

Devin Brazell, Blake Tripodi, Jenna Zon, Lily Finnegan, and Karen S. Mooney

Introduction

This presentation highlights preliminary analyses from an ongoing project comparing the quality of college students' peer relationships. Friendships that are high in positive features and low in negative features are considered the highest quality friendships. Adolescents who have high-quality friendships report fewer internalizing and externalizing problems than adolescents with low-quality friendships (Buhrmester, 1990).

Most research focuses on one aspect of friendship quality at a time (e.g., positivity with behavior problems, negativity with behavior problems) instead of the overall quality of the friendship. Moreover, not all low-quality friendships are alike, with some being low in positivity and high in negativity and others being low in positivity and negativity. These different kinds of low-quality friendships may have different associations with adjustment.

Same-sex friendships are typically higher in positivity than other-sex friendships (Hand & Furman, 2009), but little is known about how other-sex friendships vary in quality or how that quality is associated with adjustment.

Adolescents and young adults typically feel the need to establish for themselves and for their peers whether their other-sex friend is just a platonic friend, their boyfriend or girlfriend, or something in the middle (Rawlins, 1992). Contrary to popular belief, most college students prefer to remain friends rather than turning their friendship into a romantic relationship (Shaffer, 2001).

The present study examines these questions with college students. We used cluster analysis to group the students into profiles based on their reports of positivity and negativity with their closest other-sex friend. We examined associations between the friendship quality profiles and adjustment outcomes, as well as previous or current desire for a romantic relationship.

Method

Participants

The participants were 247 students (201 cis females, 34 cis males, 0 trans females, 3 trans males, 3 non-binary, 3 who identified as other, and 3 participants who did not disclose their identity) attending college at SUNY Geneseo. The students were between 18 and 32 years of age ($M = 19.16$, $SD = 1.54$). The majority (78.9%) were White; a majority (73.7%) also identified as heterosexual.

210 participants reported having an other-sex friendship. The final sample consisted of 168 cis females, 31 cis males, 0 trans females, 3 trans males, 3 non-binary, 3 other, and 2 participants who did not disclose their identity, all between 18 and 32 years of age ($M = 19.14$ years; $SD = 1.57$ years). The majority (83.3%) of the participants identified as White (3.3% Asian; 6.2% Latinx, Hispanic, or Spanish origin; 3.8% Black or African American; 2.4% with multiple identities; 1% did not disclose their identity). A majority (72.4%) also identified as heterosexual (1.9% gay/lesbian; 15.2% bisexual; 3.8% questioning/unsure; 6.2% other; 0.5% preferred not to answer).

Measures

Friendship quality. The participants completed the 33-item Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) for their current closest other-sex friend. The measure evaluates relevant features of relationship quality for the friendship: positive features (companionship, instrumental aid, intimacy, nurturance, affection, admiration, reliable alliance, and satisfaction) and negative features (conflict and annoying behavior). The amount of positive and negative features present in the friendship were rated from 1 (little or none) to 5 (the most).

Behavior problems. The participants also completed the Adult Self-Report (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2003), which assesses internalizing problems (anxious/depressed, withdrawn, and somatic complaints), externalizing problems (aggressive behavior, rule-breaking behavior, and intrusive behavior), and other problems. Items were scored on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 2 (often).

