Gender Roles and Romantic Relationships for Women in STEM

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Introduction

- Gender Role Congruity Theory (e.g.,Diekman & Eagly, 2008; Evans & Diekman, 2009; Diekman et al., 2010) proposes that *gender roles function as self-standards for behavior and serve a self-regulatory function.*

  - College students should choose majors that fit their gender roles and fulfill the goals associated with these roles.

  - College women in STEM majors struggle to deal with the conflict between the pursuit of romantic relationship roles and academic goals (Holland & Eisenhart,1990; Gilmartin, 2005; Diekman et al., 2010).

- *This is similar to Self-Discrepancy Theory* (Higgins, 1987), which suggests that people have internal "ideal" standards to which they compare themselves.

  - Self-discrepancy occurs when a person does not match up in reality to this internal "self-guide".

- **Combining Self-Discrepancy Theory and Gender Role Congruity theory:**

  - STEM women should be more invested in romantic roles versus student roles and their partners should expect the same of them.

  - STEM women and men should shift towards traditional gender role norms for their ideal selves.

  - *However, if STEM women and their partners do not strictly adhere to gender role norms, the women may invest more in the student role.*

    - The partner could possibly be more supportive of the woman's investment in the student role.

Objectives

The goal of this study is:

- To examine female STEM majors' investment in their student and relationship roles in comparison to their partners' investment in these same roles.

- To our knowledge, this is one of the first studies to directly assess *both members of the relationship* on their role investment and gender role traditionalism.

Method

Participants

- **54 female undergraduate (*M* age = 20 yrs.) STEM majors and their romantic partners (*M* age = 20 yrs.)**

- Had been together for a minimum of 4 months.

  - 74.1% had been together 12 months or longer

  - 22.2% were living together.

- Participants were primarily Caucasian.

Procedure

- Men and women arrived together and completed several assessments individually. They were seated so that they could not see each other's responses.

- Sessions lasted approximately 70 minutes and each person was paid $20 ($40/ couple).

Measures

- **Penny Role Sort** (McBride & Rane, 1997). Participants divided 18 chips across 6 different roles (student, work, relationship partner, social relationships, volunteer, and other) to indicate their commitment to each role. They complete the sort 4 times:
  - Their own current commitment
  - Their ideal commitment
  - Their partner's current commitment
  - Their ideal for their partner's commitment

- **Scale of Egalitarian Sex Role Attitudes** (ESRA, Beere et al., 1984)

