



All the Single Ladies

Romantic Partnering and Its Influence on the Self-Esteem of Female College Students

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Abstract

Early on in their undergraduate years, many female students define themselves by their social relationships. Those in a committed romantic relationship may perceive more validation and support for fostering self-esteem than those who are not. The current study sought to understand the relationship between 240 undergraduate female students' levels of self-esteem and romantic partnerships, and projected changes if the relationship status were to change. Quantitative methodology allowed for a comparison of group averages to make supported judgments about whether or not there is a correlation between being in a romantic relationship and self-esteem in young female undergraduates. With the study findings, further research can dive deeper into the identity development of female students on college campuses and create more effective support systems for them.

Research Questions

- Do female students in romantic relationships report higher self-esteem than those female students who identify as single?
- Do female students report that a change in relationship status would cause a significant change in their level of self-esteem?

Background Information

- Past studies found self-esteem to be positively correlated with involvement in romantic relationships (Bouche, 2007; Eryilmaz & Atak, 2011; Leck, 2006; Long, 1983; Pettijohn, Naples, & McDermott, 2010).
- Forbes, Jobe, and Richardson (2006) found that other indicators such as body satisfaction were better predictors of relationship status.
- Past research of a different angle, such as that of Waller and MacDonald (2010), found that self-esteem changes after a romantic break up.
- The current study sought to further the research on the influence of romantic relationships on self-esteem, while incorporating the formerly separate component of projected change.

References

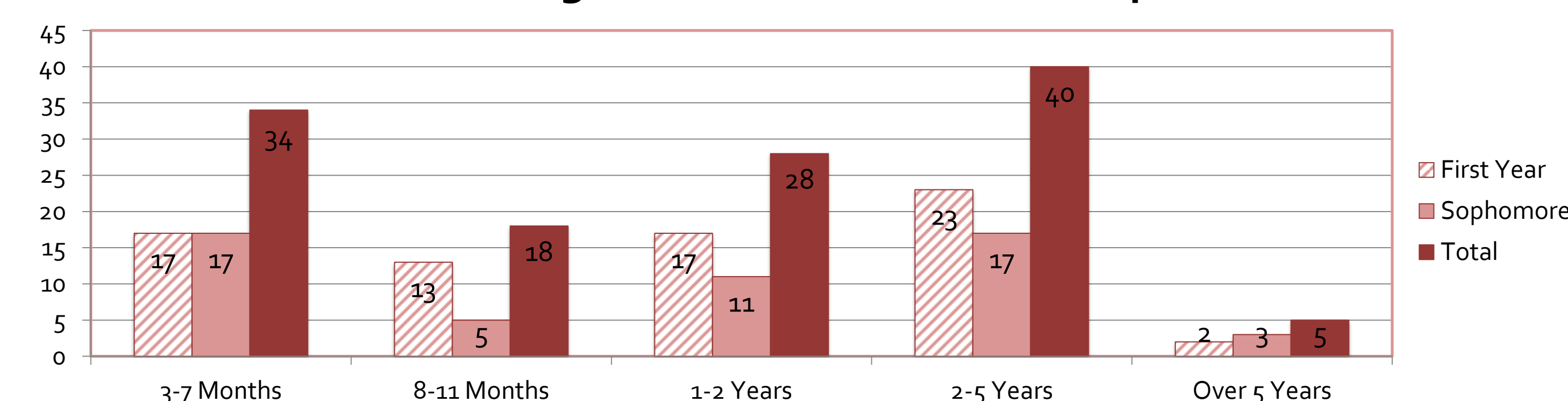
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Romantically Committed and Single Participant Sample and Percentages

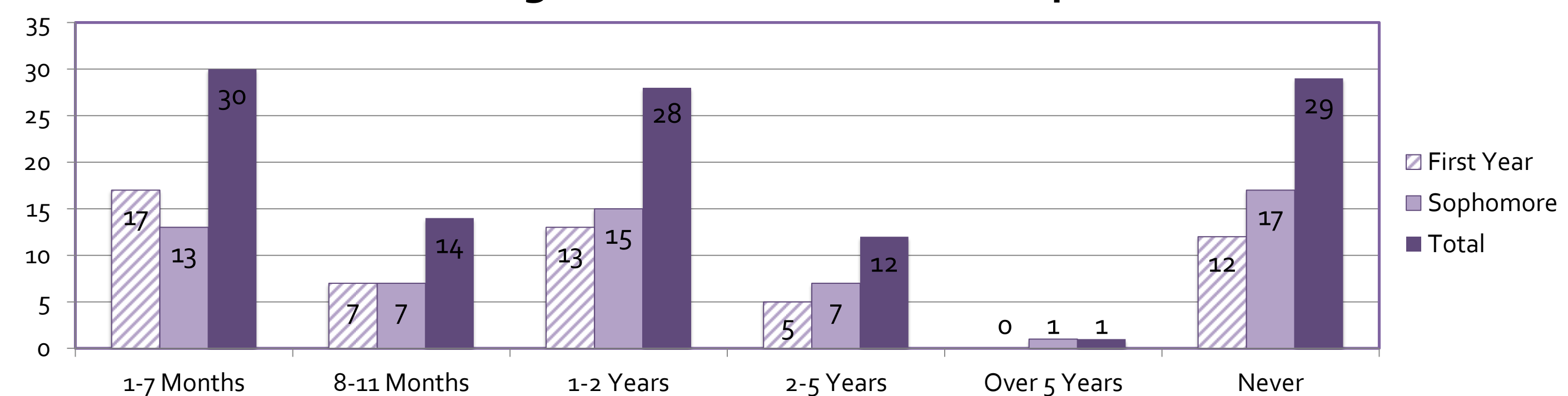
Year	Committed	Single	Total
First Year	72 (30.1)	54 (22.6)	126 (52.7)
Sophomore	53 (22.2)	60 (25.1)	112 (46.9)
Total	125 (52.3)	114 (47.7)	239

