

## THE BALANCE OF WORK IN INITIATING RELATIONSHIPS

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### ABSTRACT

The initiation of relationships is a relatively neglected topic of investigation within the interdisciplinary field of personal relationships. One aim of this research was to examine the degree to which heterosexual romantic relationships were perceived to be initiated more by one partner versus by both partners mutually. A second aim was to examine dispositional (sex and attachment style) and relational factors (relative interest early in the relationship and current satisfaction) associated with doing the work of relationship initiation. Study 1, which combined several samples of young adults who had been asked about the initiation stage of their relationship, indicated that relationship initiation was generally imbalanced; one partner was perceived as doing more of the work than the other. Further analyses indicated that women were more likely to report that the partner rather than the self was the initiator, but no such difference was found for men. Those with a preoccupied attachment style reported greater degrees of self-initiation. Consistent with Waller's principle of least interest (e.g., Waller and Hill 1951), greater interest (relative to the partner) was also associated with doing the work of relationship initiation. Participants with balanced relationship initiation reported greater current satisfaction and commitment. In a follow-up study, based on data from both members of 75 couples, moderate agreement between partners was found about who initiated the relationship.

It takes two partners to maintain a relationship, but only one to dissolve it (e.g., Attridge, Berscheid & Simpson 1995). In fact, relationships are often dissolved non-mutually, more by one partner than by both equally (e.g., Hill, Rubin & Peplau 1976; Sprecher 1994). Is the non-mutuality that is characteristic of the exit stage of relationships also found at the entrance stage? That is, are relationships generally initiated by one partner or by both equally? This question highlights a gap in our knowledge of relationships. The first objective of this research was to examine this issue of whether the work of relationship initiation is perceived to be shared equally by the partners or conducted more by one partner. The second objective was to examine dispositional and relational factors associated with balance versus imbalance in relationship initiation.

conditions that were in force at that time.  
(2006 159)

### BACKGROUND

In the past two decades, the burgeoning field of close relationships has focused on topics related to the development, maintenance, and dissolution of relationships (for reviews, see Vangelisti & Perlman 2006), but much less so on their origin. However, as noted by Berscheid and Regan,

to understand why others currently are in the relationships they are – and to understand why we ourselves developed the relationships we did – it is usually necessary to retrace the history of the relationship back to its very beginning and to identify the causal

What is meant by relationship initiation? Relationship initiation may span from the time of first awareness between two people to the time when the two begin to think of themselves as in a relationship (Sprecher, Wenzel & Harvey 2008a). Specific phenomena that have been studied that potentially contribute to relationship initiation include flirtation and initial nonverbal behavior, opening lines to initiate conversation, early attraction, and get-acquainted disclosures (for reviews, see Sprecher, Wenzel & Harvey 2008b). Although the initiation process may be complex and span over a period of time, it is an important relational transition that can often be vividly recalled later (Baxter & Bullis 1986). Therefore, people currently in a relationship are likely to have a "story" of how the relationship began, including who did the work of initiation. In this research, we consider how sex and attachment style, the two individual difference variables that arguably have been most frequently examined in the relationship field (Miller, Perlman & Brehm 2007), are associated with relationship initiation. Are men or women more likely to be identified as the initiators of heterosexual, romantic relationships? Furthermore, how are attachment styles, which are global relationship orientations that are influenced by past experiences (e.g., Shaver & Mikulincer 2006), associated with being instrumental in initiating relationships?

## **SEX DIFFERENCES IN RELATIONSHIP INITIATION**

Traditional sex roles cast men as relationship initiators and women as "gatekeepers" who can either accept or reject the overtures that they receive (Bredow, Cate & Huston 2008). These traditional sex differences are particularly relevant in regard to first dates, considered to be one step in the relationship initiation process. Research on cultural scripts for first dates indicates that young adults expect men's role to be active and women's role to be reactive. Furthermore, actual first dates are described in these sex-typed ways (Laner & Ventrone 2000; Rose & Frieze 1989, 1993).

