
Implication of sexual intention on date initiation in the Korean college students

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Abstract: This study is to delineate date initiation's relevance to sexual intentions amongst the young people. The primary objective of this study is to confirm the presence of sex differences with regards to rating sexual intentions of the date-initiator when initiating for a date. The secondary objective is to confirm that the participants rated a higher intention for the male date-initiator than the female date-initiator. Three types of date-initiating activities (going for dinner, a drive, and drinking alcoholic beverages) were introduced to 216 male and 266 female Korean college students. As expected, sex differences were found in the ratings concerning the female-initiated dating, but not in the male-initiated dating. Additionally, there was a higher intention of sexual engagements in male-initiated dates than female-initiated dates.

Keywords: Date Initiation, Heterosexual Dating, Sex Role, Sexual Intention

1. Introduction

Most young people begin showing their romantic interest to members of the opposite sex from their adolescence. Conventionally, among heterosexual college students, courtship includes the practice of dating [1]. Typical activities involved in dating for young people are going to the movies, going for a drive, drinking alcoholic beverages, eating a meal at a restaurant, and so on.

According to young people's scripts for heterosexual first dates, they still tend to behave in traditional ways when beginning a relationship [2]. The traditional scenario of initiating a dating relationship is that the role of the men is active and that of women is essentially passive or reactive. Even when couples acknowledge egalitarianism, it is clear that men are more likely to see themselves as taking the initiative, including paying for the date and taking the woman home as well as other actions that involve terms of money and transportation, while women rarely describe themselves as making the first move and they tend to hold back and wait for the man to act [1-3].

Men are also traditionally socialized to be the initiators and pursuers of sexual encounters while women are responsible for restricting the level of sexual activity and serve as a gatekeeper during the interaction. Consequently, if a man is interested in having sex with a woman, he is

likely to feel that he should make the first move such as initiating a date. Many studies showed that college men were more likely to initiate sex, particularly early in the relationship than women [4-8].

When young people set out to make a date, they employ decision-making and problem-solving approaches by attempting to proceed towards their desired goal [1, 3]. As for the goal, heterosexual dating implies romantic and sexual interest whereas socializing with an opposite sex member does not [1]. Men, in general, report using more strategies to engage in sex, whereas women report using more strategies to avoid sex [5, 6, 9]. Men's initial sexual moves are usually subtle in order to reduce the embarrassment associated with potential rejections. When a man hopes that a woman is interested in having sex with him, he will only focus the cues that fit his expectation and disregard the cues that do not [4].

Availability of alcohol is a significant tool in dating relationships. That is, alcohol consumption was the strongest predictor of sexual behavior on the first date, and the majority of college students consumed alcohol on their recent first dates [1, 10]. Many incidents of sexual intercourses are reported in the dating relationship of young people, and some of them are related to coercion [11-13]. The reason would be because sexual intentions might be involved in the date-initiating behavior and because alcohol consumptions on the date might be connected to sexual

activities [6]. For instance, male social drinkers reported that alcohol expectancies and intoxication influenced their sexual aggression intentions during an unprotected sexual encounter [14].

Following the traditional sexual script, men view friendly and mundane dating behaviors by women as denoting more sexual interests. Women's indirect behaviors, such as kissing a man, drinking alcohol, or letting a man pay for a date, are perceived by men as indications of sexual interest. Thus, women should be aware that men are highly attuned to sexual cues and could take any signs of interest as indicatives of sexual desire [5, 6, 13, 14].

Dating was conventionally initiated by men in the past, but many women have recently become the initiators of dating. In this case, there might be some curiosity to see if female date-initiators intend to have sex when they initiate the date as much as male date-initiators. Another curiosity should be to investigate the differences in sexual intentions between a male and a female date-initiator. According to relative studies, young men tended to assess greater sexual intentions as the date-initiator than women, and the sex differences were especially found in rating the intention of the female date-initiator [15-17].

