

POWER AND THE QUALITY OF SAME-SEX FRIENDSHIPS

Rosemary C. Veniegas and Letitia Anne Peplau
University of California, Los Angeles

Does the quality of same-sex friendship depend on the gender of the friends and the balance of power between friends? Fifty-four men and 60 women undergraduates evaluated two of their same-sex friendships, one equal in power and one unequal in power. The quality of each friendship was rated in terms of emotional closeness, satisfaction, liking, self-disclosure, and rewards. In general, most young adults evaluated their friendships positively. Mixed-model multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) found significant main effects of gender and power on ratings of quality, but no interactions. Consistent with previous research, women generally evaluated their same-sex friendships more positively than did men. Gender differences were relatively small in magnitude and were not found for all indices of relationship quality, however. As predicted, participants rated equal-power friendships significantly higher than unequal-power friendships on all measures of quality. Power appears to be an important but largely neglected element of friendship.

When you're down and troubled, and you need a helping hand,
You just call out my name and I'll come running . . .
You've got a friend.

—King, "You've Got a Friend"

For many people, friendships are essential in creating a general sense of well-being and happiness. As the words from this popular song suggest, friends provide comfort, support, and help in times of need. Friends who share our interests, enjoy our company, and value our ideas enrich our lives (Foa & Foa,

We thank Khanh Bui, Terri Conley, Nancy Henley, Lynda Sagrestano, Pamela Taylor, and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on previous versions of this article. This study was conducted while the first author was supported by National Institute of Mental Health Grant 5T32MH15742-15.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to: Rosemary C. Veniegas, Department of Psychology, University of California Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563. E-mail: veniegas@ucla.edu.

1974; Solano, 1986; Weiss, 1974). Unfortunately, not all friendships meet these high standards of quality. Some friendships are superficial and lack emotional closeness. Other friendships are sources of conflict and emotional distress. Relatively little is known about the determinants of the quality of adult friendships. Available research suggests that two important factors may be the gender of the friends and the balance of power in their relationship.

Gender and Friendship Quality

Our closest friends are often people of our own sex. A tendency to have more same-sex than cross-sex friends has been documented across the life span (Karweit & Hansell, 1983; Rubin, 1980; Weiss & Lowenthal, 1975). Considerable research has shown that women report greater satisfaction with their same-sex friendships than do men (see reviews by Hays, 1988; Sherrod, 1989; Winstead, 1986). Gender differences in the quality of same-sex friendships have been found using diverse samples and varied measures of quality. For example, Sapadin (1988) asked men and women professionals in three metropolitan centers to describe and evaluate their same-sex friendships. Women rated their friendships higher than men on scales that assessed overall quality, intimacy, enjoyment, and nurturance. Wright and Scanlon (1991) asked men and women in business and service settings to evaluate their best same-sex friendship using an instrument called the Acquaintance Description Form—Final (ADF-F; Wright, 1985), which measures various facets of friendship. Compared to men, women rated their same-sex friendships higher on interdependence and rewards. Detailed diary studies have also shown consistent gender differences in same-sex friendship; compared to men, women reported that their interactions were more meaningful, involved more “self-disclosure,” were more “pleasant,” and were more “satisfying” (Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985; Wheeler, Reis, & Nezelek, 1983). Although some studies have not found gender differences in the quality of same-sex friendships (e.g., Jones, 1991; Rose, 1985), when differences do emerge, it is women who evaluate their same-sex friendships as higher in quality. The processes underlying these gender differences are not well understood (Blieszner & Adams, 1992). One possibility that has not been investigated is the pattern of dominance in women’s and men’s friendships.

Power Equality and Friendship Quality

Henley (1977) emphasized the importance of power in shaping many everyday social interactions. She also suggested that some of the gender differences that occur in male–female relationships result from gender-based differences in power or status. In a recent review, Adams and Blieszner (1994) noted that research on friendship has not attempted to link aspects of friendship *structure*, such as power, to aspects of friendship *process*, such as feelings of closeness or satisfaction. These researchers emphasized the potential value of such research.

Interpersonal power is a complex phenomenon (Huston, 1983). Social power is commonly defined as one person's ability to influence another. Like intelligence, social power is conceptualized as a capacity that cannot be directly observed but must be inferred from behavior. Relationship researchers have tended to focus on a related concept, the relative balance of power between partners. The balance of power, or the dominance structure, refers to which partner is believed to be more influential in a relationship. It is most commonly evaluated from the subjective reports of participants. In an equal-power relationship, both partners are roughly comparable in the influence they have on each other. In an unequal-power relationship, one person exercises more influence over the pair's activities and decision making.

The association between the balance of power and the quality of a relationship has been studied in heterosexual relationships (e.g., Peplau & Campbell, 1989; Peplau, Hill, & Rubin, 1993) but not in same-sex friendships. In general, heterosexual dating partners and spouses are happier in egalitarian or male-dominant relationships than in female-dominant relationships (Huston, 1983). The possible link between the balance of power and friendship quality has not been investigated.

The lack of research in this area may result from the popular but unexamined assumption that same-sex friendships are invariably equal. Thus, Allan (1986, p. 45) asserted, "Friendships are relationships of equality in that friends are accepted as being equal within the friendship. There is no hierarchy in friendship, no differentiation." Similarly, Hays (1988, p. 395) proposed that "Friendship is also an 'equalizer' in the sense that if individuals who are disparate on a significant dimension such as age, sex or status do become friends, it is assumed that they will respond to each other symmetrically, as if the status differential were irrelevant." In a recent theoretical article, Adams and Blieszner (1994, p. 170) called attention to the problem of assuming *a priori* that friendships must involve equal power: "Because friendships are typically viewed as intimate . . . and egalitarian . . . many researchers have failed to examine . . . dimensions of internal structure" such as power or status.

