

This study applied principles of politeness theory to the task of explaining and predicting receivers' responses to expressions of affection in adult platonic friendships. Collectively, the results indicated that facework strategies affected the extent to which affectionate messages were perceived to be face-supporting and face-threatening. We proposed that a given message might support one type of face while simultaneously threatening the other, and hypothesized that the most direct, unequivocal affectionate expression (i.e., employing the bald-on-record strategy) would produce the highest positive face support and also the highest negative face threat. Likewise, we predicted that the least direct, most qualified expression (i.e, employing the off-the-record strategy) would produce the lowest positive face support and also the lowest negative face threat. These predictions obtained for positive face support and negative face threat due to relational boundary ambiguity. In both instances, as predicted, affection-

ate messages designed to mitigate potential negative face threats (i.e., employing the negative politeness strategy) were in the middle of the range.

Importantly, the effect of facework strategy on negative face threat was moderated. Receivers' own trait negative face need had a direct predictive relationship on the extent to which they perceived negative face threat due to relational boundary ambiguity; those with higher negative face need perceived greater threat. Moreover, facework strategy interacted with the closeness of the friendships, with the interaction indicating that facework strategy affected the perceived negative face threats for receivers in less-close friendships. Those in closer relationships were less concerned about relational boundary ambiguity, regardless of message strategy. Clearly, this finding is in line with politeness theory's assertion that people in close relationships are more immune to potential face threats than are people in less-close relationships. Receivers' negative face need also had a direct predictive relationship on their perceptions of negative face threat due to feeling manipulated, further illustrating its usefulness as a potential moderator (a point we take up in greater detail below).

Finally, we examined the effects of facework strategy and positive face need on receivers' intentions to reciprocate an affectionate expression. As predicted, positive face need was a significant predictor of intention to reciprocate. We were unsure as to a specific prediction about the effect of facework strategy. It may be that the bald-on-record message would be most likely to be reciprocated because it was the most supportive of positive face. However, it is also possible that the bald-on-record message would be least likely to be reciprocated because it was the most threatening to negative face. Thus, this issue was addressed in a research question and a nonsignificant linear relationship between facework strategy and intention to reciprocate was found.

However, we reasoned *post hoc* that our other alternative would have been to predict a curvilinear relationship, such that the most face-supporting message (bald-on-record) and the least face-threatening message (off-the-record) would be most likely to be reciprocated, while the negative politeness message would be least likely to be reciprocated. This investigation produced support for this alternative hypothesis.

The present findings have numerous implications for research on affectionate communication as well as for politeness theory and future research on facework. These are delineated subsequently.

Implications for Research on Affectionate Communication

The grand implication of this study for affection research is its support for the counterintuitive notion that affectionate communication can lead to negative outcomes. Although affection is normatively associated with positive relational outcomes such as increased intimacy, a number of recent studies have suggested that it can instead produce negative outcomes when it is misattributed, when it negatively violates expectations, or when it runs counter to a receiver's goals (see, e.g., Floyd & Burgoon, 1999; Floyd & Voloudakis, 1999b). Largely absent from these earlier investigations, however, is an omnibus explanation for *why* affectionate behavior can be unwanted, unexpected, or misattributed. We propose that politeness theory can provide such an explanatory framework, as well as propose important questions for future research.

When one considers the risks of affectionate communication, it becomes evident that many risks can be accounted for as a function of face needs. With respect to senders, for instance, the possibility that an affectionate expression will go unreciprocated is a risk for senders because it would threaten their positive face, making them

feel as though receivers did not love or value them. The possibility that a receiver will misinterpret a platonic gesture as romantic can threaten senders' negative face by making them feel obligated either to go along with receivers' misinterpretations or to "break the bad news" and hurt receivers' feelings. Likewise, the misinterpretation of a romantic gesture as platonic can threaten senders' positive face by making them feel as though receivers do not care for them in the same way.

Several face threats are more pertinent for receivers. As we explored in the present study, receivers' negative face can be threatened by their perception that senders are attempting to alter the nature of the relationship, or by their perception that senders are attempting to manipulate them. Receivers' negative face may also be threatened simply by the pressure they feel to reciprocate an expression even if the sentiment is not shared.

If affectionate expressions can be accompanied by such various face threats for senders and receivers, then one could easily surmise that such expressions might be judged negatively, and subsequently, produce negative attributions or qualify as negative expectancy violations. That is, an unexpected gesture of affection might be regarded as a negative violation of expectations if it is accompanied by one or more face threats but as a positive violation if such face threats were absent. Likewise, if a receiver feels manipulated by a sender's gesture, the receiver may be inclined to make less-flattering attributions about the gesture than if such a face threat were not perceived. Future research can further flesh out these explanatory potentials by investigating not only the face threats that are perceived in affectionate expressions, but how they covary with the form of the expression and to what extent they are predictive of cognitive, behavioral, and/or other affective reactions.

Implications for Politeness Theory and Research

This research has at least three important implications for politeness theory and facework research. The first is that a given communicative act may threaten one type of face while simultaneously supporting the other. While such a possibility is not excluded by Brown and Levinson's (1987) delineation of the theory, empirical research has tended to focus either on the face-threatening or face-supporting properties of communicative behaviors without acknowledging potential covariation between such properties. The present study examined how expressions of affection support receivers' positive face needs and simultaneously threaten their negative face needs. Future studies might examine behaviors that support the positive face and threaten the negative face of senders, or behaviors that threaten positive face while simultaneously supporting negative face.