While men may engage in direct initiation strategies to a greater degree than women (e.g., Clark, Shaver & Abrahams 1999; Mongeau & Carey 1996; Rose & Frieze 1989), women have been described as controlling the period that may lead up to a first date, through nonverbal behaviors such as smiling and making eye contact (Clark et al. 1999; Cunningham & Barbee 2008; Moore 1985; Perper & Weis 1987; Walsh & Hewitt 1985). In addition, the process of relationship initiation extends much beyond initial interactions and the first date. For example, Hendrick and Hendrick suggest that the initiation stage occurs over "the first few months of the life of the relationship" (2008 338). During these months, there may be escalating breadth and depth of communication, the development of a sense of couple identity, the integration of the relationship with existing social networks, and the initiation of physical activities – all phenomena that can be linked to the process of relationship initiation.

Indeed, because there are many steps to the relationship initiation process, it is difficult to predict how men and women will respond at a later time if asked to recall this period and describe who initiated the relationship. There is some evidence, however, to suggest that men are later recalled as the initiators of relationships. Custer, Holmberg, Blair, and Orbuch (2008; see also Holmberg, Orbuch & Veroff 2004) examined the relationship initiation narratives in the sample of couples from the Early Years of Marriage project. They found in the narratives that male initiation was more common than balanced initiation or female initiation, with the latter being the least frequent.

## **ATTACHMENT STYLE AND RELATIONSHIP INITIATION**

A dispositional factor that may be associated with the balance of relationship initiation is attachment style. Shaver and Hazan (1988) argued that there are parallels between infant attachment (e.g., Ainsworth 1989) and romantic attachment in adulthood. Adults, similar to infants, can be categorized as secure, avoidant, or anxious-ambivalent. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) contributed to the understanding of attachment styles by identifying four unique styles: secure (positive model of self and others), dismissive (positive model of self, negative model of others), preoccupied (negative model of self, positive model of others), and fearful (negative model of self and others).

Adult attachment styles have been found to be associated with various relationship outcomes and processes (for reviews, see Feeney, Noller & Roberts 2000; Shaver & Mikulincer 2006). In addition, attachment security has been found to be linked with many qualities (e.g., openness to new experiences, trust of others, social skills) that are likely to facilitate relationship initiation (for a summary, see Creasey & Jarvis 2008). However, very little research has been conducted to examine how attachment styles are related to the initiation stage of the relationship, although researchers have called for more investigations (Eastwick & Finkel 2008).

## **IMBALANCE IN ATTRACTION AS A PREDICTOR OF RELATIONSHIP INITIATION**

Generally, relationships are initiated because one or both partners are attracted enough to engage in initiating behaviors. For example, in their conceptual model of first romantic encounters, Bredow, Cate, and Huston wrote, "The decision to make a bid for another's attention is driven by attraction" (2008 11). However, two people who move toward a relationship are not always equally attracted. Therefore, unequal or nonmutual attraction is likely to be associated with unequal work in initiation. This relates to Willard Waller's principle of least interest. Commenting on the phenomenon of unequal emotional involvement and its effect on relationship development, Waller and Hill wrote:

One person usually becomes more involved than the other and must therefore take the lead in furthering the movement from stage

to stage. (1951 190)

Waller (1938) observed that in many romantic pairs, one person is more interested or loves more than the other. This can occur even at the very early stage of the relationship and likely dictates who does the work of relationship initiation, although this is an unexplored issue.

### RELATIONAL OUTCOMES OF BALANCE VERSUS IMBALANCE IN THE RELATIONSHIP

Whatever its cause, balance or imbalance in a romantic relationship can occur at any stage of the relationship and in regard to a number of phenomena. For example, and as noted above, researchers have studied the degree of imbalance versus balance in relationship breakups (e.g., Hill et al 1976; Sprecher 1994). Researchers have also examined nonmutuality in power dynamics (e.g., Felmlee 1994; Peplau 1979); decision-making (e.g., Gray-Little & Burks 1983); exchange of resources or equity (Sprecher 2001); and emotional involvement (Le & Agnew 2001). Although some imbalance may be found in most couples at least occasionally, balance or equality has been found to be associated positively with relationship satisfaction and commitment, whereas inequality or imbalance is associated with dissatisfaction (Felmlee 1994; Sprecher & Schwartz 1994). Extrapolating from this prior research, we would expect that recalled balance at the initiation stage may have later positive effects on relationship satisfaction and commitment.

### SUMMARY OF PURPOSES TO THIS RESEARCH

On the topic of who is doing the work of relationship initiation, we have formed several research questions and hypotheses. Our first research question addresses the balance of relationship initiation:

RQ1: Is relationship initiation perceived to be more often balanced or imbalanced?