There is reason to believe that dominance patterns do emerge in friendship pairs despite an ideology of equality. For example, social exchange theory predicts that the friend who has greater interpersonal resources (e.g., is more knowledgeable, is more attractive, has more money) will have greater influence (Huston, 1983). Furthermore, the friend who is more psychologically dependent on the relationship as a source of support or companionship may be at a power disadvantage. Two studies provide preliminary evidence about the balance of power in friendship. In an interview study, Davidson and Duberman (1982) asked undergraduate students to describe conversations with a same-sex best friend. Information was also obtained about influence patterns in the relationship. Sample questions included, "When you and your friend argue, which one of you is more likely to 'win'?" and "When you and your friend make plans, which of you usually makes the final decision?" Approximately half the participants indicated that their relationship with a best friend was equal

in power. Importantly, however, many people depicted their best friendship as unequal in power. One out of every four participants indicated that one partner was dominant and that both friends accepted this pattern. The remaining participants (25%) reported ongoing struggles for dominance in their friendship. Hence, as these data indicate, power inequality does indeed exist in some friendships.

A study by Parker and deVries (1993) also suggested that dominance is relevant to same-sex friendship. These researchers compared men's and women's ratings of the importance and frequency of controlling what went on in a friendship. Control was defined as "having influence . . . over what happens" in the friendship (p. 620). In comparison to women, men placed more personal importance on having control, and reported having more control in their friendships. Men also gave lower ratings of friendship quality (e.g., self-disclosure, appreciation, understanding) than did women. Unfortunately, Parker and deVries (1993) did not test the association between perceived control and friendship quality. Together, these two studies show that power imbalances can be identified in same-sex friendships.

Power may affect friendship quality in at least two ways. First, given cultural norms endorsing equality in friendship, unequal relationships may be perceived as unconventional and deficient. In addition, power imbalance may also lead to interactional patterns that detract from relationship satisfaction. McWilliams and Blumstein (1991) described a popular woman who regularly arrived late when meeting her less popular friend. Eventually, the less popular friend started to dislike this treatment and decided that her friendship with the popular woman was not rewarding.

The current study was designed to examine systematically the impact of gender and dominance on the quality of same-sex friendships. In an effort to assess facets of friendship quality that are important to *both* women and men, several multiitem scales were used. First, to replicate the types of questions often asked in friendship research (e.g., how close do you feel to this friend, how satisfied are you with the friendship), a set of items was compiled assessing subjective feelings of emotional closeness. Second, Spanier's (1976) Satisfaction Scale was included. This is a widely used measure of relationship functioning that includes several questions about conflict. Spanier (1976) reported that the items could be used with dyadic relationships other than marital dyads. The scale has not been tested on same-sex friendships, however. In a study of heterosexual married and divorced individuals, Spanier (1976) did not test for gender differences.

A third measure included was Rubin's (1970) Liking Scale. Rubin (1973, p. 220) characterized this scale as measuring the "task-related sort of liking we have referred to as respect." He has further noted that the Liking Scale may be biased toward the assessment of "such stereotypically male characteristics as maturity, intelligence, and good judgment. It asks whether the respondent would vote for [his/her] partner in an election, and . . . recommend the partner for a responsible job" (p. 220). Despite the potentially masculine slant of the

Liking Scale, however, a study asking college students to rate their liking for a same-sex best friend found no gender differences (Rubin, 1973).

Fourth, because the sharing of personal information is often seen as a sign of closeness in a relationship, the Self-Disclosure Inventory (Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983; Miller & Kenny, 1986) was also included. Miller et al. (1983) found that women disclosed more to their same-sex friends than did men. Finally, Wright's (1985) ADF-F scale was included. This measures five different types of rewards provided by friends. Several items "were defined and operationalized to reflect activity-centeredness and a utilitarian focus" (Duck & Wright, 1993, p. 724). Although these items seem to capture aspects of friendship that are of special relevance to men, several studies of same-sex friendships by Wright and his colleagues have found that women consistently score higher than men on these five types of rewards (Duck & Wright, 1993; Wright, 1985; Wright & Scanlon, 1991). Together, these measures provide a comprehensive assessment of the quality of a friendship.

This research addressed three major issues. A first goal was to compare the quality of men's and women's friendships using diverse measures of quality. Based on previous research, it was predicted that compared to men, women would rate their same-sex friendships higher on emotional closeness, self-disclosure, and rewards. A second goal of this research was to demonstrate that at least some young adults experience unequal-power friendships. A third goal was to investigate the association between the balance of power and friendship quality. We predicted that equal-power relationships would be rated higher in quality than would unequal relationships. To test these hypotheses, young adult participants provided information about the quality of two of their same-sex friendships, one that they viewed as equal in power and one they viewed as unequal in power.

METHOD

Participants

Undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) completed a questionnaire asking detailed questions about their current same-sex friendships. From an initial pool of 334 participants, 114 met all eligibility requirements for inclusion in the final sample. These students currently had both an equal-power and an unequal-power same-sex friendship. Additionally, respondents' answers to the question of "Who has more influence in your friendship?" had to be "Both of us equally" for the equal-power friendships, and had to indicate that one person had more influence than the other in the unequal-power friendship.¹

The final sample of 54 men and 60 women did not differ significantly from the initial pool in age, gender, or ethnic background. Their mean age was 19 years old; over two thirds were first-year college students. The self-reported

ethnic background of the final sample was 44% Asian American, 34% Caucasian/European American, 13% Chicano/Latino, 5% students of mixed ethnicity, and 4% African American.