  - Items are rated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items:
    - *Domestic chores should be shared between husband and wife*
    - *Bringing up children is the most important job for a woman (Reverse)*
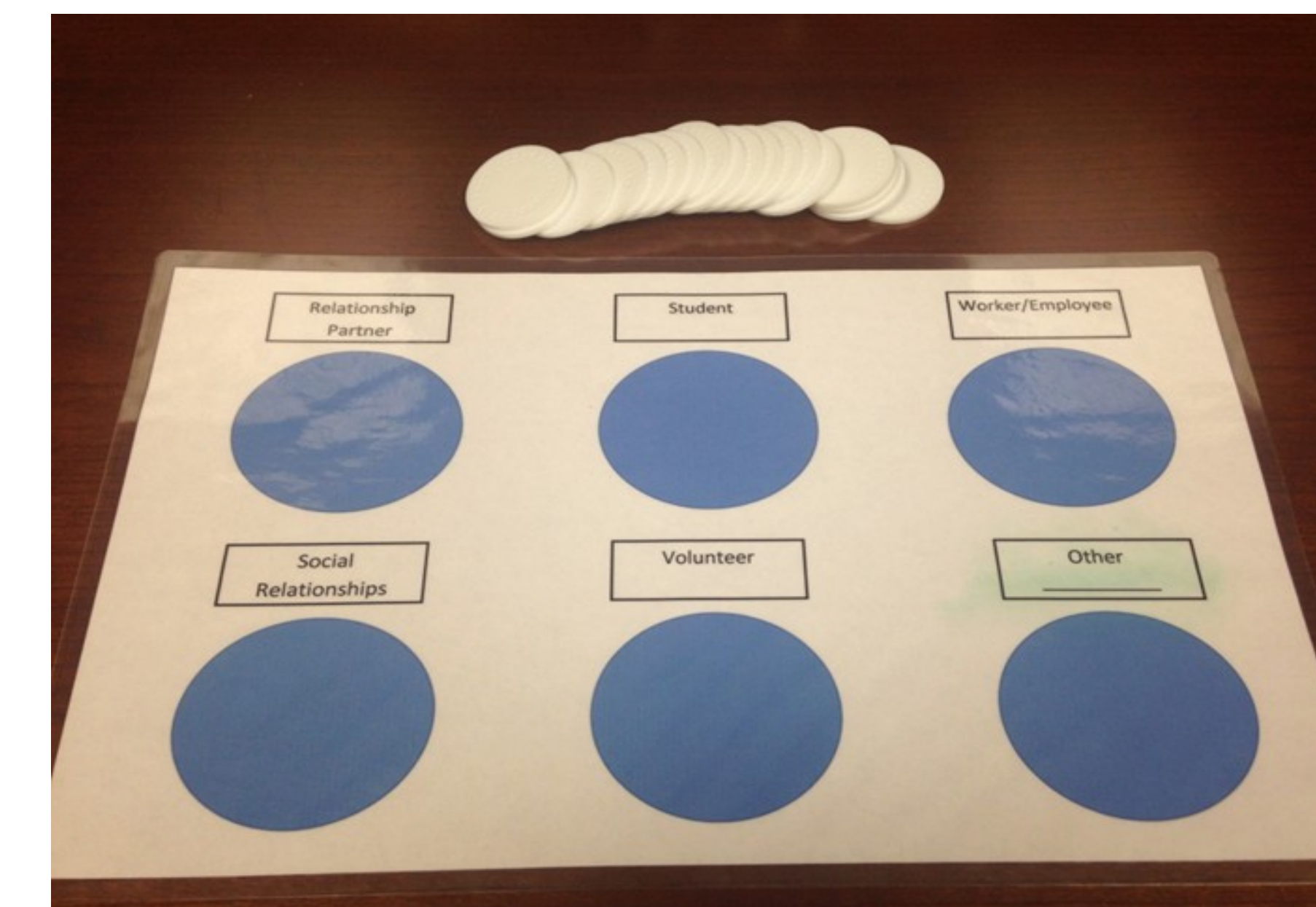
Results

Analyses focused on the comparing men and women on ESRA and role investment for the student and romantic relationship.

- Correlations were calculated between the men's and women's scores (Table 1). There were significant correlations for:
  - ESRA (marginal)
  - Ideal Relationship investment
  - Ideal Student investment

- To assess the differences between the men and women on the Role Sort task a 2(Gender) x 2(Real/Ideal) x 2(Role) repeated measures ANOVA was conducted Significant effects were found for: the following:

Table 1. Correlations between Women's and Men's Scores

		r	*p*	N
Egalitarian sex role		.233	.093	53
Role Sort for Self				
Real	Relationship	.138	.319	54
	Student	.082	.577	49
Ideal	Relationship	.401	.003	54
	Student	.442	.002	47

Results continued

- Gender x Role $F(1,45)$= 17.12 p <.001, $\eta p2$ = .276 (Figure1). Connecting bars indicate significant differences
  - Women were more invested in the student role than men.
  - Men were more invested in the relationship than women.
  - Men were more invested in the relationship than student role.

