

Online Dating Deception: Sex Differences in Response to Lies about Status & Attractiveness

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Introduction

- 36% of Canadians use online methods to find someone to date (E-Harmony). However, little research in evolutionary psychology has examined dating behaviour online
- Although online dating can facilitate finding a partner, the lack of initial physical interaction and the ability to curate the image and information put forth to prospective mates allows for the possibility of deception in important areas of mate choice
- Males and females differ universally in their mate preferences. Males prioritize physical attractiveness in mates, whereas females prioritize status and indicators of resource investment.
- In online dating, males tend to lie more about their status and/or their career, whereas females tend to deceive more to appear more youthful and attractive (Toma et al., 2008)
- In this same study, paradoxically, both males and females reported that it is generally unacceptable to lie in an online dating context.
- To date, no research has explored sex differences in the degree to which males and females become upset by deception in an online dating context.
- It was anticipated that males would be more upset by a date having lied about her physical attractiveness, whereas females would be more upset by a date having lied about his status and volunteerism.

Method

Study 1. 364 heterosexual undergraduate students between 18-40 (M=21.63, SD=5.06).

Sex. Self-report biological sex (male/ female).

Dating Scenario. Participants read a hypothetical dating scenario in which they had connected with someone who had lied about one of three conditions 1) attractiveness, 2) volunteerism, or 3) occupation. Participants reported how upset they were about the dishonesty and how likely they were to cancel the date.

Study 2. 280 heterosexual undergraduate students between 18-40 (M=21.06, SD=5.55).

Sex. Self-report biological sex (male/female).

Dating Scenario. Study 2 used the same scenario but with forced choice via all 3 types of deception being ranked from least to most upsetting.

Hypotheses

Overarching Hypotheses Across Studies.

Hypothesis 1: Male, relative to female, participants will be more upset and more likely to cancel if a date (via online dating profile) was found to have lied about attractiveness (reproductive capacity)

Hypothesis 2: Female, relative to male, participants will be more upset and more likely to cancel if the date was found to have lied about employment (resource potential)

Hypothesis 3: Females, relative to males, will be more upset by dishonesty about volunteerism as an index of tendency to invest resources in others.

Results

Hypothesis 1 was not directly supported. There was no sex difference for the attractiveness dishonesty (although see below for within-sex findings)

Hypothesis 2 was supported. There was a significant sex difference for the employment dishonesty, $F(1, 353) = 6.21$ $p = .013$, where females were more likely to cancel the date due to the employment dishonesty than males.

Hypothesis 3 was supported. There was a significant sex difference for the volunteering dishonesty $F(1,353) = 23.44$ $p < .001$, where females were more likely to cancel the date due to volunteering dishonesty than males.