Procedure

Participants completed an anonymous questionnaire regarding two same-sex friendships. A section on equal-power friendship explained that "In some friendships both friends share or take turns organizing and planning what they do together. In these friendships neither friend has more influence or more of a say about what happens in the friendship than the other person." Respondents were asked if they currently had a relationship similar to this description. To verify that they were in fact thinking of a friendship that was equal in power, participants were also asked "Who do you think has more influence in your friendship?" Response categories were "I have more influence," "Both of us equally," and "My friend has more influence." Respondents who did not indicate equal influence were excluded from the analyses. Participants answered many questions about their equal-power relationship.

A second section of the questionnaire on unequal-power friendship explained that "In some friendships one friend takes the lead in organizing or planning what they do together. In these friendships one friend has more influence or more of a say about what happens in the friendship than the other person." Questions about this unequal-power friendship were identical to those for the equal-power friendship. Respondents who did not indicate unequal influence were excluded from the analyses. The order of presentation of the equal-power and unequal-power friendships was counterbalanced.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire began with two pages of questions about the participant's own background and attitudes. Next, participants completed identical questions about the quality of their equal-power and unequal-power friendships. Questions about the frequency of contact and the duration of the friendship followed. Then, measures of dominance asked who had more influence and who generally made the decisions in the friendship. Next, measures of relationship quality assessed emotional closeness, satisfaction, liking, self-disclosure, and rewards. Participants then described their friends' background and the activities they engaged in with the friend. Finally, to illustrate in a more personal way the nature of power in same-sex friendships, four open-ended questions about influence were included ("What are the positive things about this friendship?," "What are the negative things about this friendship?," "Please give two examples of how each friend has equal influence/one friend has more influence in this friendship," and "What are the reasons for each friend having equal influence/one friend having more influence in your friendship?").

Areas of Dominance

To elaborate the general categorization of a friendship as equal or unequal in power, four questions assessed dominance in specific types of interactions between friends. Similar to the method used by Davidson and Duberman (1982), participants were asked, "Who usually wins when you argue?", "Who takes charge of dealing with problems, starting discussions, initiating meetings?", "Who is more assertive in the friendship?", and "Who makes most decisions about what activities you and your friend attend/engage in?" Three response categories were given: 1 = *mostly me*, 2 = *both equally*, and 3 = *mostly my friend*. All items were positively correlated with one another. In equal-power friendships, four out of six possible correlations were significant at the .05 level or less (mean $r = .25$). In unequal-power friendships, six out of six possible correlations were significant at the .01 level (average $r = .62$). The responses were later recoded into two categories: 1 = *unequal power* and 2 = *equal power*. Higher scores indicated greater equality.

Emotional Closeness Scale

Eight items assessed perceptions of emotional closeness in the friendship (see Appendix). These items, similar to those often used in friendship research, concerned feelings of closeness to the friend, commitment to continuing the relationship, expectations that the relationship would continue, similarity and common interests, overall satisfaction with the friendship, and a rating of how "intimate or personal" the relationship is. Examples include, "Currently, how close do you feel to this friend?", "In the next year, are you and your friend likely to become closer or to drift apart?", and "Currently, how intimate or personal is your relationship with this friend?" Each item was rated from 1 to 7 with higher ratings indicating greater emotional closeness. A closeness index was calculated by summing the eight ratings with scale scores ranging from 8 to 56. The standardized alpha for Closeness was .94 in equal-power friendships and .92 in unequal-power friendships.

Satisfaction Scale

Seven items from the Satisfaction subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) measured general relationship functioning and conflict. This scale is often used to measure satisfaction in marital dyads. Wording was modified to make items suitable for friendship (e.g., "How often do you and your partner quarrel?" became "How often do you and your friend quarrel?"). Each item was rated on a scale ranging from 1 ("Never") to 7 ("All the time"). The sum of all seven items was used as an index of satisfaction, with scores ranging from 7 to 49. The standardized alpha for Satisfaction was .59 in equal-power friendships and .69 in unequal-power friendships.

Liking Scale

The nine-item Liking Scale (Rubin, 1973) measured participants' feelings of affection and respect for their friend. Sample items include "I think my friend is unusually well-adjusted" and "My friend is one of the most likable people I

know." Items were rated on 7-point scales from 1 ("Not at all true") to 7 ("Completely true"). A total Liking score was calculated by summing the nine ratings for each friendship. Liking Scale scores ranged from 9 to 63. The standardized alpha for Liking was .87 in equal-power friendships and .93 in unequal-power friendships.

Self-Disclosure Inventory

Eight items from the Self-Disclosure Inventory (Miller & Kenny, 1986; Miller et al., 1983) measured how much personal information participants had told their friend. For example, "How much have you told your friend about your personal habits?" and "How much have you told your friend about your deepest feelings?" A modified disclosure rating scale was used, ranging from 1 = *Nothing* to 5 = *Everything*. A Self-Disclosure Index score was calculated by summing the eight items for each friendship, for a possible range of 8 to 40. The standardized alpha for Self-Disclosure was .91 for both equal-power and unequal-power friendships.

