

Men's Friendships, Women's Friendships and the Alleged Inferiority of the Latter

Paul H. Wright¹

University of North Dakota

Over a decade of research utilizing a model and technique for the study of same-sex friendships has revealed some unsought and initially unexpected differences between men and women. Relevant aspects of this research are reviewed. Taken as a whole, the findings indicate overall differences between men and women that were readily interpretable in terms of traditional sex roles and socialization practices. However, when differences were found, they were seldom extremely large or glaringly obvious and thus provide no sound basis for predicting the character of the friendship of any particular pair of men or women. Moreover, when the friendships examined were limited to those that were very strong and of long duration, no appreciable sex differences were found. Special attention is given to the contention that women's friendships are inferior to those of men.

Studies of interpersonal attraction often reveal differences between men and women with respect to the ways in which they conduct their same-sex friendships. Booth (1972) and Booth and Hess (1974) studied samples of men and women aged 45 years and older. They concluded that women's friendships, being characterized by more frequent spontaneous activity and by more confiding, were affectively richer than those of men. Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) explored friendships in four age groups ranging from high school through preretirement. They found that male friends tended to emphasize commonality (e.g., shared activities and shared experiences), while female friends tended to emphasize reciprocity (e.g., helping, emotional support, and confiding). Kon and Losenkov (1978) reported similar findings for a large sample of adolescent boys and girls in the Soviet Union (see also Douvan and Adelson, 1966). Wheeler and Nezlak (1977) found such supportive and personalized interaction to be more charac-

¹Correspondence should be sent to Paul H. Wright, University of North Dakota,

teristic of women than men early in their first year of college, although the differences diminished by the end of the year. Davidson (Note 1) reviewed several unpublished studies that converged on the same general conclusion.

It is not unusual to encounter a corollary to these kinds of assumed or observed sex differences: friendships between women are not only different from, but inferior to, those between men. However, it is difficult to estimate just how widespread or deeply entrenched this latter belief is. Statements that women cannot or typically do not form friendships that are as deep or stable as those between men may be found in occasional pronouncements of social scientists; articulate observations of essayists, novelists, and other purveyors of conventional wisdom; and in the homey generalizations of the "person on the street."

Pronouncements from within the social sciences concerning the inferiority of women's friendships are seemingly rare. Perhaps the strongest and best known statement is that of Tiger (1969), who proposed that men, but not women, have a strong predilection to form deep, enduring same-sex bonds. This is presumably a biologically and socially transmitted predilection stemming from the common hazards and pressures that evolutionary history have imposed upon the male in the form of such activities as hunting and warfare. To cooperate was to survive. Because the female has not been subjected to the same or similar hazards, women do not inherit the same bonding capacity.

Derogation of women's friendships seems to be much more common among the purveyors of conventional wisdom. An essay by Lewis (1960) used a line of thinking strikingly similar to that of Tiger in treating friendship as if it were almost exclusively a male prerogative. Brenton (1975) cited a number of literary figures who have made strong statements about women's lack of capacity to form deep or lasting friendships. These include a comment attributed to Simone de Beauvoir that "women's feelings rarely rise to genuine friendships" (Brenton, 1975, p. 142). Such statements are sometimes based on women's assumed superficiality and unpredictability, and sometimes upon their assumed competitiveness for available males. Davidson (Note 1) reviewed a variety of literary sources and concluded that, historically, conceptions of women's friendships have been grossly underrepresented and, when represented, have been cast in an unfavorable light. In other words, the derogation of women's friendships has more often been passive than active. She noted in this regard that films and novels have provided numerous in-depth portrayals of friendships between men, but until recently have seldom provided similar portrayals of friendships between women.