Consistent with the first-date scripts, some women believe a kiss is more likely to be male-initiated than female-initiated, and men believe that something more than kissing is more likely to be on a female-initiated date [2]. As the dating couple move through the steps of a relationship, it is the increasing commitments that enhance them to go beyond kissing, such as sexual intercourses [18]. Such findings suggest that initiating a date itself connotes some sexual intentions but there are differences between the intentions of a male and a female date-initiator.

Thus, this study is to discuss the sex differences when rating sexual intention for the date-initiator when young people initiate a date. The study also confirms that the participants rate a higher sexual intention for the male date-initiator than the female date-initiator. Three types of date-initiating activity (going for dinner, a drive, and drinking alcoholic beverages) were introduced to the participants. If young people stick to the conventional framework that dating and sexual intercourse are much more likely to be initiated by men than women, despite the types of date-initiating activities, it would be expected that men would rate higher on the sexual intentions as the date-initiator than women, and the participants would rate a higher sexual intention for the male date-initiator than the female date-initiator.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and Procedure

A total of 488 undergraduates, who resided in Gwangju, the metropolitan area of Korea, responded to the questionnaire survey, but only 480 completed the questionnaire for the study. From the 480 participants, 214

(44.6%) were males and 266 (55.4%) were females. All the participants were self-identified as heterosexual and were never married. They ranged from 18 to 23 years, and there were no significant age differences between men ($M = 19.97$; $SD = 1.74$) and women ($M = 19.97$; $SD = 1.39$).

Each participant received an one-page questionnaire and completed it in a quiet room in small groups of 2 to 10, with one member of the research team in presence. They were instructed to answer each question honestly, were assured of their confidentiality, and were asked to fill out the questionnaire as quickly as possible. The entire data collection session took approximately 10 minutes. There were ten items listed on the questionnaire: sex, age, marital status, sexual identity, and 6 questions related to the dating situation.

2.2. Dependent Measures and Design

The 6 items on dating situation concerned 3 types of common dating activities. The first 3 items were related to a male-initiated date. A sample item was "When a young man initiates the date to *go for dinner* with a young woman, how much do you think he intends to have sexual intercourse with her?" The type of date-initiating activity '*go for dinner*' was replaced with '*go for a drive*' or '*drinking alcoholic beverages*' in the other items.

The other 3 items were related to a female-initiated date. A sample item was "When a young woman initiates the date to *go for dinner* with a young man, how much do you think she intends to have sexual intercourse with him?" The type of date-initiating activity '*go for dinner*' was replaced with '*go for a drive*' or '*drinking alcoholic beverages*' in the other items. The response format for the 6 items was to write down any number between 0 (when the participant judges the initiator to have no intention at all) and 100 (when the participant judges the initiator to have the greatest intention).

Thus, the design of this study was a 2 (participants' sex: man or woman) \times 2 (sex of the date-initiator: male-initiator or female-initiator) mixed between-subjects and within-subjects design, with sex of the date-initiator being the within-subjects factor. The three dependent measures used in this study were the mean ratings of 3 date-initiating activities.

3. Results

Participants' mean ratings of sexual intention for the date-initiator are shown in Table 1. The main 2 \times 2 analysis of the mean ratings was conducted using a MANOVA, followed by univariate analyses of variance. In the omnibus MANOVA, there was a small but significant main effect of participants' sex, $F_{1,478} = 4.91$, η_p^2 (partial eta-squared) = .01, $p < .05$. For the 3 types of date-initiating activities, men gave higher ratings than women for going for dinner, $F_{1,478} = 6.13$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, $p < .05$, and for going for drinks, $F_{1,478} = 4.40$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, $p < .05$, but not for going for a drive, $F_{1,478} = 1.11$, $n.s.$

Table 1. Participants' Mean Ratings of the Sexual Intention

| Dependent Measure | Men (<i>n</i> = 214) | | Women (<i>n</i> = 266) | | Total (<i>n</i> = 480) | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| | male-initiator | female-initiator | male-initiator | female-initiator | male-initiator | female-initiator |
| dinner ^a | 27.2 (23.8) | 18.6 (19.9) | 26.3 (21.9) | 11.1 (15.2) | 26.7 (22.7) | 14.4 (17.8) |
| driving ^a | 41.9 (26.6) | 33.9 (25.4) | 46.3 (25.5) | 25.1 (21.4) | 44.4 (26.1) | 29.1 (23.6) |
| drinking ^a | 54.7 (26.6) | 40.0 (25.6) | 57.3 (26.6) | 28.6 (22.8) | 56.2 (26.6) | 33.7 (24.7) |

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses.