Rewards Scale

Five subscales adapted from the Acquaintance Description Form—Final (Wright, 1985, 1991) were used to assess the instrumental and emotional benefits received from each friendship. Four items from each of the five subscales were used. *Stimulation Value* is the degree to which a participant regards a friend as interesting, stimulating, and capable of enhancing one's knowledge or range of activities. Sample items include "When we get together to work on a task or a project, my friend can stimulate me to think of new ways to approach jobs and solve problems," and "My friend can come up with thoughts and ideas that give me new and different things to think about." *Utility Value* is the degree to which a friend is perceived as willing to use her/his time and personal resources to help the respondent meet needs or reach personal goals. Sample items from this subscale are "If I were short of cash and needed money in a hurry, I could count on my friend to be willing to loan it to me," and "If I were sick or hurt and my friend was around, I could count on him/her to do things that would make it easier to take." *Self-Affirmation Value* is the degree to which a friend is seen as recognizing and promoting expression of the other friend's important and highly valued self-attributes. Illustrative items are "My friend makes it easy for me to express my most important qualities in my everyday life," and "My friend understands the personal goals and ideals that are most important to me and encourages me to pursue them." *Ego Support Value* is the degree to which a friend is supportive, nonthreatening, and helps the respondent to maintain a positive self-image. This subscale includes such items as "If I accomplish something that makes me look especially competent or skillful, I can count on my friend to notice it and appreciate my ability," and "If I have some success or good fortune, I can count on my friend to be happy and congratulatory about it." *Maintenance Difficulty* is the degree to which it is frustrating, inconvenient, or unpleasant to be with a friend because of his or her habits, mannerisms, or personal

characteristics. Items from this subscale include "My friend's ways of dealing with people make him/her rather difficult to get along with," and "When we have a disagreement or misunderstanding, I can count on my friend to listen to my side of the story in a patient and understanding way." These items were scored so that a high score always meant less difficulty. Following Wright, some items were rated for frequency, ranging from 1 = *Never* to 6 = *Always*. Other items were rated for certainty, ranging from 1 = *Definitely not* to 6 = *Definitely*. Slightly modified versions of Wright's response options were used in the current study.² A composite Rewards score was calculated by summing all 20 items separately for equal-power and unequal-power friendships. The total Rewards Scale scores ranged from 20 to 120. The standardized alpha for Rewards was .81 in equal friendships and .87 in unequal friendships.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prior to testing our main hypotheses, we compared the length of the relationship and frequency of contact between friends in equal-power and unequal power friendships. Previous research suggested that friendship quality may be higher in relationships of longer duration and with more frequent contact (Hays, 1985, 1988). In this study, however, no differences in duration or frequency were found. Paired *t*-tests revealed no significant difference between the duration of equal- and unequal-power friendships, both averaging 2 to 3 years in length ($t [113] = -.66, p > .10$, two-tailed). Paired *t*-tests found no significant differences in the frequency of contact between equal- and unequal-power friends, both averaging two visits each week over the past 3 months ($t [111] = -.37, p > .10$, two-tailed).

For the unequal-power friendships, we also compared quality ratings given by participants who said *they* had more influence with participants who said *their friend* had more influence in the friendship. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) comparing ratings of participants who said "I have more influence" versus participants who said "My friend has more influence" revealed no significant difference (all $ps > .10$). Consequently, these two groups were combined into a single unequal-power friendship category for all analyses. We also conducted exploratory analyses comparing friendships in which partners were similar or different in ethnic background. No significant differences in ratings of friendship quality were found between people whose friend was of the same or different ethnic background ($ps > .05$).

We predicted that there would be main effects of both gender and power on ratings of friendship quality. A mixed-model MANOVA tested the between-group effect of gender and the within-group effect of power on the five quality measures. There were no interactions between gender and relative power in the multivariate or univariate tests (all $ps > .05$). As a result, we report the effects of gender and power separately in the following sections.

Table 1

Women's and Men's Mean Scores on Scales Assessing Friendship Quality

Scale	Women		Men		F	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Emotional Closeness	42.1	6.2	40.4	5.7	1.59	n. s.
Satisfaction	36.3	5.6	33.6	5.5	.42	n. s.
Liking	44.6	7.6	42.8	6.1	3.53	n. s.
Self-Disclosure	30.8	4.7	28.1	5.9	5.87	.017
Rewards	97.4	13.8	91.6	12.9	10.51	.002
Stimulation	18.8	3.6	18.4	3.5	1.04	n. s.
Utility	16.4	2.4	15.0	3.1	7.30	.008
Affirmation	21.8	3.6	20.3	3.5	1.96	n. s.
Ego Support	21.1	3.9	19.3	3.8	7.01	.009
Maintenance Difficulty	19.3	3.6	18.8	2.6	.04	n. s.

Note. $N = 114$ (60 women, 54 men), dfs for all tests = 1, 109. Higher scores indicate higher quality. Means are for both equal-power and unequal-power friendships combined. Significance levels are based on univariate F -tests (identical to independent t -tests) for each variable.

Gender and the Quality of Friendship

We predicted that women would report higher quality in their friendships than men. In the Gender \times Power MANOVA for overall quality, gender had a marginally significant multivariate main effect ($F [5, 105] = 2.19, p = .06$). As shown in Table 1, compared to men, women gave higher ratings of quality for each of the dependent variables. Univariate F -tests (identical to t -tests) indicated statistically significant differences for only two measures, however. Women rated their friendships as involving significantly greater self-disclosure and providing more rewards than did men. To determine the magnitude of these gender differences, we used statistical procedures for calculating effect sizes (η^2 , eta-squared). According to Cohen (1977), an η^2 of .01 is small, an η^2 of .06 is medium, and an η^2 of .14 is large. The effect size for gender was moderate on ratings of self-disclosure ($\eta^2 = .09$), and small on ratings of rewards ($\eta^2 = .03$). These results are consistent with earlier findings that women report greater self-disclosure and rewards in their friendships than do men (e.g., Sherrod, 1989; Winstead, 1986).

