

Factors Influencing Relationship Control in the Dating Relationships of College Students

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Abstract. We investigated the factors influencing relationship control in the dating relationships of college students. The data were collected from 184 college students at 4 four-year universities and 2 two- to three-year colleges located in D city from July to October 2015. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed to determine factors influencing participants' relationship control. We found that gender and attachment anxiety were the strongest influencing factors of relationship control in college students. In other words, male college students were more likely to control their partners than were female college students, and when attachment anxiety was higher, there was a risk of increasing relationship control. These findings should be considered in developing interventions for college students focusing on management of relationship control.

Keywords: College Students, Child Abuse Experience, Attachment Anxiety, Relationship Control

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Heterosexual college students typically begin to date in earnest after they have been freed of the stress of college entrance, as their interest in the opposite sex sharply increases during this time. College students seek out future spouses through natural encounters with the opposite sex, and obtain intimacy with the opposite sex through personal relationships [1]. However, dating relationships have some negative aspects, such as conflicts in the process of reconciling differences in opinions and violence in attempting to resolve such conflicts [2].

Dating violence has been shown to negatively affect the victim's health. It can lead to symptoms of depression and anxiety, increased likelihood of engaging in unhealthy

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behaviors such as smoking and using recreational drugs or alcohol, and, in extreme cases, suicidal ideation [3]. Previous exploratory studies have noted a variety of factors affecting dating violence, and have highlighted the need to prevent this phenomenon from occurring in the first place. A major factor determining dating violence is relationship control [4, 5].

Relationship control refers to a desire to regulate and change a partner's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors to accord with one's own wants in a dating relationship [6]. It is believed that dating violence is oftentimes an attempt to obtain control of a partner in a dating relationship through psychological or physical harm [7].

Social learning theory, developed by Bandura & Walters [8], is concerned with how human aggression is a learned behavior. The theory hypothesizes that, through imitative learning, children who are assaulted by their parents or who observe violence between parents will act out violent behaviors in various human relationships, including relationships with the opposite sex.

Bowlby's attachment theory [9] states that the formation of perception, emotion, and behavior patterns toward others depends on one's attachment relationship with the primary caregiver in early life. A person with high attachment anxiety is obsessed with obtaining stability and comfort from an attachment figure in a personal relationship, and therefore has a high tendency to control that other person due to a fear of being deserted [10].

Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to investigate how the experience of childhood abuse and adult attachment style influence relationship control among college students in dating relationships. The results will be used as baseline data for developing an intervention program targeting relationship control desire in college students.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to identify the effects of experience of childhood abuse and adult attachment of college students on relationship control in dating relationships.

2 Methods

2.1 Study design

The current study was a descriptive survey study aiming to identify factors that affect the degree of relationship control in college students' dating relationships.

2.2 Participants and Procedure

The subjects in the present study were 184 college students attending six universities and colleges in D city (4 four-year universities and 2 two- to three-year community colleges). The inclusion criteria were students with dating experience and who agreed to participate in the current study. The sample size was calculated using G*power 3.1. Although the sample size calculation indicated a minimum sample size of 138 for an alpha of 0.05, a power of 0.95, an effect size of 0.15, and five predictor variables, we attempted to recruit 250 subjects to account for the possibility of non-response and lack of dating experience. A total of 184 responses were finally used for statistical analysis, after excluding 50 responses from individuals without dating experience and 16 obviously insincere responses.

2.3 Instruments

2.3.1 Child Abuse Experience: The experience of childhood abuse was measured using the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale developed by Straus [11] and modified and supplemented by Park [12]. The tool comprises 14 items rated on a five-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's α in Park's study [12] was .90 and that in the present study was .80.

2.3.2 Adult Attachment: Adult attachment was measured using the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale developed by Brennan et al., revised by Fraley et al. [13], and translated into Korean by Kim [14]. The tool comprises two subscales (attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance), each with 18 items (for a total of 36). Cronbach's α of .85–.89 was reported in Kim's study [14], while that in the current study was .90.

2.3.3 Relationship Control: Relationship control was measured using the relationship control scale, a subscale of the Sexual Relationship Power Scale developed by Pulerwitz et al. [6] and translated and revised by Yoo [1]. It comprises 15 items rated on a 4-point Likert. The Cronbach's α was .84 in Yoo's study [1] and .72 in the current study.

2.4 Statistical Analyses

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 21.0 as follows:

- The general characteristics, experience of childhood abuse, adult attachment, and relationship control of college students were analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.
- To identify the differences in relationship control by the general characteristics of college students, a t-test was performed.
- The correlations among the experience of childhood abuse, adult attachment, and relationship control were analyzed using Spearman's rho.

- To identify the factors that affect relationship control of college students, a stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed.

3 Result

3.1 General Characteristics of Subjects

The gender distribution of the subjects was 38.6% male and 61.4% female. Most of the subjects were from four-year universities ($n = 176$, 84.8%), while the remaining were from the two- to three-year colleges (15.2%). Regarding dating experience, most participants reported having dated one to three times (73.9%) while the rest reported more than four times (26.1%; Table 1).

Table 1. General Characteristics and Relationship Control according to General Characteristics of Subjects

($N = 184$)

Variables	Categories	Relationship Control			
		n (%)	$M \pm SD$	t	p
Gender	Male	71 (38.6)	24.94 \pm 3.65	3.572	<.001
	Female	113 (61.4)	22.85 \pm 4.20		
College	2- to 3-year	28 (15.2)	24.50 \pm 3.56	1.320	.194
	4-year	156 (84.8)	23.51 \pm 4.20		
Dating frequency	1-3	136 (73.9)	23.75 \pm 4.07	.500	.619
	4 or greater	48 (26.1)	23.40 \pm 4.27		

3.2 Factors Influencing Relationship Control in the Dating Relationships of College Students

The stepwise regression analysis showed that gender ($\beta = -.274$) and attachment anxiety ($\beta = .233$) significantly affected relationship control; their explanatory power for relationship control was 10.6%. In sum, relationship control was higher among male students and those with higher attachment anxiety (Table 2).

Table 2. Factors Influencing Relationship Control in the Dating Relationships of College students

($N = 184$)

Variables	B	β	t	p	R^2	Adj. R^2	F(p)
Constant	24.095		18.085	<.001	.115	.106	11.806 (<.001)

Gender [†]	-2.311	-.274	-3.899	<.001
Attachment Anxiety	.067	.233	3.314	.001

[†] Dummy coded as Male = 1

4 Conclusions

The results confirmed that relationship control was higher for male students than for female students, and was associated with higher attachment anxiety. Based on our results, the following can be suggested. First, repeated research on a national scale is needed to identify the factors influencing relationship control in dating relationships of college students throughout South Korea. Second, the development and application of intervention programs is needed to ensure balanced relationship control among college students in dating relationships.

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