Closely related is a second implication for politeness theory, which is that a given communicative behavior can threaten face in more than one way. Although numerous other studies have acknowledged that a given act (e.g., criticism) can threaten both positive and negative face at the same time, the present study suggests that a given act can threaten a single type of face need in more than one way. For instance, affectionate behavior can threaten receivers' negative face in two distinct ways: by imposing relational boundary ambiguity and by making the receiver feel manipulated. Future affection research might address additional potential negative face threats of affection, such as pressure on the receiver to reciprocate. Moreover, looking at more than one *form* of positive or negative face threat can assist facework researchers in understanding numerous face-threatening acts.

A final implication for politeness theory and research is that individuals' own levels of positive and negative face need can directly affect the extent to which they see a given behavior as face-threatening, and may also moderate the effect of facework strategy. In their original explication of the theory, Brown and Levinson acknowledge relational-level variables (closeness and egalitarianism) and the magnitude of the FTA as variables that may moderate the effect of facework strategy on perceived face threat, while seemingly assuming that individuals enter interactions with the same levels of positive and negative face need. In practice, however, this may be a faulty assumption. Individual-level positive and negative face needs may play a role in the perceived level of face threat a given behavior induces, and in how one intends to respond to FTAs.

Limitations and Conclusions

Particular limitations of the present experiment should be borne in mind when considering the results. As a preliminary investigation and a first application of politeness theory to affectionate communication, the study is limited in its scope. First, only one verbal message strategy was considered for each facework strategy. Other verbal messages employing the same strategies, or affectionate expressions that are largely nonverbal, might affect face needs in different ways. Similarly, while this study extends on previous research by considering more than one threat to negative face, future research might consider other negative face threats, such as a receiver's pressure to reciprocate an affectionate expression even if the sentiment is not shared. Future work should also consider sender's face needs and potential face threats, a task we are currently undertaking with research in progress. Second, we did not do a formal pre-test on the treatment conditions. Rather, we based the verbal and nonverbal behavior sequences described in each scenario on previous inductive research that has examined the manner in which individuals (largely of the same age group as the current participants) express affection in their social and personal relationships (see Floyd & Morman, 1998).

Third, we did not have a truly random assignment to conditions in this study. Because we collected data with written instruments that we distributed in classes and asked students to return, it was not feasible for us to do a truly random assignment, involving pre-identified ID numbers and a random number generator. In lieu of that strategy, we randomized the order of distribution of the questionnaires for each condition, so that each stack of questionnaires we distributed in the classes contained a randomly ordered selection of the questionnaires for each condition. There was no opportunity for participants to self-select into any of the categories, and each participant's assignment was based on whichever randomly ordered questionnaire he or she took as they were distributed. This strategy provided us with some degree of randomization, although it did not allow us to create conditions with equal cell sizes. Finally, although our sample was relatively diverse with respect to age and ethnicity, it still consisted predominantly of undergraduate students, a factor that may constrain generalizeability. Perhaps as a result of these or other limitations, relatively small amounts of variance are accounted for in this experiment. Certainly, this is an important limitation when one considers that the overall goal of scientific theory is to account for variance, and replications and extensions of this experiment should proceed, and perhaps refinements of politeness theory, in attempts to account for greater proportions of the variance in affectionate behavior.

Despite tempering the conclusions to be drawn from the current findings, these limitations give rise to important issues for future studies. For instance, when senders'

perspectives are considered, researchers might examine how the form and content of senders' affectionate expressions are affected by the extent to which senders perceive potential face threats to themselves or to receivers. The conditions under which expressions are offered despite the perception of face threat would also be informative to study, insofar as it places face threats in context, as one of multiple considerations a sender encounters when offering an affectionate sentiment.

In a larger sense, facework and politeness principles have a way of accounting for apparent paradoxes in affectionate communication in a way that few theoretic perspectives can. Politeness theory can account not only for the finding that affectionate expressions can produce *either* positive or negative outcomes, but, as this study demonstrates, it can also provide a useful framework for understanding why affectionate expressions can produce *both* positive and negative outcomes within the same interaction. This is an important theoretic anchor for research on interpersonal affection exchange and we invite further fleshing out of this model by other researchers.

NOTES

[1]Our experiment involves bald-on-record, negative politeness, and off-the-record facework strategies. Because we did not predict that affectionate expressions threaten receivers' positive face, we did not include a message employing a positive facework strategy. According to politeness theory, negative and positive facework strategies mitigate threats to negative and positive face, respectively, while off-the-record messages mitigate both threats and bald-on-record messages mitigate neither.

[2]We recognize that the scale for viewing relationships as of secondary importance has a sub-optimal reliability estimate. However, we elected to retain the measure for two reasons. First, we use it only to test the validity of our scale measures, not as a variable of interest in the study. Second, despite its low reliability, the scale manifested statistically significant relationships with both our positive and negative face needs scales, indicating that the low reliability was not problematic.

[3]Factor loadings are available from the authors.

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