To gain a better understanding of possible differences between women's and men's friendships, we examined the five specific types of rewards assessed by the ADF-F. An exploratory mixed-model MANOVA tested the effects of gender and power on mean ratings of Stimulation, Utility, Self-Affirmation, Ego Support, and Maintenance Difficulty. There were no significant interactions between gender and power in the multivariate or univariate F -tests (all $ps > .05$). As shown in Table 1, there was much commonality in the way men and women evaluated the rewards in their friendships. Both genders rated their

friendships as equally interesting (Stimulation), equally supportive of their personal qualities (Self-Affirmation), and equally easy to maintain (Maintenance Difficulty). Representative responses to the open-ended question "What are the positive things about this friendship?" reflected these themes. Both women and men emphasized being able to trust their friends and to count on them for help. One woman wrote, "I can trust her because I've known her for so long." Another woman said, "She'll help me out if I need something." Similarly, a man described his friend as "understanding about my feelings and needs, [a] loyal person, generous with time." Another man said, "I know he'd be there for me if I needed him."

At the same time, significant gender differences were found on two of the five Rewards subscales. Women rated their friendships higher on Utility, indicating that they could count on their friend to provide material assistance more than did men. Women also rated their friendships higher on Ego Support, indicating that their friends noticed and appreciated their abilities and congratulated them on good fortune. The effect of gender on both these variables was moderate in size, $\eta^2 = .06$. Thus, women reported greater instrumental support and validation from their friends than did men. These differences are consistent with research on same-sex friendships showing that compared to men, women generally report higher rewards on all of the ADF-F scales (Duck & Wright, 1993; Wright, 1985; Wright & Scanlon, 1991).

In summary, the results of this study replicated earlier research showing that women evaluate their same-sex friendships higher in quality than do men. This generalization was qualified in two ways, however. First, gender differences were found in ratings of self-disclosure and some rewards, but not in ratings of emotional closeness, liking, or satisfaction. Second, the size of the significant gender differences ranged from small to moderate. The relatively small mean differences between women and men should not overshadow the considerable overlap in their evaluation of their friendships.

Balance of Power in Friendship

An important goal of this research was to demonstrate the existence of unequal-power friendships and to examine the impact of power imbalances on the quality of same-sex friendships. How common are unequal-power friendships? From an initial pool of 334 students who completed friendship questionnaires for this research, 52% indicated that they currently had *both* an equal-power and an unequal-power friendship. An additional 8% reported having only an unequal-power friendship. Together, 60% of the sample were currently involved in a friendship that they perceived as unequal. Only 40% of respondents indicated that all their same-sex friendships were equal in power. These findings refute the assumption that friendships by their nature are invariably relationships of equality and power sharing.

There is some reason to expect that a higher proportion of men than women

Table 2

Mean Scores on Items Assessing Dominance
in Equal-Power and Unequal-Power Friendships

Item	Equal		Unequal		F	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Who usually wins when you argue?	1.7	.4	1.4	.5	12.81	.000
Who takes charge of dealing with problems, starting discussions, initiating meetings?	1.6	.5	1.2	.4	1.36	n. s.
Who is more assertive in the friendship?	1.7	.5	1.2	.4	5.95	.016
Who makes most decisions about what activities you and your friend attend/engage in?	1.8	.4	1.2	.4	5.60	.020

Note. $N = 114$ (60 women, 54 men), dfs for all items = 1, 100. Items were originally rated as "mostly me," "both equally," or "mostly my friend," and were later recoded into two categories: 1 = unequal power and 2 = equal power. Higher scores indicate greater equality. Means are for both women and men combined. Significance levels are based on univariate F -tests (identical to paired t -tests) for each item.

might report having unequal-power friendships. American women have been found to be stronger advocates than men for power equality in heterosexual dating and marriage (Peplau & Campbell, 1989). If this gender difference in desire for equality extends to friendship, we might expect more women than men to report having equal-power friendships. Results from the present study did not support this prediction. Chi-square analyses yielded no significant differences between the proportions of women and men who reported having only equal-power friendships, only unequal-power friendships, or both types of friendship.

To provide a better understanding of the differences between equal-power and unequal-power friendships, participants rated four dominance behaviors that might occur in their friendships. Questions concerned which friend usually won arguments, took charge of problems, was more assertive, and made most decisions about joint activities. A mixed-model MANOVA compared mean ratings for Dominance behaviors by gender and power as shown in Table 2. No significant multivariate interactions or main effects of gender on Dominance ($ps > .05$) were found. As expected, there was a significant multivariate main effect of the balance of power ($F [1, 97] = 5.73, p < .001$) on dominance behaviors. In equal-power friendships, both friends shared influence. In unequal-power friendships, one friend behaved in more dominant ways. Univariate F -tests (identical to paired t -tests) indicated that participants were more likely to report that both friends won arguments, were assertive, and made decisions about the pair's activities in their equal-power relationships than in their unequal-power friendships ($ps < .05$).

These results suggest some of the dyadic behaviors that may lead partners

to view their friendship as equal or unequal in power. They also lend further support to the utility of the distinction between these two types of dyads. Participants' open-ended responses to the request "Please give two examples of how one friend has more influence/how each friend has equal influence in this friendship" further support the patterns revealed by the statistical analyses. Descriptions of equal-power friendships emphasized the mutuality and the "we-ness" of the relationship. One woman wrote, "We both listen to each other because we know our differences will bring up different points of view about the same thing." One man said, "We both take turns deciding on things to do." Other respondents wrote, "We both initiate activities" (male respondent) and "We don't boss each other around" (female respondent). Themes of mutual respect and turn-taking were common in these friendships.