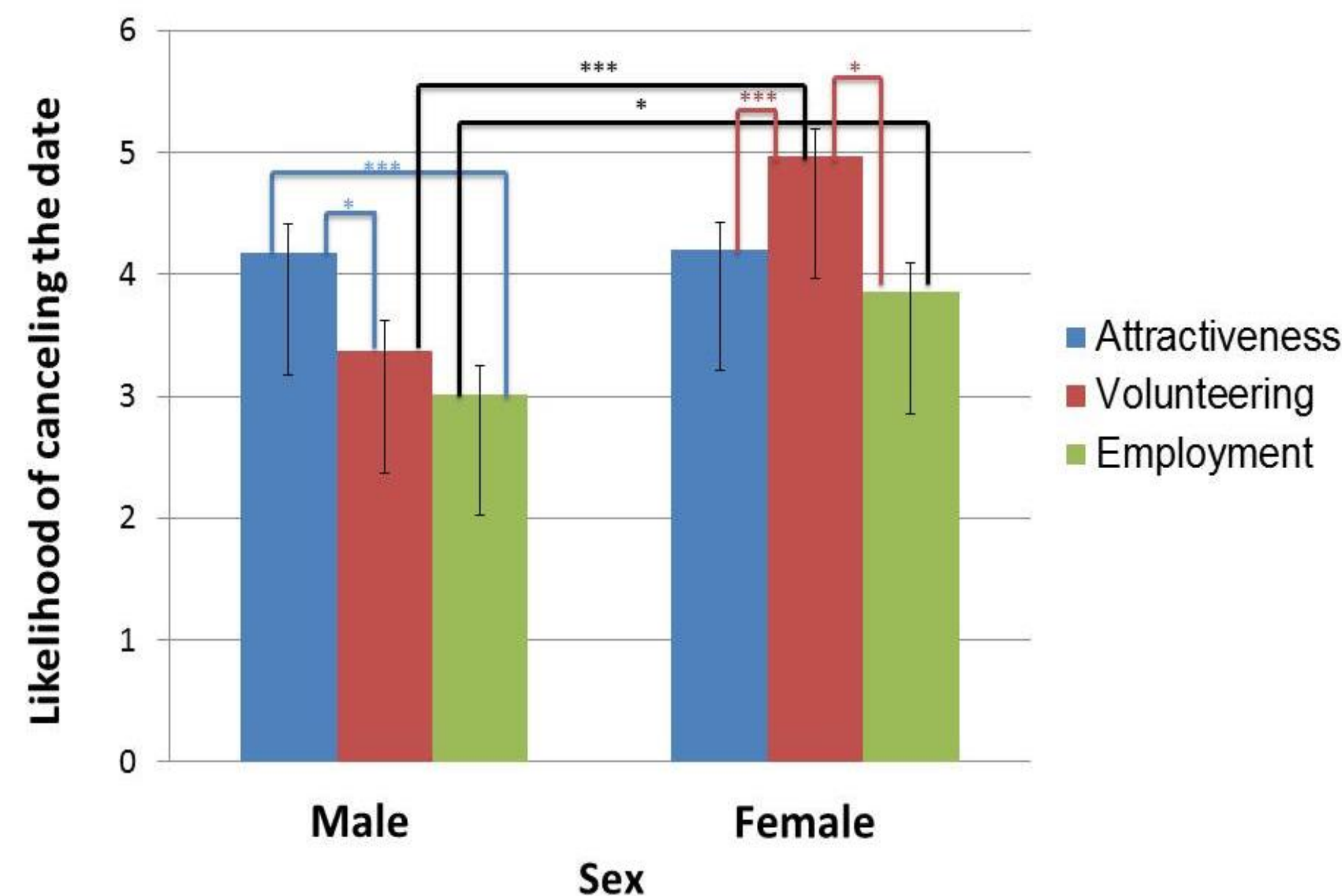


Figure 1. Likelihood of participant cancelling the date across three forms of dishonesty by sex.

The results from study 2 (forced choice) showed clear differences in upset over particular deceptions: females were more upset than males about deception regarding occupation, and males were more upset than females about attractiveness deception. There was no sex difference in upset about volunteering such that both males and females were equally upset.

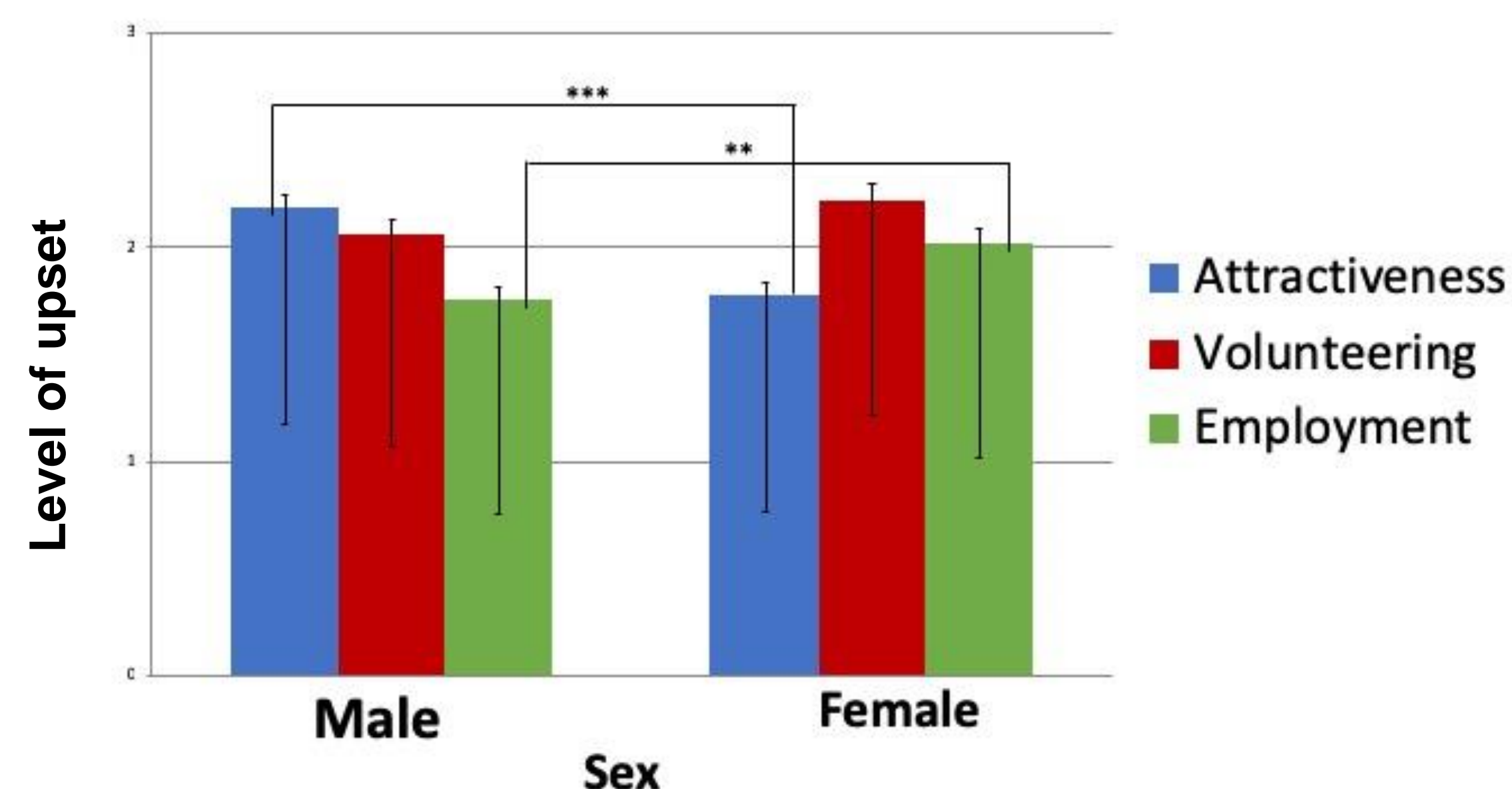


Figure 2. Sex differences in level of upset across three forms of dishonesty.

	Attractiveness		Volunteering		Employment	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Males N= 157	2.178	0.76	2.064	0.88	1.752	0.75
Females N= 123	1.764	0.84	2.220	0.78	2.016	0.77

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of sex differences to different types of deception.

Conclusion

Findings reflect sex differences in mate preferences in terms of what is most important to men and women and their respective reproductive behaviours (Buss, 1989). These established sex differences were shown to extend into contemporary dating culture with respect to degree of upset over online dating deception.

Limitations

This study was conducted using undergraduate participants, so the extent to which findings generalize to the broader population must be examined in future research.

References

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