Differing conceptions of men's and women's friendships by the "person on the street" — or, more exactly, the "woman on the street" — have been collected by the author in literally thousands of casual conversations as well as informal but relatively systematic postexperimental interviews with subjects

tested in ongoing research spanning more than 10 years.² When asked about the comparative quality of men's and women's friendships, a clear majority of the women responded that women's friendships were much better because they more often involved personal concern, intimate sharing, and other interaction at an emotional level. Men's friendships were seen as more likely to involve work, business, sports, or, generally speaking, depersonalized activities. However, a sizable minority of the women felt that women's friendships were inferior. In addition to the assumptions cited previously concerning superficiality, etc., these women often felt that a woman's friendship with another woman almost always took second place to any relationship with a man, particularly a romantic relationship. An appreciable number of women clearly expressed what they regarded to be an implicit understanding between women friends: If two women have made arrangements to get together and one of them subsequently has an opportunity to get together with a man, the women's date is automatically cancelled. An overwhelming majority of the men, when asked about the comparative quality of men's and women's friendships, initially responded that they had not given the matter any thought.

A PERSPECTIVE ON SEX DIFFERENCES IN FRIENDSHIP

Given the current state of conjecture and research, it would seem helpful to develop a perspective on men's and women's friendships providing some indication of how much, or how little, to make of the differences that have been found in systematic studies as well as those that are a matter of "common knowledge." One thing that makes statements about qualitative differences in men's and women's friendships suspect, however convincing or articulate those statements may be, is that they are rarely based on a clearly delineated conception of what friendship is. And friendship is a relationship with broad and ambiguous boundaries, allowing for a great deal of variability in subjective definitions (Wright, 1978). Therefore, to be understandable, much less believable, any statement about the relative inferiority of women's friendships should meet three conditions: (1) The statement should be based on a reasonably clear conception of the nature of friendship. (2) It should be demonstrated empirically that men and women actually differ on the dimensions or variables specified in that conception. And (3) the differences must be the kind that can be evaluated,

² It has been a standard practice to conduct relatively informal postsession interviews with subjects since the beginning of the work on friendship in 1968. However, the issue of qualitative differences in men's and women's friendships was not addressed in these interviews until after an exchange of correspondence with a woman who had just published a book on the psychology of women. In answer to a letter concerning some of the earlier sex difference findings on friendship, she responded, "My big question is this: is it possible for two women to really be friends?"

either dichotomously or continuously, with respect to inferiority and superiority.

Concerning the first condition, the findings reported in the remainder of this article were based primarily on research growing out of a conceptual and measurement model of friendship (Wright, 1969, 1974, 1978, Note 2). This model specifies two separate but correlated criteria of friendship strength, four benefits or direct rewards of friendship, and a variable concerning the degree to which the relationship is difficult to maintain. The data were collected in a variety of studies covering more than a 10-year period. In the course of these studies, men and women responded to same-sex associates of different lengths of acquaintance and different levels of friendship. Thus, the perspective that emerged as this research unfolded was based on the differences – and similarities – between men and women on seven friendship variables applied to both long-term and short-term acquaintanceships. While some of this research dealt with substantive problems, most of it was conducted in the course of developing and refining the model and measuring technique. A review of the model is presented in the following section.

For the second condition, a number of sex differences have been uncovered by research utilizing the friendship model. In assessing the significance of these differences, several points must be kept in focus. First, the differences emerged from studies that were not designed to demonstrate sex differences. Initially, the differences were not only unsought but also unexpected. Second, while the differences have been persistent over time and across samples, they have not always been extremely large or glaringly obvious. Finally, following from the second point, the differences reflect widely overlapping distributions. They refer to global men-on-the-average versus women-on-the-average differences. Using these differences to draw firm conclusions about the friendship of any particular pair of men or women would be clearly unwarranted.

For the third condition, there was nothing about the sex differences revealed in research with the friendship model that could be evaluated either objectively or “intrinsicly” with respect to the relative inferiority-superiority of men’s and women’s friendships.

Let us look first at a summary of the friendship model and a brief overview of the technique used to measure the relevant variables. Then we will examine ways in which men and women have been found to differ on these variables.