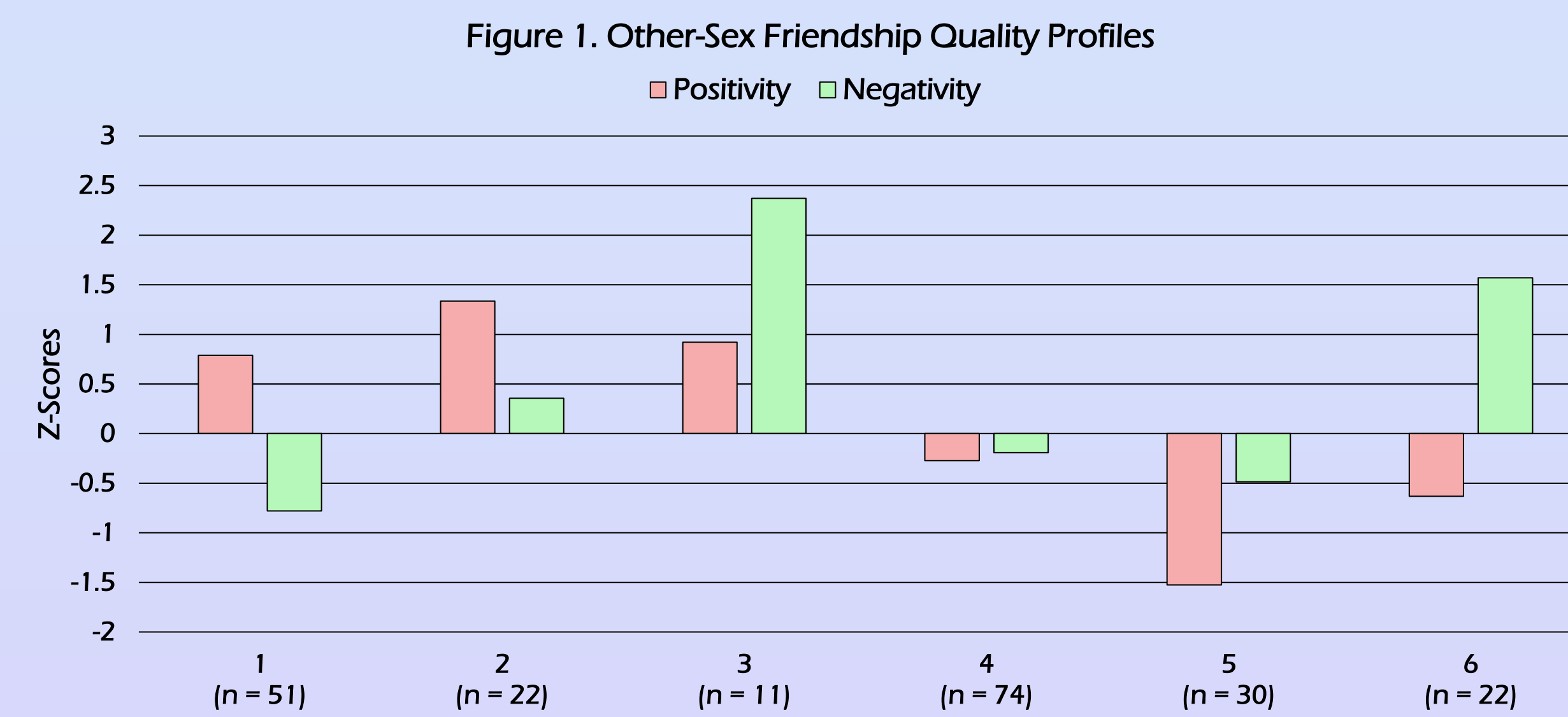
Relationship experience. The participants reported on how many other-sex friends they have ever had since age 11, whether they have ever had a romantic relationship with their current other-sex friend, and whether they have ever wanted a romantic relationship with their other-sex friend.

Results

Friendship Quality Profiles

K-means cluster analysis grouped the students into six profiles based on their reports of positivity and negativity with their close other-sex friend (see Figure 1). Students in Profile 1 had a high quality (high positivity, low negativity) friendship. Students in Profile 2 had a friendship high in positivity and average in negativity. Students in Profile 3 had a friendship high in both positivity and negativity. Students in Profile 4 had a friendship that was average in both positivity and negativity. Students in Profile 5 had a friendship low in both positivity and negativity. Students in Profile 6 had a friendship low in positivity and high in negativity.

Results (cont.)



Associations Between Friendship Quality Profiles and Adjustment

A univariate ANOVA was conducted to see whether students in these six profiles differed in their adjustment outcomes. Post hoc LSD comparisons followed statistically significant main effects. Means with different letters differ significantly at $p < .05$. Small effect sizes (ranging from $\eta^2 = .060 - 1.36$) were found for significantly different profiles.