In contrast, the depictions of unequal-power friendships highlighted asymmetries. One young man wrote, "He can convince me to do things more easily than I can convince him," and a young woman wrote, "Most of the time she always has to have her way." The absence of give-and-take between these friends was further echoed in such statements as "She sets up every meeting time and place, regardless of whether it conflicts with my schedule" (female respondent) and "I can get him to do stuff he's not sure he wants to do . . . I make more plans and he goes along" (male respondent). Participants characterized unequal-power friendships as relatively one-sided, and depicted dominant friends as unyielding. Contrary to popular thought about the inherent equality of friendship, many young adults do experience unequal power in their friendships.

Power and the Quality of Friendship

We predicted that young adults would give more positive evaluations of the quality of equal-power friendships than of unequal-power friendships. A Gender \times Power mixed-model MANOVA comparing quality measures indicated that power had a significant multivariate main effect ($F [1, 109] = 841.40, p < .001$). As shown in Table 3, significant univariate effects were also found for all five measures of quality (all $ps < .01$). Strong support was found for the hypothesis that equal power is associated with higher friendship quality. Most effect sizes were large. The smallest effect size was found for the Liking Scale ($\eta^2 = .07$), which measured feelings of respect for a partner. Participants reported higher Closeness ($\eta^2 = .25$), Satisfaction ($\eta^2 = .86$), Self-Disclosure ($\eta^2 = .59$), and Rewards ($\eta^2 = .97$) with equal-power than unequal-power friends.

In order to pinpoint more precisely how equal- and unequal-power friendships differed in quality, a second mixed-model MANOVA compared scores on the five Rewards subscales for the two types of friendships. There was a significant multivariate main effect for power ($F [1, 111] = 110.52, p < .001$) indicating that equal-power friendships provided more overall rewards than unequal-power friendships. As shown in Table 3, univariate F -tests found that equal-power friendships were rated significantly higher than unequal-power

Table 3

Mean Scores on Scales Assessing Friendship Quality in Equal-Power
versus Unequal-Power Friendships

Scale	Equal		Unequal		F	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Emotional Closeness	44.2	6.8	38.4	9.5	36.45	.000
Satisfaction	36.6	7.0	33.4	7.4	649.49	.000
Liking	46.5	8.9	41.0	11.7	8.10	.000
Self-Disclosure	30.6	6.2	28.4	6.5	158.60	.01
Rewards	100.2	14.5	89.2	20.0	3671.21	.000
Stimulation	19.6	4.3	17.6	4.7	10.25	.01
Utility	16.6	3.1	14.9	4.0	41.59	.000
Affirmation	22.3	3.7	19.8	5.2	525.48	.000
Ego Support	21.1	4.2	19.4	5.6	2.21	n. s.
Maintenance Difficulty	20.5	4.1	17.7	4.6	1.44	n. s.

Note. $N = 114$ (60 women, 54 men), dfs for all tests = 1, 109. Higher scores indicate higher quality. Means are for both women and men combined. Significance levels are based on univariate F -tests (identical to paired t -tests) for each variable.

friendships in terms of Stimulation, Self-Affirmation, and Utility ($ps < .01$). Somewhat surprisingly, power was not related to feeling that a friend was supportive of one's successes (Ego Support) or was relatively easy to be with (Maintenance Difficulty). Equal-power friendships were no more likely than unequal-power friendships to be associated with a higher likelihood of support from a friend or finding the friendship frustrating and inconvenient.

In summary, these young adults reported that their egalitarian friendships were more satisfying, provided a greater sense of emotional closeness, encouraged greater self-disclosure, and were more interesting and helpful than their unequal friendships. It is important to note that unequal-power relationships were not without their merits. Although such relationships were judged relatively lower in quality, they were not evaluated negatively. For instance, on the Emotional Closeness scale (range 8–56) unequal-power friendships received an average rating of 38, compared to 44 for equal-power relationships. Similarly, scores on the Self-Disclosure Inventory (range 5–50) were fairly similar between unequal-power friendships ($M = 28$) and equal-power friendships ($M = 31$). Further, unequal relationships were perceived as just as likely to provide self-validation and were no more likely to be prone to conflict. When asked to list the positive aspects of their unequal-power friendships participants wrote, "She always encouraged me to come to college and pursue my goals," "She makes me feel better about myself and tries to make me more confident about myself," "[He] encourages me to do better . . . he keeps telling me 'You can do it!'" "He is always there to support me." Although unequal-power friendships were lower in overall quality compared to equal-power friendships, they provided

certain valued rewards such as support and encouragement. This may help to explain why equal and unequal-power friendships did not differ in their longevity or in the frequency of contact between friends.

CONCLUSIONS

Before highlighting the major findings from this study, two potential limitations in the research deserve comment. First, the sample was relatively young. Most participants were between the ages of 18 and 20. The friendships of these young adults may differ in important ways from those of older adults whose friendship experiences are shaped by different values, motivations, and opportunities (Hays, 1988). Further, our finding that equal- and unequal-power friendships were comparable in duration among college students may not generalize to older adults whose friendships often span many years. Second, volunteer bias may have affected our results. There is reason to believe that men are more reluctant than women to volunteer for relationship research and that men who do participate may have somewhat less traditional attitudes than their nonvolunteering male peers (Hill, Rubin, Peplau, & Willard, 1979; Lewis, Winstead, & Derlega, 1989). If such factors affected the present study, the results might underestimate the magnitude of gender differences in self-disclosure or other aspects of friendship. Thus, caution is necessary in generalizing these findings to other populations.