Second, we examine dispositional factors that might be associated with being identified as the partner who does more of the relationship initiation:

RQ2: Are men or women perceived as doing more of the work of relationship initiation?

H1: Participants with a secure attachment style are more likely to initiate relationships than are those with a preoccupied, dismissive, or fearful attachment style.

Third, in a way consistent with Waller's principle of least interest, we predict:

H2: The person who is more attracted early in the relationship is also likely to be the one who does the work of relationship initiation.

We also consider the relational outcomes of mutually and non-mutually initiated relationships:

H3: Those who report balanced relationship initiation will be more satisfied and committed (currently) than those who report imbalanced relationship initiation.

### METHOD TO STUDY 1

#### Samples

Analysis of pre-existing data based on three samples from a Midwest University was conducted.<sup>1</sup> Two samples were obtained from a classroom setting where students completed the questionnaire. The third was collected through a network sample (as an optional research assignment, students were asked to distribute a questionnaire to a person from their social network who was in the early stage of becoming attached to someone.) Because our interest is in romantic relationships, we eliminated those who completed the survey for a friendship. We also eliminated those in same-sex relationships because there were too few to conduct comparisons. We combined the participants remaining in the three subsamples because they responded to identical questions. In all, there were 455 participants from heterosexual romantic couples (161 male and 294 female), ages 18 to 35 ( $M=20.22$ ;  $SD=1.99$ ). Ninety-two percent of participants were dating, five percent were engaged, and three percent were either married or cohabiting. Although no data had been collected on ethnicity or social class, the samples reflected the larger student body at this Midwest University, where a majority of the students were White.

### MEASURES

*Relationship initiation.* To measure rela-

tionship initiation, participants were asked, "Who would you say worked harder to initiate the relationship?" The response options were: 1) The other did a lot more; 2) The other did somewhat more; 3) The other did a little more; 4) We both did equally; 5) I did a little more; 6) I did somewhat more; and 7) I did a lot more.<sup>2</sup> In some of the analyses below, we use the original scores, which ranged from 1=no self initiation; to 7=complete self initiation. In other analyses, we collapsed the 7-item response scale into three groups: 1) those who reported greater relative partner initiation (responses 1, 2, or 3); 2) those who reported balanced initiation (response of 4); and 3) those who reported greater relative self initiation (responses 5, 6, or 7).

*Balance of attraction.* The participants were asked, "Who would you say was most attracted early in your relationship?" The options were: 1) The other was a lot more; 2) The other was somewhat more; 3) The other was a little more; 4) We were both equally; 5) I was a little more; 6) I was somewhat more; and 7) I was a lot more.

*Attachment style.* In a section of background questions, participants were presented with Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) measures of the four-category adult attachment theory. Four paragraphs, each describing one of the four attachment styles, were presented to participants. For example, the secure paragraph read:

It is easy for me to become emotionally close to others. I am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me. (Bartholomew & Horowitz 1991)

Respondents were asked to choose which paragraph of the four best described them.

*Relationship outcomes.* Two global items were used to assess satisfaction and commitment. The measure of satisfaction read: "Currently, how satisfying is the relationship?" (options ranged from 1=not at all; to 7=extremely). The measure of commitment read: "Currently, how committed are you to maintaining the relationship in the future?" (identical response options were used).

## RESULTS TO STUDY 1

### Balance in Relationship Initiation

Our first objective was to examine whether

relationship initiation is more often balanced or imbalanced. Only 32 percent responded "we both did equally" to the question asking who initiated the relationship. Conversely, 68 percent indicated that the work was done more by one partner than the other. More specifically, 39 percent reported that their partner did more of the work and 29 percent reported that they did more of the work. A one-sample chi-square test indicated that these proportions differed significantly from an equal distribution ( $X^2(2, N=455)=7.86, p<.05$ ). Follow-up tests indicated that the proportion who reported partner initiation was significantly greater than the proportion who reported self initiation ( $X^2(2, N=311)=7.10, p<.01$ ). In addition, there was a near significant difference between the proportion of participants who reported partner initiation and the proportion who reported balanced initiation ( $X^2(2, N=323)=3.79, p=.05$ ). There was no difference in the proportions of participants who reported self initiation versus balanced initiation. These results indicate that relationships are perceived to be initiated more by one partner than by both, and that there is a tendency to perceive the partner as more instrumental than the self in relationship initiation.