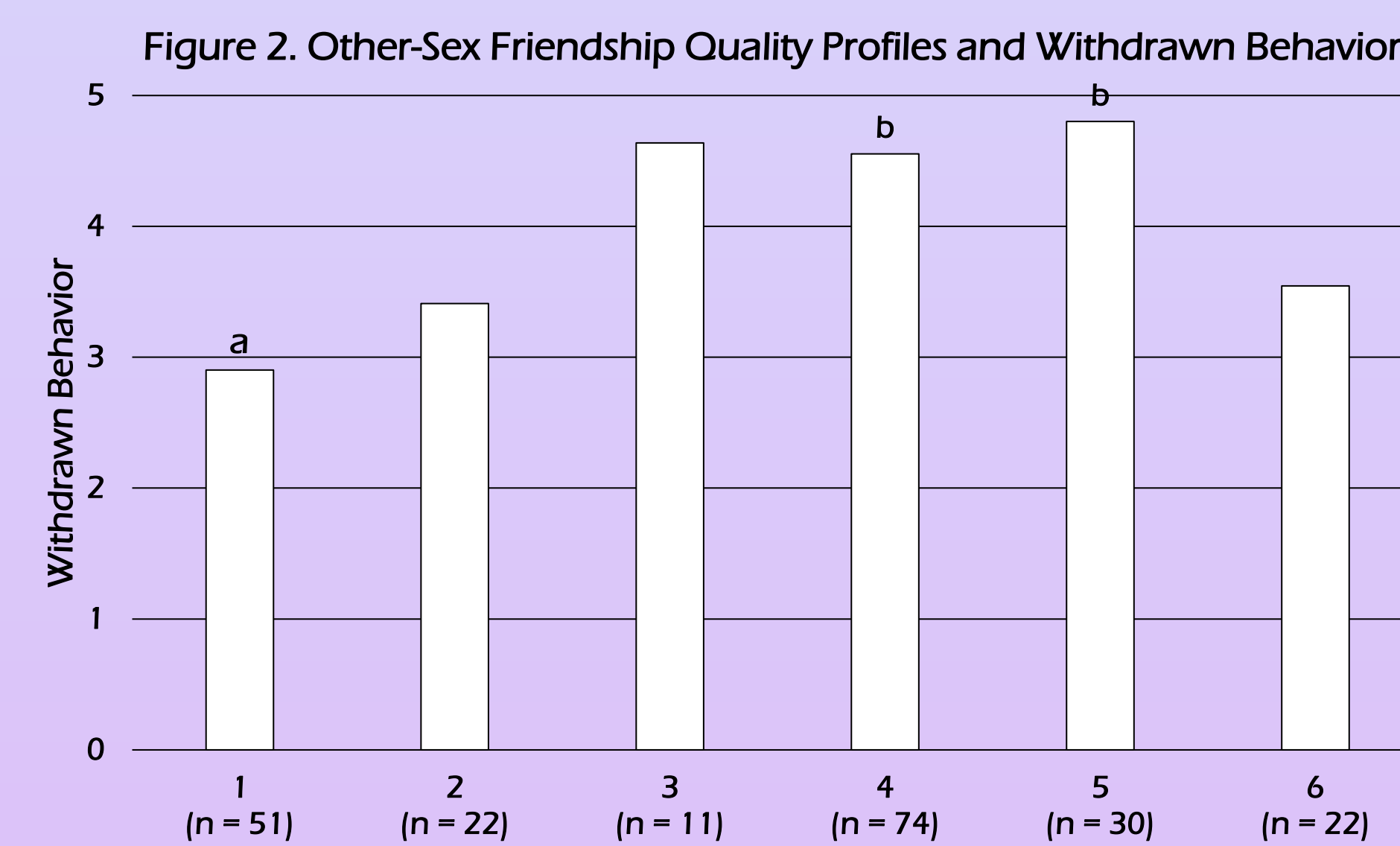
