Does Love Make You Smarter?

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Little research has been done that examines the correlation between the length of a romantic relationship and academic success. In the present study, a questionnaire addressing this issue was administered to 40 college students at Lindenwood University. Analysis of the questionnaire revealed no correlation between the length of a romantic relationship and participants' actual GPAs. However, a moderately strong correlation between participants' self-reported GPAs was found. This study implies that the length of one's romantic relationship may be particularly related to perceived academic success.

Many studies have been conducted to determine factors that contribute either positively or negatively to academic success. One such study by Amenkhienan and Kogan (2004) found student effort and involvement among university students to be directly related to student performance and retention. Student involvement can be defined as one's personal initiative and commitment to one's academics. This includes the amount of both physical and psychological energy a student dedicates to his/her academic work (Astin, 1999, as cited in Amenkhienan & Kogan). In essence, the more time you spend on something, the better you get at it.

Closely related to student involvement and effort is work drive. Work drive, or a student's persistent motivation to spend time and effort to be productive and achieve success, is found to be significantly positively related to grade point average (Lounsbury

& Ridgell, 2004). Lounsbury and Ridgell state, "Students with a well-developed academic [work drive] place their studies above their leisure activities; study on a daily or nearly daily basis; and study in a disciplined, intense, and sober fashion (p. 609)." Students with a high work drive were found to possess high levels of conscientiousness, openness, and agreeableness as well (Lounsbury & Ridgell).

While these internal traits have been shown to have a positive relation to overall academic success, workload, an external factor, is shown to be negatively related to academic achievement. When the quantity of material is too demanding, students have been known to engage in what Kember and Leung (1998) call "superficial learning." Students concentrate on memorizing just enough information to pass an examination. Even worse, when confronted with large amounts of material, students find it difficult to distinguish between key concepts and support material (Wenestam, 1978, as cited in Kember & Leung).

While these factors influencing academic achievement have been studied somewhat extensively, the correlation between GPA and the length of one's current romantic relationship has not. The purpose of this study is to determine whether the length and status of a romantic relationship is related positively to a student's grade point average. The word "length" can be interchanged with the word "commitment." Commitment in a college student's relationship is of importance because according to Pistole and Vocaturo (1999), building a central, committed relationship to which their life and career will be secured is a major developmental agenda for young adults.

A secure partner provides an anchor to promote research behaviors such as learning (Pistole & Vacaturo, 1999). Therefore, we hypothesized that the longer a person

is in a monogamous, romantic relationship, the higher his/her GPA will be due to a higher level of attachment. This was determined through the use of a survey containing questions concerning the participant's current relationship status and his or her GPA. Participants' actual GPAs were obtained through the registrar's office of Lindenwood University.

Method

Participants

Forty college students were recruited through the Human Subject Pool at Lindenwood University. These students were from PSY 100, SOC 100, and ANT 100 classes. Participants received extra credit towards their respective classes for participating. Twenty-three participants were male between the ages of 18 and 27, and 17 were female between the ages of 18 and 30. Participants were recruited by means of a sign-up sheet on the Human Subject Pool board on the forth floor of Young Hall.

Materials

A survey containing questions concerning romantic relationships and academic success was given to all participants along with a pen to answer the questions. Half of the participants were given survey form A, while the other half was given form B. The survey questions were exactly the same; however, question order was changed between the two forms as a form of counterbalancing. Participants also received informed consent forms, feedback letters, and grade point average consent forms (a form created by the researchers to obtain participants' grade point averages from the Lindenwood registrar). The rooms used generally had a chair and a desk for the participant to use. However,

some questionnaires had to be administered in Y105E where a desk was not available. Participants used a coffee table to write on instead.

Procedure

Upon entering the lab, participants were told that the study involved the relationship between romantic relationships and grade point average. Participants were asked to sit down to fill out and sign a consent form and a Human Subject Pool form. The researcher then explained the purpose of obtaining the participants' current GPAs and asked participants to fill out and sign a GPA consent form. The GPA consent form contained the participants' names, student identification numbers, and their research identification numbers assigned to them by the researcher. The completed forms were given to a psychology professor who obtained the participants' GPAs from the registrar's office at Lindenwood University. Before giving the GPAs to the researchers, the professor removed all identifying information except the participants' research IDs. This insured anonymity.