A CONCEPTUAL AND MEASUREMENT MODEL OF FRIENDSHIP

The Conceptual Model

The friendship model is based on a conception of self that identifies, among other things, four behavioral tendencies that function as self-referent

motives (Wright, 1977). Among the most important of a variety of ways in which these behavioral tendencies may be expressed is through interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the self-referent motives play an important part in interpersonal and person-group relations. In many ways, the friendship relationship is especially well suited to helping the individual fulfill these motives. Each of the self-referent motives will be identified in its relation to friendship.

Friendship is defined as a relationship characterized by voluntary interdependence, in which the individuals involved respond to one another personally, or as persons qua persons. *Voluntary interdependence* (VID) refers to the degree to which the plans and activities of one of the partners are contingent upon those of the other in the absence of outside pressures or constraints toward interaction. The *person-qua-person* (PQP) factor refers to the degree to which the partners react to one another as unique, genuine, and irreplaceable in the relationship. Considered together, these two criteria provide an overall index of friendship strength, or total friendship (TF).

By this definition, friendship involves the partners' mutual willingness to commit free or otherwise uncommitted time to one another, as well as their positive reactions to one another as unique and important individuals. Thus, a strong friendship should provide the person with one means of maintaining a sense of individuality. In so doing, friendship helps fulfill one of the self-referent motives — the individual's tendency to behave in ways that maintain and, when necessary, reaffirm his/her sense of uniqueness and individuality (Fromkin, 1970, 1972).

Friendship provides several other benefits in the form of direct rewards or "values." One of these is *ego support value* (ESV). Some people are valued as friends because they are supportive, encouraging, and generally help the individual maintain an impression of him/herself as a competent, worthwhile person. This value of friendship is closely related to a second self-referent motive: In situations compelling or encouraging self-evaluation, the individual tends to evaluate his/herself or its attributes in a positive or self-enhancing manner (Jones, 1973). Another reward of friendship is *self-affirmation value* (SAV). Some people are valued as friends because they act, react, and generally treat the individual in ways that facilitate the recognition and expression of his/her more important and highly valued self-attributes. This is related to a tendency on the part of the individual to behave in ways that define and reaffirm the specific self-attributes that have important implications for his/her self-concept considered holistically (Secord & Backman, 1965; Bailey, Finney, & Helm, 1975). Yet another potential reward of friendship is *stimulation value* (SV). Some people are valued as friends because they are interesting and stimulating, and they are capable of fostering an expansion in the individual's knowledge, ideas, or perspectives. This reward is related to the orientation that most people have (albeit in varying degrees) to changes in their self-attributes in the direction of growth or positive elaboration (Sherwood, 1970).

A final reward of friendship is *utility value* (UV). Some people are valued as friends because of their willingness and ability to use their own time and re-

sources to help the individual meet his/her needs or reach various personal goals. This particular value of friendship is not related to any specific self-referent motive, but is a tangible way of expressing a personalized interest and concern.

A final point is that friendship is not a relationship that runs smoothly and without tension or strain all the time. Some friendships do, but many do not. A common by-product of the frequent and sometimes intense interaction of a strong friendship — or any relationship involving a high level of interdependence — is an occasional conflict of goals, motives, or momentary wishes. Thus, friendships may be found to vary in their levels of *maintenance difficulty* (MD) as reflected in the amount of time and effort one or both partners spend in clarifying actions or comments, soothing ruffled feelings, or exercising patience and restraint to keep the relationship intact.

Measurement of the Friendship Variables

The Friendship Scales. The variables specified by the friendship model are measured by means of a questionnaire called the Acquaintance Description Form, or ADF (Wright, 1969, 1974). As a result of both substantive and methodological research, this technique has been elaborated in a number of ways since it was originally developed. In its present form, it consists of 80 statements calling for one of seven responses on a 0-6-point scale indicating the extent to which the item in question applies to the subject's relationship with a designated Target Person. Seventy of the statements comprise seven scales, with 10 items each related to Stimulation Value, Utility Value, Maintenance Difficulty, Ego Support Value, Self-Affirmation Value, Voluntary Interdependence, and Person-quasi-Person. The latter two scales measure different aspects of friendship strength and are added together to provide a variable designated as Total Friendship. The maximum score for each variable other than Total Friendship is 60.