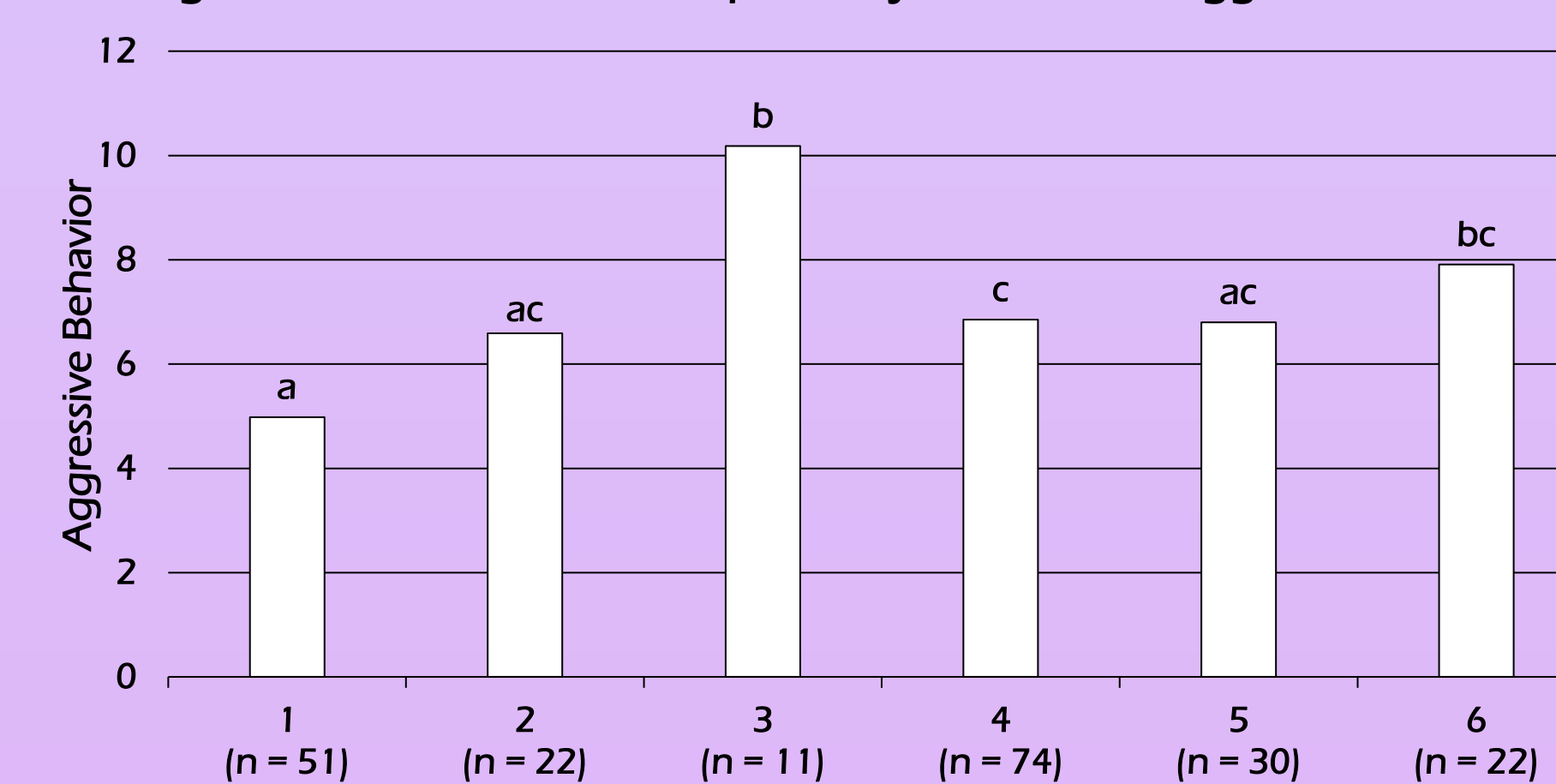