Several major findings from this research are noteworthy. First, most young adults evaluated their relationships positively. Consistent with earlier research, however, women described their same-sex friendships as somewhat higher in quality than did men. In particular, women reported higher levels of self-disclosure and greater interpersonal rewards, although gender differences were not found for emotional closeness, satisfaction, and liking. Second, this research clearly demonstrated that at least some young adults experience unequal-power friendships. Responses to specific questions about dominance and open-ended relationship descriptions indicate the utility of distinguishing between equal-power and unequal-power friendships, and challenge the view that friendships are invariably egalitarian. These data support recent theoretical analyses asserting that power hierarchies do exist in friendship (Adams & Blieszner, 1994; McWilliams & Blumstein, 1991).

Third, findings strongly confirmed the hypothesis that the balance of power is associated with friendship quality. Both women and men rated equal-power friendships as more emotionally close, satisfying, enjoyable, disclosing, and rewarding than unequal-power friendships. The effect sizes for these differences were relatively large. Our correlational design does not enable us to identify the direction of causation in this power-quality association. One plausible interpretation is that unequal power, reflected in the lack of turn-taking or reciprocity, detracts from the quality of a friendship. Further, in the context of cultural norms endorsing equality as the ideal for same-sex friends, an

imbalance of power may lead friends to emphasize the flaws in their relationship. Individuals who enter a friendship expecting mutuality but fail to receive it might become dissatisfied with these friends over time (McWilliams & Blumstein, 1991). It is also possible, however, that the causal direction flows in reverse. People who have close, satisfying relationships may attempt to maintain their successful friendships by sharing decision making, minimizing status differences between partners (Hays, 1988), and fostering the positive illusion that their relationship conforms to the cultural ideal of equality (Murray & Holmes, 1996).

Our findings address the possibility that male–female differences in friendship quality may stem from gender differences in power. Do women describe their friendships as more intimate and rewarding because women's friendships are more often egalitarian? According to our results, the answer is "no." We found virtually identical proportions of men and women reporting that their current friendships are equal in power or that they have both equal and unequal friendships. Further, although gender and power each had main effects on friendship quality, no interaction effects were found. Put differently, gender differences in friendship quality occurred in equal-power friendships as well as in unequal-power friendships. In the domain of friendship quality, gender and power may have independent effects. Researchers interested in the origins of gender differences in self-disclosure and the rewards of friendship will need to look beyond a power explanation.

Finally, it is also noteworthy that the effects of power on friendship quality were stronger and more pervasive than those of gender. We found significant gender differences on only two of five main indices of quality, and these effects were relatively small in magnitude. In contrast, we found significant differences between equal- and unequal-power friendships on every measure of friendship quality, and these were often substantial in size. These findings suggest that researchers interested in understanding the quality of friendships would do well to pay increased attention to the importance of the balance of power between friends.

Initial submission: May 3, 1996

Initial acceptance: July 29, 1996

Final acceptance: December 6, 1996

NOTES

1. Of the total sample of 334 participants, there were 61 (18%) who either said they had an equal friendship and indicated unequal influence ($n = 16$) or said they had an unequal friendship and then indicated equal influence ($n = 52$). These n s do not total 61 because each participant answered questions about equal and unequal power friends. We compared two groups: one that was composed of these 61 participants, and a second that was composed of the 114 participants in our final sample. Statistical analyses yielded no significant differences between these two groups in terms of frequency of contact or duration of friendship ($ps > .05$). There were also no statistically significant differences between these two groups in terms of the

key dependent measures (satisfaction, closeness, liking, etc.). We chose not to include the 61 participants because they did not meet our operational definition of people who had equal-power and unequal-power friendships.

We do not know why some people said that they had an "unequal power" friendship but also indicated "equal" influence in that relationship. Some respondents may have misread the instructions. Others may have been concerned about the social desirability of their answers: after reading the paragraph on influence in friendship, they may have realized that they had just indicated having a nonnormative friendship. As a result, they may have attempted to amend this by stating that their friendship was actually closer to the equal-power norm.

2. The original subscale items were rated using one of two 6-point scales. According to Wright (1985), several items were best answered by responses ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 6 (*Always*), whereas other items were best answered by responses ranging from 1 (*Definitely not*) to 6 (*Definitely*). In pilot tests, respondents reported being confused regarding which scale should be used for which items. To simplify responding, questions were grouped according to whether respondents should indicate the frequency or certainty of receiving rewards. The word "friend" was substituted for the original signifier "TP" (Target Person) to refer to participants' friend.