### Sex Differences in Relationship Initiation

Our second objective was to examine whether there are sex differences in the work of relationship initiation. An independent t-test comparing men's and women's mean responses to the original initiation item revealed no significant sex differences (men  $M=3.86, SD=1.64$ ; women  $M=3.61, SD=1.59$ ).<sup>3</sup>

We also examined sex differences by comparing the relative distribution of the three initiation groups. For men, the percentages of participants in the partner, balanced, and self initiation groups were 34 percent, 33 percent, and 33 percent respectively. These proportions were not significantly different from an equal distribution. For women, however, the proportions were 42 percent, 31 percent, and 27 percent, respectively, which were significantly different from an equal distribution ( $X^2(2, N=294)=11.08, p<.01$ ). Follow-up tests indicated that the proportion of women who reported partner initiation was greater than the proportion who reported either self initiation ( $X^2(2, N=203)=9.98, p<.01$ ) or balanced initiation ( $X^2(2, N=215)=5.07, p<.05$ ). However, the proportion that reported balanced initiation was not significantly different from the

Table 1 - Type of Initiation by Attachment Style: Results from Study 1

Attachment Style	Partner Initiation	Balanced Initiation	Self Initiation	Totals
Fearful	n = 42; 39.3%	n = 35; 32.7%	n = 30; 28.0%	n = 107; 24.5%
Preoccupied	n = 20; 32.3%	n = 14; 22.6%	n = 28; 45.2%	n = 62; 15.2%
Dismissive	n = 42; 53.8%	n = 17; 21.8%	n = 19; 24.4%	n = 78; 16.9%
Secure	n = 75; 36.1%	n = 78; 37.5%	n = 55; 26.4%	n = 208; 44.6%

proportion that reported self initiation.

### Attachment Style and Relationship Initiation

We hypothesized (H1) that individuals who identified with a secure attachment style would be more likely to report being the initiator of their relationship than were those who identified with one of the insecure attachment styles (preoccupied, dismissive, or fearful attachment style). To test our hypothesis, we grouped participants by their self-identified attachment style. A oneway ANOVA revealed significant overall differences in responses to the degree of self initiation ( $F(3,455)=2.69$ ,  $p<.05$ ). However, contrary to what was predicted, participants who identified with a preoccupied attachment style had the highest mean score ( $M=4.05$ ;  $SD=1.91$ ), followed by those with a fearful attachment style ( $M=3.76$ ;  $SD=1.52$ ), secure attachment style ( $M=3.71$ ;  $SD=1.52$ ), and finally those with a dismissive attachment style ( $M=3.29$ ;  $SD=1.67$ ). A post hoc bonferroni analysis revealed that the only two groups to significantly differ were preoccupied individuals and dismissive individuals. To further investigate attachment differences in relationship initiation, we compared the four attachment styles on the proportions that reported partner initiation, balanced initiation, and self initiation (Table 1). As can be seen, those reporting a preoccupied attachment style had the largest percentage of self-initiators, followed by the fearful, secure, and dismissive attachment styles. These results parallel the comparisons across attachment styles on mean scores described above.

### Relative Attraction and Relationship Initiation

In our second hypothesis, we predicted that the partner who is more attracted early in the relationship is likely be the one who is credited with doing the work of relationship initiation. In support of this hypothesis, responses to the item asking who was more attracted (higher score = perception that the self was more attracted) was correlated posi-