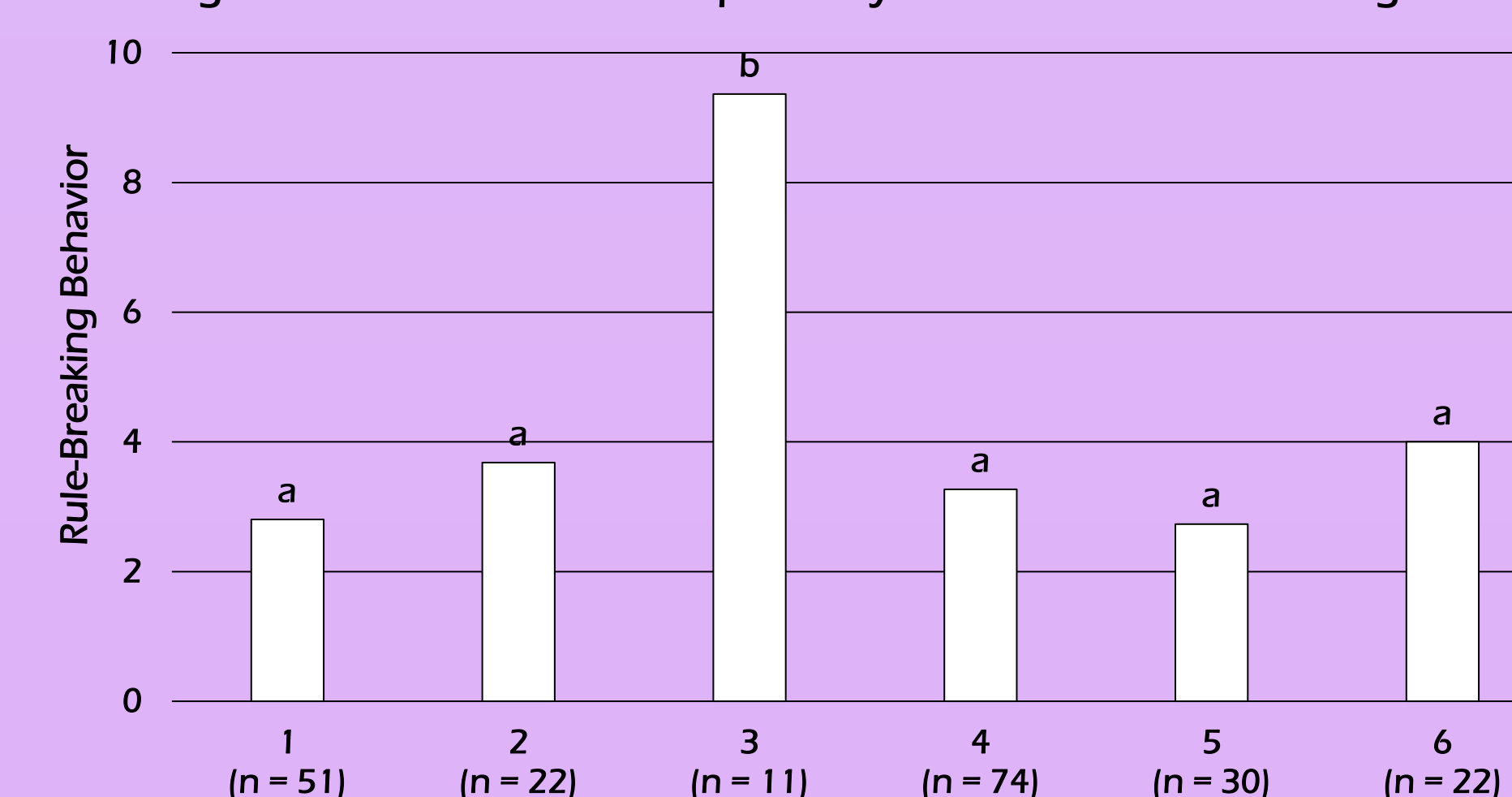
Figure 3. Other-Sex Friendship Quality Profiles and Aggressive Behavior