Note. The data is presented as n(% of total).

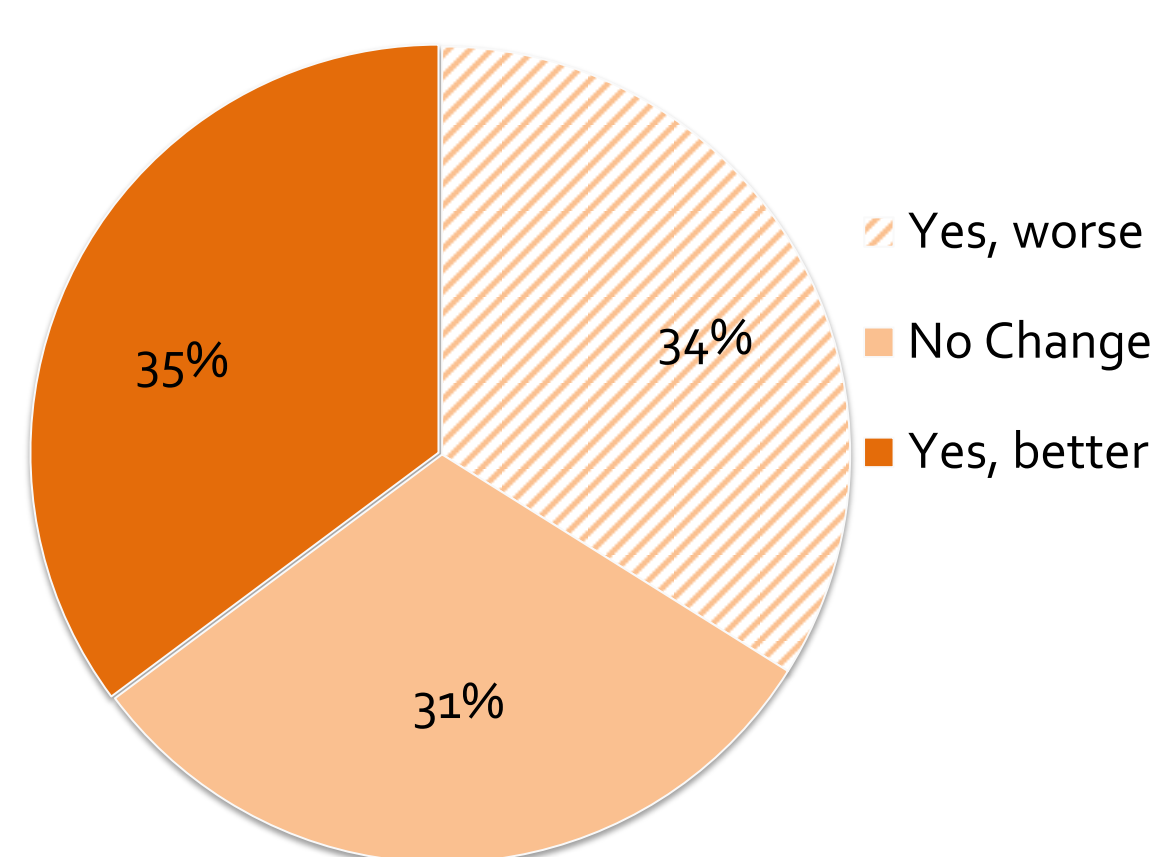
Current Length of Romantic Relationships