Next, the researcher gave participants the survey (Appendix A) and explained that the questions would concern the participants' own romantic relationships and GPAs. Questions included, "What is your current GPA?" and "How long have you been in a monogamous relationship?," etc. Researchers alternated evenly between survey A and B. Participants were told if they did not understand any of the questions on the survey feel free to ask.

After identifying themselves as either male or female and how old they were, the survey asked participants if they were in an exclusive, monogamous relationship with someone whom you see at least once a week. If participants answered "Yes" to this

question they were then asked how long they had been in this relationship with the "conditions as they are now (monogamous and exclusive)" along with questions pertaining to positive or negative effects of their relationship on their GPAs. If they answered "No" they were instructed to skip over questions concerning a romantic relationship and move on to questions about GPA, study habits, and life events. Those in romantic relationships answered these questions as well.

Questions 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 10 on survey A and questions 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, and 10 on survey B were rated on a nominal scale. All other questions were rated on a ratio scale. All questions except number 10 were closed ended questions. Therefore they were easily assessed. Responses for question 10 concerning life events were categorized as follows: 1. Job, 2. Leaving home (negative effect), 3. Leaving home (positive effect), 4. Peer pressure, 5. Parties and drinking, 6. School dissatisfaction, 7. University sports (negative effect), 8. Death of a loved one, 9. Parental divorce, 10. Personal change, 11. Break up (negative effect), 12. Financial trouble, 13. University sports (positive effect).

Before leaving, participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns about the study in which they had just participated. They were then told how and when they could find out the results of the study and were given a feedback letter (Appendix E) containing the researcher contact information along with the information they were just told verbally.

Results

Using SPSS, a correlational analysis was conducted on participants' responses to the survey. This analysis revealed no correlation between the length of a participant's romantic relationship and his/her actual grade point average, $r = .063$. However, there

was a positive correlation between the length of a participant's romantic relationship and his/her self-reported grade point average, r = .532. Of the 40 participants surveyed, only 14 of them were in a monogamous relationship at the time of the study. On average, female participants had a higher actual grade point average than male participants. The female mean GPA was 3.24 while the male mean GPA was 2.93.

Discussion

Our hypothesis was not supported by the information that was gathered. The length of one's romantic relationship does not correlate with one's actual grade point average. However, this conclusion may be due to the lack of participants currently in a romantic relationship. The correlation between subjects' self-reported GPAs and the length of the romantic relationship may be due to those in monogamous relationships overestimating their GPAs. These results were surprising considering there was a strong positive correlation between actual GPA and self-reported GPA, r = .793. No correlation was found between any of the life events reported by the participants and their respective GPAs. However, 40% of those surveyed found that involvement in athletics negatively affected their academic performance.

Our surveys yielded more missing data than originally anticipated. This may be due to international and American students not understanding some of the questions or words within the questions. While we encouraged all participants to ask questions should they have any, some people may not have felt comfortable enough with the survey situation to do so. Words such as "monogamous" and "exclusive" may have caused problems for some participants.

We believe that the reason for the correlation between self-reported GPA and length of a relationship is that people in romantic relationships tend to overestimate their GPAs more so than those who are not in romantic relationships. Future studies should further investigate these findings.

References

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. Male or Female (circle one)

2. Age in years _____

3. To the best of your knowledge, what is your current GPA?

4. How much time (in hours) do you spend studying each week?

5. Are you currently in an exclusive, monogamous relationship with someone whom you see at least once a week (if not, skip to question 9)?

6. How long have you been in this relationship with the conditions as they are now (monogamous & exclusive)?

7. Do you feel that your current relationship is positively or negatively affecting other aspects of your life?

8. Is your grade point average (GPA) higher or lower than it was before you were in this relationship?

9. If you are not in a relationship, how does your current GPA compare to your GPA when you were last in a relationship of the above magnitude (if applicable; if not skip to question 10)?

10. Since enrolling in college, have there been any other life events that you feel may have impacted your GPA either positively or negatively? (feel free to elaborate or skip)