^a Absolute range, 0-100

A significant main effect also emerged for the sex of the date-initiator, with all the dependent variables contributing significantly to the effect, $F_{1,478} = 572.92$, $\eta_p^2 = .55$, $p < .001$. Compared with the female initiator, the male initiator was rated as having the greater sexual intention when he would initiate the date of going for dinner, $F_{1,479} = 260.33$, $\eta_p^2 = .35$, $p < .001$; for a drive, $F_{1,479} = 281.03$, $\eta_p^2 = .37$, $p < .001$; and for drinking alcoholic beverages, $F_{1,479} = 461.37$, $\eta_p^2 = .49$, $p < .001$.

In addition to the main effects, there was a significant two-way interaction between sex of participant and sex of the date-initiator, $F_{1,478} = 70.10$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$, $p < .001$. The interaction effect was significant for all three of the dependent variables: for dinner, $F_{1,478} = 19.02$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, $p < .001$; for a drive, $F_{1,478} = 57.39$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, $p < .001$; and for drinking, $F_{1,478} = 48.86$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, $p < .001$. The interaction effect is shown in Figure 1.

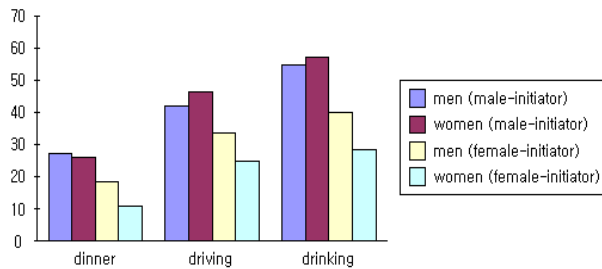


Figure 1. Mean ratings of the sexual intention as a function of both sex of participants and sex of date-initiator

As for initiating a date of going for dinner, there were no sex differences when rating sexual intentions of the date-initiator to be male, $F_{1,478} < 1$, but men rated higher sexual intentions than women when the initiator was female, $F_{1,478} = 21.93$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, $p < .001$. Also, as for initiating a date of going for a drive, there were no sex differences when rating sexual intentions of the date-initiator to be male, $F_{1,478} = 3.36$, *n.s.*, but men rated higher sexual intentions than women when the initiator was female, $F_{1,478} = 16.92$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, $p < .001$. In addition, as for initiating a date of going for a drink, there were no sex differences when rating sexual intentions of the date-initiator to be male, $F_{1,478} = 1.14$, *n.s.*, but men rated higher sexual

intentions than women when the initiator was female, $F_{1,478} = 26.70$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, $p < .001$. Irrespective of the types of dating activities, there were sex differences in rating or perceiving sexual intentions only when the date-initiator was female.

4. Discussion

According to traditional sex role norms on heterosexual dating and sexuality, college men arrange the date at a time of their convenience, they choose to engage in activities they enjoy, and they decide when to end the date. Women tend to play a more reactive role in order to complement the men's behavior. The woman either accepts or rejects the man's invitation to go out. If she chooses to accept, she becomes a passive participant. The sex role norms also encourage men to be interested in having sex with the date. Thus, men usually feel responsible for making the first move to initiate dating and to lead sexual relations. Although sex roles may differ in egalitarianism, researchers suggest that the changes have had minimal effects on traditional dating and sexuality [1, 19].