The remaining 10 items are globally complementary or noncomplementary statements designed to measure the subject's tendency to respond to his/her Target Person in a generally favorable or unfavorable way. This General Favorability (GF) scale was originally used to correct the substantive scales for the positive or negative biases assumed to result in spuriously high or low scores, and to increase the intercorrelations among the various ADF scales. Until recently, all ADF scores were routinely corrected for General Favorability, and the corrected score was treated as the subject's actual and only score on a given scale. However, it became increasingly clear through subsequent studies that General Favorability reflected not only a response bias (i.e., a tendency to respond to ADF items in a particular way) but also a tendency to react to the Target Person in a generally positive or negative way in actual behavioral or evaluative situations. Therefore, the practice of routinely using GF-corrected scores as the primary score for the various ADF variables has been abandoned in favor of

using uncorrected scores. These uncorrected scores are, however, adjusted to the mean of an appropriate reference sample in the manner described in the following section.

Adjustments to Reference Samples. In order to provide a convenient and stable reference point for interpreting scores on the various ADF scales, two reference samples were developed – one for male and one for female subjects. These reference samples were generated by asking each of a large number of college undergraduates to name a person of his/her own sex and approximate age whom (s)he considered to fall into one of the following categories: Best Friend, Good Friend, Moderate Friend, Friendly Acquaintance, or Formal Acquaintance. Each of these labels was accompanied by a descriptive sketch to provide the subject with a highly specific characterization of the kind of Target Person the researcher wished him/her to consider. The proportion of subjects asked to identify the different categories of Target Persons was varied in a way intended to provide ADF responses that were normally distributed on the Total Friendship scale. Subjects were then asked to use the ADF to describe their self-selected Target Persons. This procedure resulted in responses from 210 males and 296 females that were, as intended, normally distributed on the Total Friendship variable. Means of the various ADF scores for these samples provide reference points for adjusting ADF scores from subsequent samples. The adjustment is made by subtracting the appropriate male or female reference sample mean from each subject's raw score on a given scale and adding a constant of 40. Thus, any adjusted ADF score can be considered high, low, or average to the extent that it differs or fails to differ from the neutral point of 40.

Reliability and Validity. Test-retest correlations for the various ADF scales range from a low of .70 for men's scores on Utility Value to a high of .93 for women's scores on both Self-Affirmation Value and Person-qua-Person. Split-half reliabilities range from .79 for women's scores on Voluntary Interdependence to .94 for men's scores on Ego Support Value. Studies supporting the validity of the different scales for earlier versions of the ADF are reported elsewhere (Wright, 1969, 1974). Extensive validity studies for the current version have been conducted, and a report of these studies is in preparation. The author will gladly honor requests for copies of the ADF and scoring information as well as for advance information on the validity studies.

MEN'S FRIENDSHIPS VERSUS WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIPS

Findings concerning sex differences in friendship have come to light over time from research using different samples and various refinements of the ADF. The samples tested were usually, but not always, college undergraduates. Volunteers were sometimes provided by noncollege clubs, civic organizations, church groups, and the like. Sex differences have not varied markedly as between college

and noncollege subjects. If anything, they have been smaller for college students. However, because we will be relying most heavily on recent research with college students, some caution in generalizing to noncollege populations is clearly in order.

Side by Side Versus Face to Face

Sex differences were found in the first set of substantive, nonmethodological studies utilizing the ADF (Wright & Crawford, 1971). These studies explored the relationship between friendship and various kinds of agreement. No relationship was found between similarity on sociopolitical attitudes and friendship for either men or women. However, men were better friends and considered one another more interesting and stimulating if they agreed, rather than disagreed, on specific day-to-day activities. This was not true of women. Women were better friends and considered one another more interesting and stimulating if they agreed, rather than disagreed, on their "deeper" personal values. This was not true of men.