Figure 1: Gender X Role
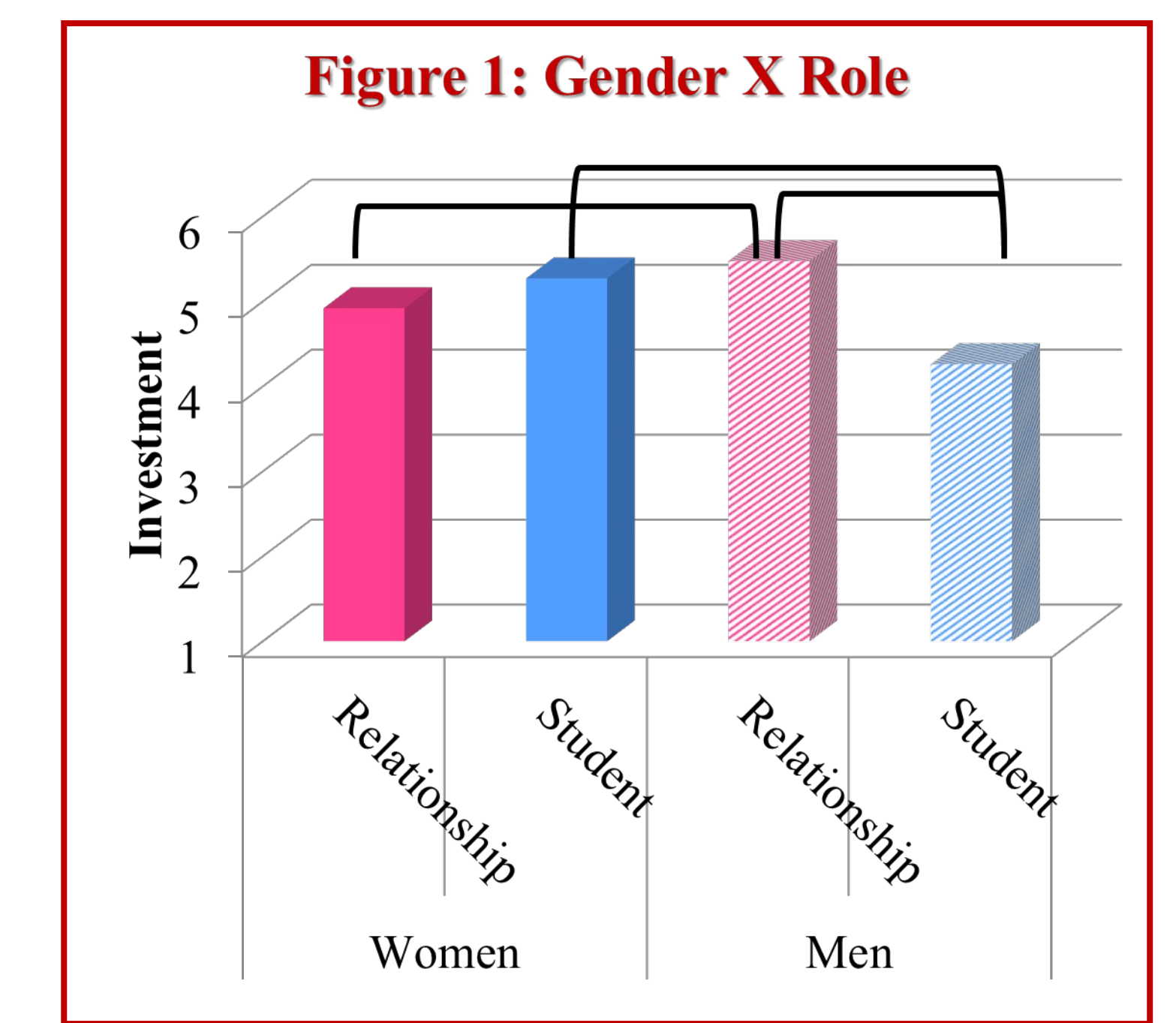
- Real-Ideal x Role F(1,45)= 8.12 p<.007, $\eta p2$ = .153 (Figure 2). Both men and women would ideally:
  - Be less invested in their student role than they really are.
  - Invest more time in their relationship than the student role.