REFERENCES

- Adams, R. G., & Blieszner, R. (1994). An integrative conceptual framework for friendship research. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 11, 163-184.
- Allan, G. (1986). Friendships and care for elderly people. *Ageing and Society*, 6, 1-12.
- Blieszner, R., & Adams, R. G. (1992). *Adult friendship*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Cohen, J. (1977). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. New York: Academic Press.
- Davidson, L. R., & Duberman, L. (1982). Friendship: Communication and interactional patterns in same-sex dyads. *Sex Roles*, 8, 809-822.
- Duck, S., & Wright, P. H. (1993). Reexamining gender differences in same-gender friendships: A close look at two kinds of data. *Sex Roles*, 28, 709-727.
- Foa, U., & Foa, U. (1974). *Societal structures of the mind*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas.
- Hays, R. B. (1985). A longitudinal study of friendship development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48, 909-924.
- Hays, R. B. (1988). Friendship. In S. W. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships: Theory, research, and interventions* (pp. 391-408). New York: Wiley.
- Henley, N. M. (1977). *Body politics*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Hill, C. T., Rubin, Z., Peplau, L. A., & Willard, S. G. (1979). The volunteer couple: Sex differences, couple commitment and participation in research on interpersonal relationships. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 42, 415-420.
- Huston, T. L. (1983). Power. In H. H. Kelley, E. Berscheid, A. Christensen, J. H. Harvey, T. L. Huston, G. Levinger, E. McClintock, L. A. Peplau, & D. R. Peterson, *Close relationships* (pp. 169-219). New York: W. H. Freeman.
- Jones, D. C. (1991). Friendship satisfaction and gender: An examination of sex differences in contributors to friendship satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 8, 167-185.
- Karweit, N., & Hansell, S. (1983). Sex differences in adolescent relationships: Friendship and status. In J. L. Epstein & N. Karweit (Eds.), *Friends in school: Patterns of selection and influence in secondary schools* (pp. 115-130). New York: Academic Press.
- Lewis, R. J., Winstead, B. A., & Derlega, V. J. (1989). Gender differences in volunteering for friendship research. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 4, 623-632.
- McWilliams, S., & Blumstein, P. (1991). Evaluative hierarchy in personal relationships. In E. J. Lawler, B. Markovsky, C. Ridgeway, & H. Walker (Eds.), *Advances in group processes* (Vol. 8, pp. 67-88). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Miller, L. C., Berg, J. H., & Archer, R. L. (1983). Openers: Individuals who elicit intimate self-disclosure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 44, 1234-1244.

- Miller, L. C., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). Reciprocity of self-disclosure at the individual and dyadic levels: A social relations analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 713-719.
- Murray, S. L., & Holmes, J. G. (1996). The construction of relationship realities. In G. O. Fletcher & J. Fitness (Eds.), *Knowledge structures in close relationships: A social psychological approach* (pp. 91-120). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Parker, S., & deVries, B. (1993). Patterns of friendship for women and men in same and cross-sex relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 10, 617-626.
- Peplau, L. A., & Campbell, S. M. (1989). The balance of power in dating and marriage. In J. Freeman (Ed.), *Women: A feminist perspective* (4th ed., pp. 121-137). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
- Peplau, L. A., Hill, C. T., & Rubin, Z. (1993). Sex-role attitudes in dating and marriage: A 15-year follow-up of the Boston Couples Study. *Journal of Social Issues*, 49(3), 31-52.
- Reis, H. T., Senchak, M., & Solomon, B. (1985). Sex differences in the intimacy of social interaction: Further examination of potential explanations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48, 1204-1217.
- Rose, S. M. (1985). Same and cross-sex friendships and the psychology of homosociality. *Sex Roles*, 12, 63-74.
- Rubin, Z. (1970). Measurement of romantic love. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 16, 265-273.
- Rubin, Z. (1973). *Liking and loving: An invitation to social psychology*. San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Rubin, Z. (1980). *Children's friendships*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sapadin, L. A. (1988). Friendship and gender: Perspectives of professional men and women. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 5, 387-403.
- Sherrod, D. (1989). The influence of gender on same-sex friendships. In C. Hendrick (Ed.), *Close relationships* (pp. 164-186). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Solano, C. H. (1986). People without friends. In V. J. Derlega & B. A. Winstead (Eds.), *Friendship and social interaction* (pp. 227-246). New York: Springer.
- Spanier, G. B. (1976). Measuring dyadic adjustment: New scales for assessing the quality of marriage and similar dyads. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 11, 15-28.
- Weiss, L., & Lowenthal, M. F. (1975). Life course perspectives on friendship. In M. F. Lowenthal, M. Thurnher, D. Chiriboga, & Associates (Eds.), *Four stages of life* (pp. 48-61). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Weiss, R. S. (1974). The provisions of social relationships. In Z. Rubin (Ed.), *Doing unto others* (pp. 17-26). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Wheeler, L., Reis, H., & Nezelek, J. (1983). Loneliness, social interaction, and sex roles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45, 943-953.
- Winstead, B. A. (1986). Sex differences in same-sex friendships. In V. J. Derlega & B. A. Winstead (Eds.), *Friendship and social interaction* (pp. 81-99). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Wright, P. H. (1985). The Acquaintance Description Form. In S. Duck & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Understanding personal relationships* (pp. 39-62). London: Sage.
- Wright, P. H. (1991). *The Acquaintance Description Form: What it is and how to use it*. Unpublished manuscript, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.
- Wright, P. H., & Scanlon, M. B. (1991). Gender role orientations and friendship: Some attenuation, but gender differences abound. *Sex Roles*, 24, 551-566.

APPENDIX**Emotional Closeness Items**

1. Currently, how close do you feel to this friend?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat		Extremely	

2. How personally committed do you feel to continuing this friendship in the future?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat		Extremely	

3. How likely is it that your relationship with this friend will exist in 1 year?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat		Extremely	

4. In the next year, are you and your friend likely to become closer or to drift apart?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Drift apart			No change		Get closer	

5. How much do you and your friend have in common?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Almost nothing			Some		A great deal	

6. How different or how similar are you and this friend to each other?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very different			Somewhat		Very similar	

7. Overall, how satisfied are you with the friendship as it is?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat		Extremely	

8. Currently, how intimate or personal is your relationship with this friend?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat		Extremely	