In a study of self-disclosure and friendship potential, Walker and Wright (1976) found that pairs of minimally acquainted same-sexed subjects made a better start toward becoming friends if one of them had revealed highly intimate things about him/herself than if (s)he had revealed only non-intimate things. This was true for both men and women. However, it was necessary to solicit half again as many male subjects to obtain the number necessary to complete the experiment because so many men refused to follow instructions leading them into intimate self-disclosures. In other words, men who disclosed intimate things about themselves became better friends if they ever overcame their reluctance to engage in intimate self-disclosures. None of the women in the experiment showed a similar reluctance to disclose intimate items of information.

These findings complement and extend those of the investigators cited previously (e.g., Booth & Hess, 1970; Weiss & Lowenthal, 1975). Taken together, they suggest that for men friendship tends to be a side-by-side relationship, with the partners mutually oriented to some external task or activity; while for women friendship tends to be a face-to-face relationship, with the partners mutually oriented to a personalized knowledge of and concern for one another. We shall see later that this generalization had to be modified.

Reactions to Friends at a Given Level: Specificity Versus Holism

Two closely related differences in ADF data relevant to men's versus women's friendships were persistent over time and across samples, but were not always large enough to be obvious. Therefore, they were initially easy to overlook or to dismiss as "chance." These differences were that (1) women typically dif-

ferentiated more clearly and on a wider range of variables when describing acquaintances at different levels of friendship; and (2) intercorrelations among the ADF scores tended to be somewhat higher for women than for men. A recent set of data collected as part of a series of standardizing studies demonstrated these differences.

One hundred sixty-eight females and 97 males from undergraduate classes in psychology provided ADF descriptions of either a Best Friend, Good Friend, Moderate Friend, Friendly Acquaintance, or Formal Acquaintance. The procedure was the same described above for generating the reference samples, and part of the rationale was to determine the extent to which ADF descriptions actually differentiated among different levels of friendship.

After adjustments to the appropriate male or female reference sample mean, the overall mean for each ADF variable was very close to the neutral point of 40. Standard deviations for women's scores were 20.46 for Total Friendship and between 9.00 and 12.01 for all other scales. Standard deviations for men's scores were 18.11 for Total Friendship and between 8.70 and 11.10 for all other scales. Differences among the various ADF means for the different levels of friendship were assessed with analyses of variance followed, where appropriate, by the Newman-Keuls test for individual contrasts. These means, along with *F* ratios and outcomes of the individual contrasts, are presented in Table I.

An examination of Table I reveals that the female subjects did differentiate more clearly among different categories of Target Persons, and on a wider range of scales, than did the males. Note, for example, that the ADF means for women describing a Best Friend are significantly higher than those for women describing a Good Friend on all the scales except Maintenance Difficulty. In contrast to this, the means for men describing a Best Friend are significantly higher than those for men describing a Good Friend only on the scales designed to reflect friendship strength, i.e., VID, PQP and TF. Similarly, at the low levels of friendships, women's means are significantly higher for Friendly Acquaintances than for Formal Acquaintances on seven scales. For men, Friendly Acquaintances are significantly higher only on VID.

Intercorrelations among the various ADF scales for female and male subjects are presented in Table II. All but three of these correlations are higher for female than for male subjects, but in many cases the magnitude of the difference is negligible. The largest and most consistent differences appear to involve either Maintenance Difficulty or Voluntary Interdependence. Tests for the significance of the difference between correlation coefficients indicated that the following relationships, all involving Maintenance Difficulty, were significantly more negative for women than for men: Maintenance Difficulty and Stimulation Value (men = $-.07$; women = $-.38$; $z = 2.56$, $p < .01$); Utility Value (men = $-.24$; women = $-.47$; $z = 2.09$, $p < .04$); Ego Support Value (men = $-.32$; women = $-.59$; $z = 2.71$, $p < .01$); Self-affirmation Value (men = $-.30$; women = $-.54$; $z = 2.24$, $p < .03$); Person-qua-Person (men = $-.29$; women = $-.56$;