Aggressive behavior.

There was a significant difference in aggressive behaviors for the profiles, $F(5, 204) = 2.852$, $p = .016$ ($\eta^2 = .065$; see Figure 3). Higher scores indicate more aggressive behaviors.

Figure 4. Other-Sex Friendship Quality Profiles and Rule-Breaking Behavior



Rule-breaking behavior.

There was a significant difference in rule-breaking behavior for the profiles, $F(5, 204) = 6.445$, $p < .001$ ($\eta^2 = .136$; see Figure 4). Higher scores indicate more rule-breaking behavior.

Results (cont.)

Analyses Involving Experiences with Other-Sex Friends

Associations between friendship quality profiles and number of other-sex friends since age 11. There was a significant difference in the number of other-sex friends, $F(5, 199) = 3.666$, $p = .003$ ($\eta^2 = .084$; see Figure 5).

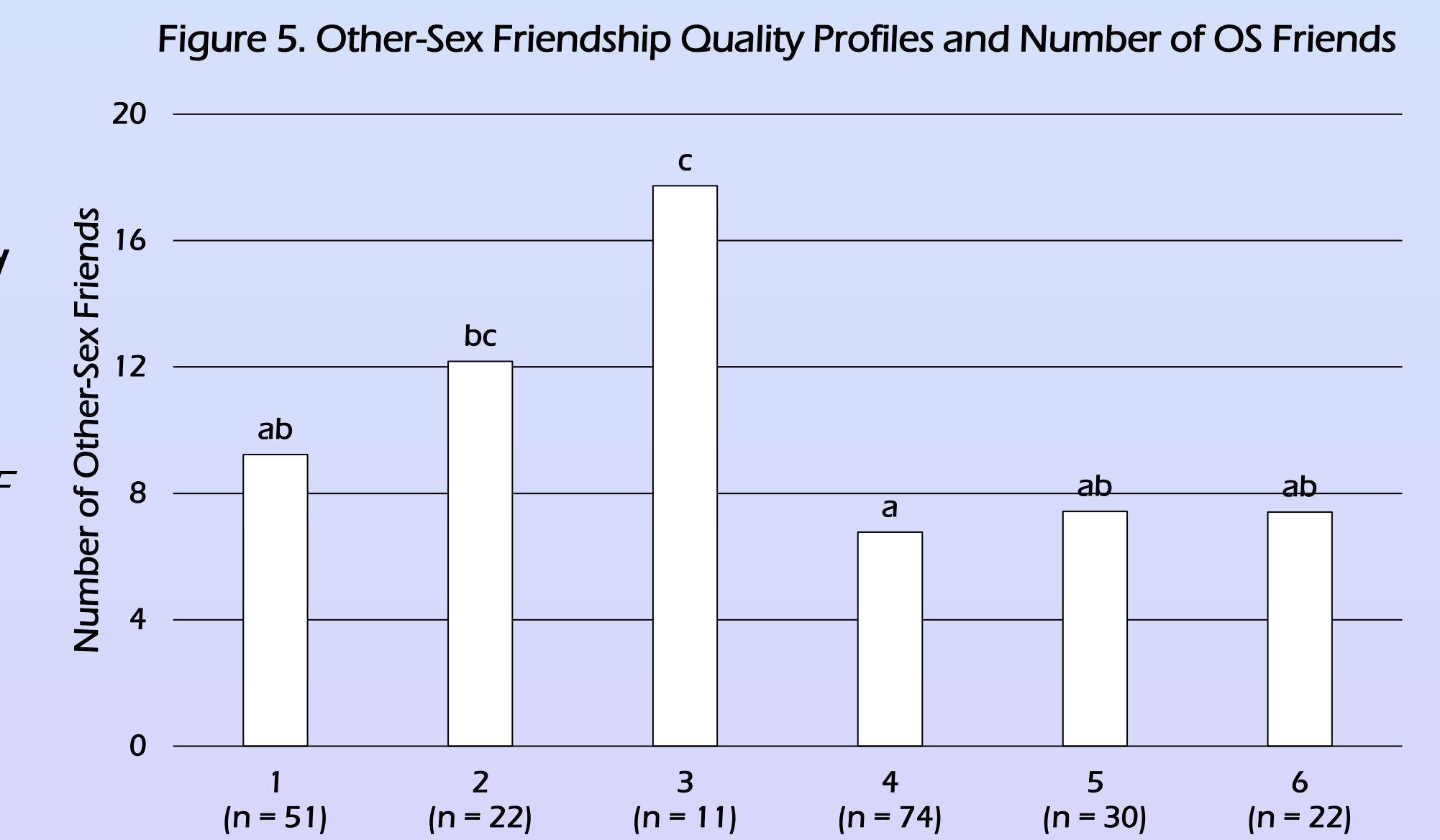


Table 1. Chi-Square for Profiles and Previous Romantic Relationship with Friend

Profile	Yes		No		Total
	Observed	(Expected)	Observed	(Expected)	
1	0 ^a	(3.8)	50 ^b	(46.2)	50
2	3	(1.7)	19	(20.3)	22
3	2	(0.8)	9	(10.2)	11
4	5	(5.6)	68	(67.4)	73
5	1	(2.3)	29	(27.7)	30
6	5 ^a	(1.7)	17 ^b	(20.3)	22
Total	16	(16)	192	(192)	208

Previous romantic relationship with friend.

A chi-square analysis determined that students who had previously been in a romantic relationship with their friend were more/less likely to be in certain profiles, $\chi^2(5) = 14.846$, $p = .001$ (Cramer's $V = .267$; see Table 1). Frequencies with different letters differ significantly at $p < .05$.

Romantic interest in friend. A chi-square analysis did not find any differences between the profiles and romantic interest in their friend, $\chi^2(5) = 5.677$, ns . Overall, 55 students wanted a romantic relationship but 152 did not.

Conclusions/Next Steps

- About one-fourth of the students had a high quality other-sex friendship.
- As expected, students whose friendship was high in quality (Profile 1) tended to have the best outcomes.