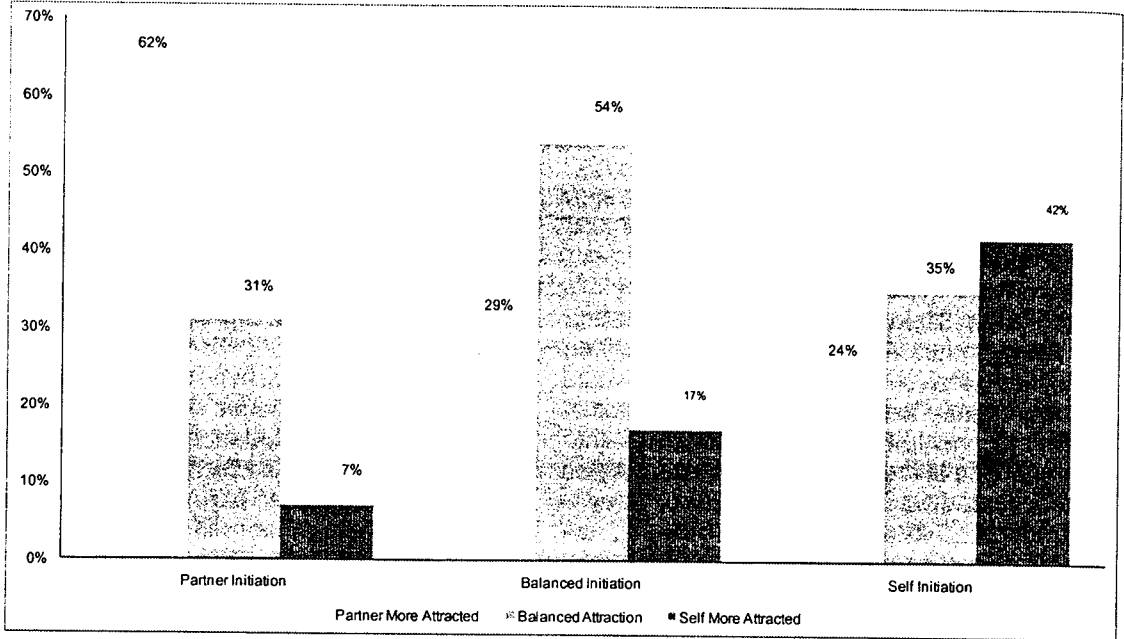
tively with responses to the item asking who worked harder to initiate the relationship (higher score = more self initiation),  $r = .57$ ,  $p < .001$ .

To further test this hypothesis, we cross-classified three categories of attraction (partner more attracted, balanced attraction, self more attracted) by three categories of relationship initiation (greater partner initiation, balanced initiation, greater self initiation). A two-way contingency table analysis revealed that the distribution of responses to relative attraction was significantly associated with the distribution of responses to the three initiation groups ( $X^2(4, n=455)=91.03$ ,  $p<.001$ , Cramér's  $V=.35^4$ ). Essentially, this test indicates that partner initiated relationships were most often characterized by a more interested partner, balanced initiations were characterized by balanced attraction, and self initiations were characterized by a more interested self (Figure 1).

### Relationship Outcomes Regarding Mutuality

Our third hypothesis predicted that those who report a balanced relationship initiation will be more satisfied and committed (currently) in their relationship, as compared to those who reported imbalanced relationship initiation. We first compared those who reported balanced initiation ( $n=144$ ) with those who reported imbalanced initiation ( $n=311$ ) on measures of satisfaction and commitment. Independent t-tests revealed that participants who experienced a balanced initiation were more satisfied ( $M=6.02$ ;  $SD=1.24$ ) than participants who experienced an imbalanced initiation ( $M=5.53$ ;  $SD=1.42$ ) ( $t(315.45)=3.73$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and were also more committed in their relationship ( $M=6.09$ ;  $SD=1.31$  and  $M=5.62$ ;  $SD=1.59$  respectively,  $t(331.97)=3.33$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Additional ANOVA analyses compared the three specific groups – partner versus balanced versus self initiation. These analyses revealed significant overall differences for sat-

**Figure 1. Crosstabs of Relative Interest and Initiation**

Note: Totals more than 100% are a result of rounding error.

isfaction,  $F(2, 452)=6.48, p<.01$ , and commitment,  $F(2, 452)=4.90, p<.01$ . A Bonferroni post hoc analysis revealed that participants in balanced initiation relationships were more satisfied with their relationship ( $M=6.02$ ;  $SD=1.24$ ) than were either those in self initiated ( $M=5.48$ ;  $SD=1.48$ ) or partner initiated relationships ( $M=5.58$ ;  $SD=1.37$ ). An identical analysis conducted with commitment scores indicated that participants in balanced initiation relationships were also more committed to their relationship ( $M=6.09$ ;  $SD=1.31$ ) than were those in self initiated ( $M=5.66$ ;  $SD=1.57$ ) or partner initiated ( $M=5.59$ ;  $SD=1.61$ ) relationships. Using these same analyses, we found that participants in self and partner initiated relationships did not differ on either satisfaction or commitment.