Table 1. Mean ADF Scores of Female and Male Subjects Responding to Same-Sex Target Persons at Different Levels of Friendship^a

ADF variables	Levels of friendship						Overall F
	Best friend (n = 25)	Good friend (n = 27)	Moderate friend (n = 67)	Friendly acquaintance (n = 26)	Formal acquaintance (n = 23)		
Female subjects							
SV (Stimulation value)	46.32 ^a	41.37 ^b	39.36 ^b	40.88 ^b	33.17 ^c	6.98 ^b	
UV (Utility value)	48.92 ^a	43.22 ^b	39.96 ^{bc}	36.50 ^c	27.17 ^d	19.61 ^b	
MD (Maintenance difficulty)	35.56 ^a	39.85 ^{ab}	39.97 ^{ab}	41.58 ^{ab}	45.22 ^b	2.99 ^d	
ESV (Ego support value)	47.28 ^a	42.07 ^b	40.55 ^b	39.12 ^b	32.43 ^c	10.41 ^b	
SAV (Self- affirmation value)	50.16 ^a	43.89 ^b	39.81 ^{bc}	37.62 ^c	30.09 ^d	16.79 ^b	
VID (Voluntary interdependence)	53.16 ^a	46.07 ^b	40.55 ^c	34.38 ^d	24.22 ^e	39.79 ^b	
PQP (Person-qua- person)	49.92 ^a	43.93 ^b	39.49 ^{bc}	37.50 ^c	28.57 ^d	23.81 ^b	
TF (Total friendship)	63.08 ^a	50.00 ^b	40.04 ^c	31.88 ^d	13.17 ^e	39.15 ^b	
Male subjects							
SV	45.83 ^a	39.61 ^{ab}	40.45 ^{ab}	33.68 ^b	41.91 ^a	4.58 ^c	
UV	46.50 ^a	42.18 ^a	42.58 ^a	31.74 ^b	34.36 ^b	10.45 ^b	
MD	39.58	39.32	39.42	41.84	42.91	.56	
ESV	44.42 ^a	40.14 ^{ab}	41.58 ^a	33.42 ^b	37.45 ^{ab}	4.29 ^c	
SAV	46.25 ^a	41.27 ^{ab}	42.64 ^{ab}	32.68 ^c	37.18 ^{bc}	7.61 ^b	
VID	51.25 ^a	46.05 ^b	41.91 ^b	31.32 ^c	25.18 ^d	25.67 ^b	
PQP	47.67 ^a	42.09 ^b	43.30 ^b	32.53 ^c	33.91 ^c	15.67 ^b	
TF	58.92 ^a	48.14 ^b	45.21 ^b	23.89 ^c	19.18 ^c	24.76 ^b	

^aMeans in a given row not having a common subscript differ significantly ($p < .05$) according to the Newman-Kuels test.

^b $p < .001$.

^c $p < .005$.

^d $p < .025$.

Table II. Intercorrelations Among ADF Scores for Female and Male Subjects^a

	UV	MD	ESV	SAV	VID	PQP	TF (Total Friendship)
Stimulation value (SV)							
Females	.67	-.38	.63	.71	.57	.68	.66
Males	.71	-.07	.58	.69	.47	.55	.53
Utility value (UV)							
Females		-.47	.79	.83	.79	.75	.82
Males		-.24	.77	.80	.72	.78	.79
Maintenance difficulty (MD)							
Females			-.59	-.54	-.38	-.56	-.49
Males			-.32	-.30	-.20	-.29	-.25
Ego support value (ESV)							
Females				.84	.70	.76	.77
Males				.79	.60	.74	.70
Self-affirmation value (SAV)							
Females					.77	.81	.84
Males					.66	.79	.76
Voluntary interdependence (VID)							
Females						.76	.95
Males						.76	.96
Person-qua-person (PQP)							
Females							.93
Males							.92

^aFemales' $n = 168$; males' $n = 97$.

$z = 2.55, p < .01$); Total Friendship (men = $-.25$; women = $-.49$; $z = 2.09, p < .04$). None of the other female versus male correlations were significantly different.