Thus, it was expected that there should be sex differences among young people's ratings for the sexual intentions of the date-initiator. It was also expected that they would rate a greater sexual intention for male date-initiators than females. This study was designed to confirm these differences while participants were asked to rate the intentions according to 3 types of date-initiating activities (i.e., go for dinner, go for a drive, and drinking alcoholic beverages). As expected, the participants rated a higher intention for the male date-initiator to have sex with his partner than the female date-initiator, regardless of the types of date-initiating activities. Also, men rated higher for the sexual intentions by the female date-initiators [1, 15-17]. However, there were no sex differences among the participants when rating the sexual intentions of the male date-initiators.

Why did such findings show up? While it was not included as a research aim, we learned that both male and female participants rated sexual intentions the highest when young people initiated the date of going for a drink among

the three types of date-initiating activities (see Figure 1). Herein, we would like to discuss the implication of these findings while focusing on the date-initiating activity of drinking alcoholic beverages.

Why did participants rate a higher sexual intention of initiating the date to go for drinks? For this reason, initially, it should be addressed that men who are encouraged to be dominant in dating are expected to be interested in sex [19]. College men are more likely to have sexual goals as the primary motivation for dating than women [1]. Young people use the set of nonverbal and verbal behaviors to ask a partner for sexual contacts [20]. Social drinkers believe that alcohol makes social interactions function more smoothly [21]. Thus, drinking alcoholic beverages might be the strategy for men who want to initiate intimacy and/or to reach more advanced levels of sexual activities [4].

Men drink to induce a feeling of courage, e.g., to act on their desires of having sex [4]. Alcohol consumption would reduce inhibitions and encourage greater closeness and warmth as the date partners communicate with reduction of the anxiety which increases the interaction with women [1, 2]. College men expect greater likelihood of sexual intercourse, and are perceived to be more likely to initiate the intercourse than women when drinking on a first date [22]. While evaluating dating scenarios, perceivers tend to infer more sexual responsiveness for drinking than non-drinking daters. For example, men rated beer-drinking women as more likely to be engaged in sexual behaviors than cola-drinking women [23].

While drinking could make a man request sex to his date more easily, he might misperceive her response as acceptance of his request. Eventually, his sexual request could sometimes be considered as a socially talkative incident. Drinking could also hinder a woman from being faithful to her role as a gatekeeper, and thus, result in her involvement of the incident against her will. Drinking has the possibility of making him a perpetrator of dating rape and her a victim of unwilling sexual intercourse [4, 13, 19].

Men and women believed that sexual activity was more likely to be initiated when the dating couple consumed alcohol rather than soft drinks. They believed that dates are more likely to include sexual intercourses when both participants drink alcohol [22]. Even three-quarters of the college date rapists (men) interviewed by Kanin [24] indicated that they purposely intoxicated a date to have sexual intercourse. Thus, we may say that when a man asks his female date to go for a drink might be highly related to his intention of having sexual intercourse with her.

Therefore, it is possible to say that a woman might have some intentions of having sex with her male date if she asks him out for a drink. However, why did young men rate a greater sexual intention for a female date-initiator than a male one when the initiator asks his/her partner to go out for a drink? Despite the liberalization of sex roles during the past few decades, most people do not readily approve of alcohol consumption and sexual behavior among women [4]. Therefore, a woman who drank several beers was

perceived as being more promiscuous, easier to seduce and more willing to have sex than a woman who drank cola [23]. Because men perceived that drinking and flirting is commonly associated with women who drank alcohol at bars, parties, and other public places, whom are often approached by men [21]. College men frequently perceived women's friendly behavior as a sign of sexual interest, even when it is not intended that way [19]. Thus, it is possible to say that a woman who is drinking with her date or who asks her date to go drinking is misjudged as a prospective sexual partner.