## STUDY 2

The respondents in Study 1 did not take the survey as couples. Therefore, it was impossible to know whether their view of who initiated the relationship was shared by their partner, or whether there were biases in their perceptions and memories of the relationship initiation. In Study 2, we examined how much agreement or disagreement existed between partners (from a pair sample) in beliefs about who worked harder to initiate their relationship. On the one hand, we may find almost no agreement between partners,

which could suggest that people perceive a relationship process such as relationship initiation in biased or self-serving ways. For example, it may be flattering to perceive the partner to be the pursuer. On the other hand, there could be complete agreement, particularly if the two people have had many opportunities to develop a narrative together of how their relationship began (e.g., Custer et al 2008). We also re-examine many of the same issues as in Study 1, including the degree to which relationship initiation is balanced versus imbalanced overall and whether there are differences between the sexes (this time the men and women are relationship partners).

## Method to Study 2

An analysis was conducted with pre-existing data collected from a network sampling procedure. Students in a large class were asked to interview and administer a questionnaire to two people from their social network who were in a relationship together. Approximately one-half of the students were requested to find a dating couple and the other one-half were requested to find a friendship pair. For these analyses, we have selected only the dating pairs, which consisted of 75 male-female dating couples (mean age=21.4,  $SD=3.37$ ). The mean length of their relationships was 23 months ( $SD=17.33$ ). The

**Table 2 - Cross-tabulation of Partners' Perceptions of Relationship Initiations: Results from Study 2**

Male's Perception	Male's Perception	Female's Perception		
		Male Initiated More	Equal Initiation	Female Initiated More
Male Initiated More	Male Initiated More	22.7% (n=17)	10.7% (n=8)	8.0% (n=6)
Equal Initiation	Equal Initiation	9.3% (n=7)	5.3% (n=4)	6.7% (n=5)
Female Initiated More	Female Initiated More	8.0% (n=6)	4.0% (n=3)	25.0% (n=19)

participants completed measures identical to those described above for Study 1.

### Results to Study 2

Similar to the results of Study 1, perceptions of imbalance in relationship initiation were more common than perceptions of balance. Of the male partners, only 21.3 percent (n=16) chose the "both equally" option; the other 78.7 percent (n=59) indicated that either the self (41.3%; n=31) or the partner (37.3%; n=28) worked harder to initiate the relationship. A similar pattern of results were found for the female partner. Only 20 percent (n=15) chose the "both equally option," and the remaining 80 percent indicated that one partner worked harder than the other (40% partner n=30; 40% self n=30).

No sex (or partner) difference was found in the mean response to the initiation item. A paired sample t-test, comparing the score for the male partner with the score for the female partner, indicated no significant difference ( $M=4.05$  [ $SD=1.94$ ] and  $M=3.88$  [ $SD=2.11$ ] respectively). In addition, as was found in Study 1, who was perceived as being more attracted to the other in the relationship was associated with the perception of who worked harder to initiate the relationship ( $r=.58$ ,  $p<.001$  for male partners and  $r=.53$ ,  $p<.001$  for female partners).

To examine to what degree partners agreed about who initiated the relationship, the initiation variable was recoded so that a higher score indicated greater male initiation and a lower score indicated greater female initiation (with a score of 4 continuing to be equal initiation). The correlation between the male and female partners on this initiation variable was .45 ( $p<.001$ ), indicating some but not complete agreement. To further explore the extent of agreement versus disagreement, the male partner's score was crossed with the female partner's score (each collapsed into three groups: male greater initiation, equal initiation, female greater initiation). These results are presented in Table 2.

Fifty-three percent of the couples agreed about who initiated the relationship. In another 31 percent of the couples, there was slight disagreement; one partner reported balance in initiation work whereas the other reported that one partner did more of the work. The remaining 16 percent of couples exhibited strong disagreement meaning that one partner reported that the male did more of the initiation work while the other reported that the female did more of the initiation work.

### DISCUSSION

Our results indicate that relationship initiation is more often perceived as imbalanced than as balanced. In fact, more than two-thirds of our participants reported that one partner did more of the work of relationship initiation, with the majority of the two-thirds indicating that they were the one being pursued. These findings are especially interesting when considering the literature on relationship breakups (Hill et al 1976; Sprecher 1994). It has been found that after breakups, members of the dissolved couple develop accounts of the relationship (Duck 1982), often presenting themselves favorably (i.e., as the one who initiated the breakup) (e.g., Gray & Silver 1990; Sprecher 1994). It could be reasoned that perceiving the self as being pursued offers similar benefits to one's self-esteem. That is, when later recalling the initiation stage of one's relationship, self-esteem may be enhanced by recalling the other as the pursuand and the self as the pursued.