Figure 2: Role X Real/Ideal
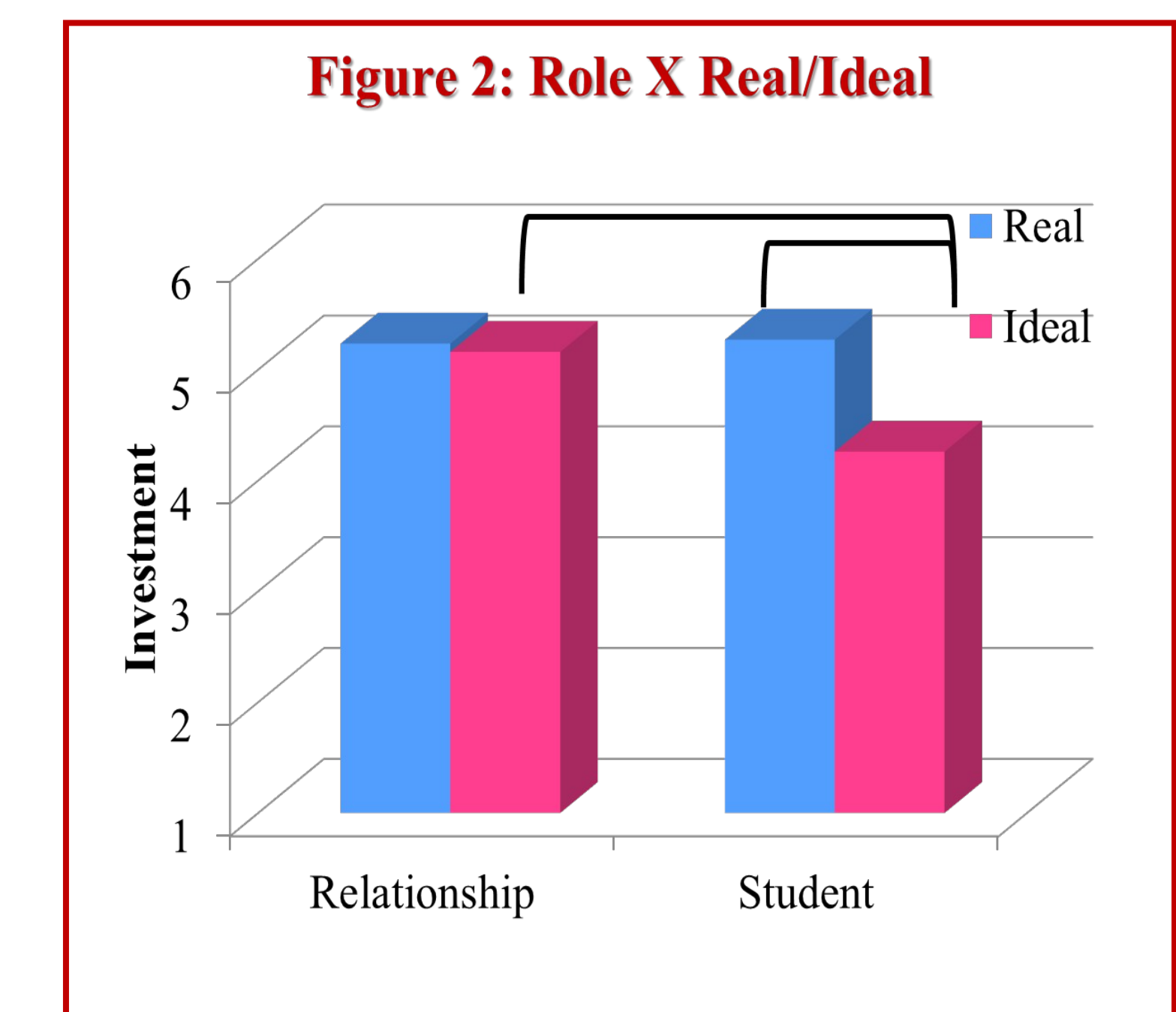
Conclusions

- In contrast to theoretical predictions from Gender Role Congruity Theory, these women STEM majors were more invested in their student roles than their relationship roles.

- Surprisingly, the men were more invested in their relationships than the women.

- Within their relationships, men and women were similar on their views of egalitarian sex roles.