What about date-initiating activities of going for dinner or for a drive? Those might also be a means or strategy by men who intended to have sex with dating partners. The findings for dinner and a drive were almost the same as those for drinking. It meant that women's initiating for dinner or a drive can also be perceived as a sign of sexual interest towards a man [19]. In general, the recipient of the request is likely to be confident that the date partner has a romantic or sexual interest in him or her [2]. Herein, let's visualize or compare the date context of going for dinner or a drive or drinking! The context of dinner or a drive might be quieter or easier to prompt intimate communications for the couple than that of drinking. So, if a man who has sexual intentions but is not on intimate terms with his prospective female dating partner, he should initiate going for dinner or drive to form a higher intimacy with her. But, there would be a high possibility for him to ask her to drink alcoholic beverages if he feels the atmosphere of intimacy while having dinner or a drive. If she would accept his suggestion of drinking, then he may interpret her as to have higher sexual intentions than before.

In other words, besides the findings in this study, we may deduce that young people have sexual intentions when they initiate a date, the intention is higher in the male-initiator, and the intention is greatly associated with alcohol. However, several limitations exist in the current study on the relationship between initiation of dating and sexual intention.

First, we acknowledge that the selected nature of our sample may have limited the generalization of our findings. Our sample was a convenient sample composed only of Korean college students. Indeed, very little research has been conducted on samples from other populations.

Recent empirical studies on sex roles suggested that the Korean society is experiencing a transition to more egalitarian sex roles [25, 26]. In Korea, Ministry of Gender Equality was founded in 2001 and citizens selected the first female president in 2012. Observing the more educated and progressive segments of society, there is a change towards gender egalitarianism, especially amongst women. Despite these changes, Korea is still considered to be low in gender egalitarianism. It has been noted that traditional gender beliefs continue to be prevalent, even among college educated young adults [25, 27].

Like many other cultures which are rooted in patriarchal ideology, traditional Korean cultures uphold different

norms and expectations for the gender behaviors on men and women. Women (daughters) might receive more prohibitory messages about sex from their parents than men (sons). Conventionally, Asian women may be allowed to accept a date when asked, while men initiate the majority of dates. A double standard for gender is still prevalent in Korea and/or to Korean people such as Korean-Americans [26, 28, 29]. Clearly, future researches may benefit from collecting data of other populations.

Second, it was found that the initiation of a romantic relationship varied dramatically depending on whether the partners were strangers or previously platonic friends [30]. The nature of the relationship (i.e., date partners who were new acquaintances or old friends) between partners prior to the first date is likely to influence the way the date will unfold [2]. Among sexually active college students, men initiated sexual activities in committed relationships more frequently than women [8]. As relationship commitment increases, there is no need to conform traditional sexual scripts to ensure ease interactions and shared expectations on one's sex role [8]. Even though the authors supposed that the questions concerned the first date, they could not rule out the possibility that participants might respond to the questions in their own ways.

Third, we simply tried to manifest the relations between initiation of dating and sexual intention in this study, but could not design the study to consider for the characteristics of intimate heterosexual relationships that the contemporary Korean young people have formed. The traditional woman waited to be asked out, but the young woman of today asks the man to go out with her. There would be a good possibility that some of dates initiated by Korean women might be a kind of responding to the requests that were previously initiated by men. According to the ways of how the Korean young people create their heterosexual romantic relationships, some women decided their acceptance or rejection right away when men asked them for a serious relationship but some other women show their acceptance to their male partners several days later. For instance, when a man requests a woman to be his steady partner, she tends to respond several days later, by sending acceptance messages [31]. Thus, it is possible to say that dating initiated by a Korean woman would either be initiated earlier than man, and thus, she is able to be an active participant, or initiated by her in the context of the acceptance from several days ago, and thus, she might be a reactive participant. Additionally, in Korea, a man would pay for all the costs during the date in terms of money and transportation, especially for the first dates, even if the date was initiated by a woman. That is to say, there would be very high likelihood of him paying for all meal costs even when she initiated to have dinner. Even when she would initiate him to go for a drive, it means that he should pick her up and take her to a nice location [32]. In order to elucidate the findings of this study more clearly, qualitative data should be collected in the future study.

Despite these limitations, several conclusions can be

drawn from this study. This study was to clarify that young people were still sticking to the traditional scripts for dating and sexuality, the date-initiating activities for them implied sexual intention, and they, in general, rated higher sexual intentions for the male date-initiator than the female one.

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