If such a bias does exist, it seems to be endorsed only by female participants, however. In Study 1, when male participants responded to our question about initiation, they were not more likely to report one type (partner initiation, balanced initiation, or self initiation) more than any other. Yet, female participants overwhelmingly reported that the male partner initiated their relationship. This difference between males and females can be explained, in part, by social scripts of courting (Rose & Frieze 1993) which place the male

as the initiator. However, in order to be a complete explanation, male participants would have to be more likely to report themselves as the initiator. Instead, we found that men did not report any one category more than the others. This suggests that other aspects are at work when recalling relationship initiation.

It is possible that some relationship initiating behaviors are weighted more heavily than others in the recall of who initiated the relationship. For example, the direct initiation strategies used by men are (by definition) more overt, possibly leading these strategies to be more easily recalled than the indirect strategies used by women. It has also been found that men are prone to interpret the innocent behaviors of women (i.e., a casual touch) as sexual advances or as indicators of women's interest (Abbey 1982; Haselton 2002). Given that this study dealt with participants' perceptions of relationship initiation, it is possible that our results are also a consequence of male misconceptions (believing that women are initiating more than they actually are).

Individual differences may play a role in our findings. We found that attachment style is a factor in initiation, although not in the way we predicted. Individuals with a secure attachment style were not more likely to initiate their relationship than were those with other attachment styles. In fact, those with a preoccupied style were the most likely to initiate their relationship and those with a dismissive attachment style were the least likely. These findings do have a theoretical explanation.

Examining attachment styles as dimensions of avoidance of intimacy and anxiety over abandonment (Brennan, Clark & Shaver 1998), we find that the preoccupied attachment style is conceptualized to be low in avoidance of intimacy and high in anxiety over abandonment. What results is a strong desire for intimacy with uncertainty that it will come, as portrayed in the paragraph description of the preoccupied attachment style:

I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that *others are reluctant* to get as close as I would like [emphasis added]. (Bartholomew & Horowitz 1991)

Individuals identifying with this attachment style may feel that it is up to them to initiate a relationship. Conversely, those identifying

with a dismissive attachment style are high in avoidance of intimacy and low in anxiety over abandonment:

I am comfortable *without* close emotional relationships. It is very important for me to feel independent. (Bartholomew & Horowitz 1991) [emphasis added]

These individuals, who are comfortable with themselves and do not strive for an intimate connection, understandably, seem to be less motivated to initiate a relationship.

Those with a secure attachment style are also comfortable with themselves, as evidenced by the statement:

I don't worry about being alone or having others not accept me. (Bartholomew & Horowitz 1991)

However, unlike the dismissive style, a secure attachment style recognizes the benefits of interdependence:

I am comfortable depending on others and having others depend on me. (Bartholomew & Horowitz 1991)

Securely attached individuals are likely to have a strong confidence in the self as worthy of care (Bartholomew & Horowitz 1991) and unlikely to be characterized with an anxiety about not being in a relationship, as someone with a preoccupied attachment style might be. As a result, they may have a more balanced role in relationship initiation. They are probably not anxious about starting a relationship, but also comfortable having the other take initiative.

Those with a fearful attachment, however, are high in avoidance of intimacy and high in anxiety over abandonment:

I am uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely or to depend on them. (Bartholomew & Horowitz 1991)

These individuals' fear of relationships may result in the lack of extra work when initiating relationships (as the preoccupied individuals do) but also the inability to walk away from a potential partner (as the dismissive individuals do), because they still have a desire



for closeness. It is likely that the difference in desire for an emotional attachment between dismissive and fearful participants prevents the latter from being the least likely to initiate a relationship. The need for connection may become strong enough for fearful individuals that they are willing to take the risk of misplaced trust. We acknowledge, however, that these are only speculations; and the differences found in balance of relationship initiation based on attachment style could also be based on the attachment style of their partner.

When testing our second hypothesis, interest appeared to play a role in initiation. Our test revealed that attraction was associated with relationship initiation. The partner (self or other) who the participant believed was more attracted was also more often perceived to be the initiator. The magnitude of the association between participants' reports of relative attraction and who did more work in initiating the relationship offers strong support for Waller's principle of least interest. Nearly half of the participants in self initiated relationships reported that they were more attracted than their partner. The association between attraction and initiation is not only mirrored but also magnified in mutual and partner initiated relationships. More than half of mutual initiations were characterized by equal attraction, and nearly two-thirds of partner initiations were characterized by greater partner interest. While there is a strong association between relative interest and relationship initiation, it is clear that these are two different phenomena as one can find exceptions to each rule (i.e. a person who perceives herself as more interested can also report having done no work in the initiation of the relationship).