- Students in the low-quality friendship profiles varied in their levels of behavior problems.
- Students in Profile 3 scored highest in externalizing behavior problems. Despite their friendships being high in positivity, they were the highest in negativity.
- Students in Profile 3 also had the highest number of other-sex friends.
- Similar to Shaffer's (2001) findings, the majority of college students did not want a romantic relationship with their friend.

- We plan to collect data for approximately 200 additional participants.
- Re-conducting these analyses with a full data set will allow us to better identify the friendship quality profiles and to better understand the associations between the patterns of friendship quality and various aspects of adjustment.
- We also hope to determine whether the findings vary based on gender identity and sexual orientation.

References

- Achenbach, T. M., & Rescorla, L. A. (2003). *Manual for the ASEBA Adult Forms & Profiles*. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont, Research Center for Children, Youth, & Families.
- Buhrmester, D. (1990). Intimacy of friendship, interpersonal competence, and adjustment during preadolescence and adolescence. *Child Development, 61*, 1101-1111
- Furman, W., & Buhrmester, D. (1985). Children's perceptions of the personal relationships in their social networks. *Developmental Psychology, 21*, 1016-1024.
- Hand, L. S., & Furman, W. (2009). Rewards and costs in adolescent other-sex friendships: Comparisons to same-sex friendships and romantic relationships. *Social Development, 18*(2), 270-287.
- Rawlins, W. K. (1992). *Friendship matters: Communication, dialectics, and the life course*. New York: Aldine De Gruyter.
- Shaffer, L. (2001, April). *Agree or disagree? Relationship consensus in late-adolescent other-sex friendships*. Poster presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Minneapolis, MN.