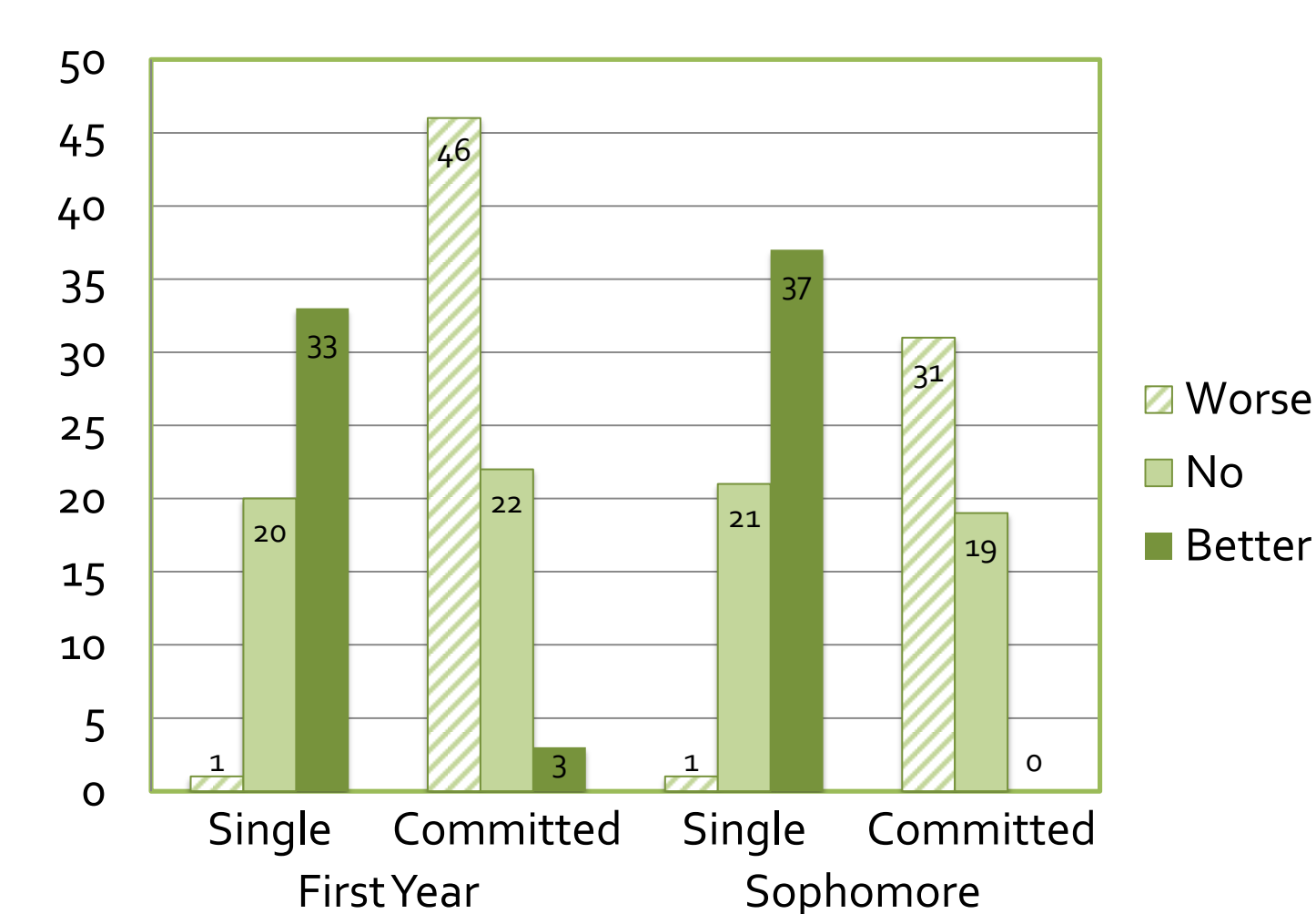
Length Since Last Relationship



Total Self-Projected Change in Self-Esteem



Self-Projected Change in Self-Esteem



Projected Length of Shift in Self-Esteem Post Relationship Status Change

Length of Change	Committed		Single	
	Increase	Decrease	Increase	Decrease
0-1 Month	1	13	13	1
2-7 Months	0	42	21	1
8-11 Months	0	7	1	0
1-2 Years	0	0	5	8
Over 5 Years	0	0	1	0
Until status changed again	1	6	29	0

Selected Literature

- Historical context makes it clear that while there may be more female than male students on some university campuses, the culture of male dominance still exists (Dunn, 2011)
- Early on in development, students often use external formulas to guide their thinking (Baxter Magolda, 2009).
- Academic achievement is often hypothesized as a method for boosting self-esteem, however many have found that this effect is actually indirect and bi-directional (Kuntz, 2011).
- Younger students in particular have trouble establishing boundaries that support proper relationship development because they have not taken the time to understand their own values, which can lead to distress in attempts to build relationships (Rosenberger, 2011).

Methods

Participants

Undergraduate female students who were "traditional aged" first year and sophomores at a small, private, religiously-affiliated school in the Midwest, with just over 7,000 full time undergraduates. All full-time, female undergraduates were contacted via email to participate in the online survey. Only those who identified themselves as 18 to 20 years of age and a relationship status that met the criteria for being romantically involved or single were included in the survey. The university Women's Center provided the author with support in contacting perspective participants, and the study concluded with an $n = 239$.

Procedure

First, participants completed a demographics questionnaire. Next, the participants responded to questions on how their self-esteem might change if their relationship status were to change. After that, they completed the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSS), a 10-item Likert Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) to determine levels of self-esteem.

Results

- Committed Ps most often projected a decrease in self-esteem after a change in relationship status than single
- Single Ps more frequently guessed an increase in self-esteem if they were to enter into a relationship
- Pearson correlation showed a slightly negative relationship between being in a relationship and feeling that they are a person of worth
- The Pearson correlation showed a positive relationship between age, level in school and many levels of the self-esteem measurement, meaning **age and level in school is a better predictor of self-esteem** than romantic relationship status

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