As hypothesized, individuals in balanced initiation relationships were more satisfied and committed than those in imbalanced initiation relationships. Participants in self-initiated relationships were no more or less satisfied with or committed to their relationships than were participants in partner initiated relationships. What this indicates is that unilateral initiation, in any direction, is associated with lesser relationship quality. The direction of the causality, however, cannot be determined with our data. Whereas we are assuming that balanced initiation leads to satisfaction and commitment, it could be argued that being more satisfied and committed in a rela-

tionship may lead to more favorable memories. This is a documented occurrence (Karney & Frye 2002; Newby-Clark & Ross 2003) and is certainly plausible in this study. However, discerning these two outcomes is outside the scope of this study.

Our results from Study 2 corroborated many of the findings of Study 1. Relationship initiation was more likely to be perceived as imbalanced. Again, no sex difference was found in the degree of self initiation, and interest (attraction) was associated with who did more of the work in relationship initiation. Within the couples, we found that there was some but not complete agreement about who initiated the relationship. This implies that for some individuals, there may be a bias in reporting who worked harder to initiate the relationship, though the reasons behind such a bias cannot be examined here.

### Limitations

This research offers a small but progressive step in the understanding of relationship initiation, but is not without its limitations. We used nonprobability samples of young, college students, and at only one university. However, we speculate that many of our findings concerning the balance of relationship initiation are robust and would likely also be found in more diverse samples – in age, education, cultural background, sexual orientation, and race/ethnicity. However, the specific steps in relationship initiation might differ for people of different socio-cultural groups.

Another limitation concerns the retrospective nature of the data on relationship initiation. The participants were recalling a prior period in their relationship when answering the question about who initiated the relationship. In addition, there was only one item that measured relationship initiation. Nonetheless, a global measure of initiation is beneficial because it allows participants to consider all initiating behaviors.

### Future Research

For addressing the shortcomings of this study, we suggest a larger and more diverse sample that is more representative of the population of romantic relationships. Collecting longitudinal data beginning with the initiation may also help us to understand if there are self-serving biases in reports of initiation or if there are instances of false memories. (We note, however, that it would be very diffi-

cult to capture the initiation stage of couples as it is occurring.) An examination of other predictor variables of relationship initiation would also be important. For example, it may be that individuals use traditional male and female sex roles as a catalyst for remembering their courtships. It may also be worth examining other dispositional variables such as personality or environmental factors including social networks as potential predictors of who initiates relationships. It is possible that one's social network contributes to the initiation of the relationship, and could be considered in future research.

The recently edited book by Sprecher et al. (2008b) indicates the complexity of relationship initiation. We encourage future researchers to develop measures that can assess various dimensions of relationship initiation, including use of social networks, opening lines, nonverbal behaviors, and initial self-disclosure. Some areas of this study would also benefit from forms of replication. Specifically, additional investigation into attachment styles and relationship initiation can offer insight to our interpretation of our unexpected findings. Further, the personality characteristics of masculinity and femininity may have an influencing role in the shape that initiation takes for a couple.

Here, we discussed how sex roles and dating scripts may be involved in heterosexual relationship initiation, but these topics are not likely to hold the same weight in same-sex relationships where both partners may behave in similar ways or have matching sex stereotype expectations. An investigation into relationship initiation in same-sex relationships is warranted. Another interesting venue to be pursued in the future is to examine people's initiation behaviors across relationships, and determine whether the role they play is relationship-specific. Our understanding of relationship initiation will grow exponentially with more research in the area.

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#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The samples were obtained in a period from 1994 to 1997. Data on other aspects of attraction were previously reported in Sprecher (1998).
- <sup>2</sup> Inadvertently, the word "you" was omitted from this question in some of the surveys. Regardless, we believe the question, in combination with the response options, was understood by the respondents.
- <sup>3</sup> It could be argued that gender similarities or differences have changed over time since the period in which these data were collected. However, in a sample obtained in 2008 (not included in this paper), similar gender results were found: no gender difference was found in response to a similar question asking about the balance of relationship initiation.
- <sup>4</sup> Information on the follow-up comparisons can be obtained by writing the authors.

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