Because Voluntary Interdependence and Person-qua-Person are two ways of gauging friendship strength that are conceptually distinct but empirically correlated, partial correlations were computed to see which of these factors was more closely related to the friendship values, including Maintenance Difficulty. Table III lists the coefficients indicating the relationship between VID and the friendship values with PQP partialled out and, conversely, between PQP and the friendship values with VID partialled out.

For the female subjects, when the level of PQP was held constant, a significant relationship remained between VID and three of the five friendship values: Utility Value, Ego Support Value, and Self-Affirmation Value. For the male subjects, when the level of PQP was held constant, a significant relationship remained only between VID and Utility Value. When the level of VID was held constant, a significant relationship remained between PQP and each of the five friendship values. This was true for both female and male subjects. The only appreciable difference for this latter set of analyses was that the partial correlation between PQP and Maintenance Difficulty was significantly more negative for women than for men ($z = 2.02, p < .025$).

According to the partial correlation analyses, both men and women associate the various rewards of friendship, including "ease of maintenance," with higher levels of personalized interest and concern for their acquaintances. Within levels of PQP, women tend further to associate the rewards of friendship with higher levels of behavioral interdependence. Men do not. That is, within levels of PQP, there is little tendency for men to associate the rewards of friendship with higher levels of behavioral interdependence.

Table III. Partial Correlations: Each Friendship Value, Including MD, with VID (PQP Partialled Out) and with PQP (VID Partialled Out)

Friendship values	Partial r s with VID ^d		Partial r s with PQP	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Stimulation (SV)	.11	.10	.46 ^a	.34 ^a
Utility	.49 ^a	.31 ^b	.45 ^a	.52 ^a
Maintenance difficulty (MD)	.10	.03	-.45 ^a	-.22 ^c
Ego support (ESV)	.32 ^a	.09	.45 ^a	.55 ^a
Self-affirmation (SAV)	.40 ^a	.15	.54 ^a	.59 ^a

^a $p < .001$.

^b $p < .01$.

^c $p < .05$.

^dVID = voluntary interdependence, PQP = person-qua-person.

Taken together, the foregoing findings suggest that women, as compared to men, react to their acquaintances at different levels of friendship in a holistic and multifaceted way. A woman who is a friend at a particular level tends to be a friend at that level "across the board." If she is a good friend, she tends to be regarded as "good" with respect to all or most facets of the relationship; if she is an outstanding friend, she tends to be regarded as outstanding with respect to all or most facets of the relationship. In contrast, men tend to react to their acquaintances in a more differentiated way (i.e., with respect to distinct, relatively isolated attributes). If a man is a good friend, he may be regarded as "good" with respect to one or a limited number of facets of the relationship, but not necessarily others. This interpretation is consistent with the finding reported by Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) that women perceived more complexity in their friendships than did men. The difference may be summed up metaphorically by saying that for men, there are friends and there are friends; while for women, a friend is a friend. We shall see later that this generalization, too, eventually had to be modified.

Strain in Friendships: Tolerance Versus Confrontation

As we consider once more the correlation coefficients in Table II, let us recall that the relationship between Maintenance Difficulty and each of the other ADF variables except VID was significantly more negative for women than for men. This suggests one or both of two possibilities: (1) Women are less inclined than men to develop strong friendships with people with whom they have difficulty getting along, Or (2) when a strong friendship becomes tense or strained, women are more likely than men to either terminate the relationship or become less good friends. Postexperimental interviews have suggested rather strongly that Maintenance Difficulty is a more inhibiting factor to the growth of friendship for women than for men and also that women are less inclined to tolerate strain in their standing friendships. Women more often expressed a preference for confronting sources of strain in their friendships and, if the problem could not be resolved, easing out of the relationship. Men indicated that they usually ignored and worked around sources of strain while pursuing unstrained aspects of their friendships. A survey of probable responses to strained friendships showed more clearly the meaning and actual extent of this particular difference.

Three hundred twenty-four female and 169 male undergraduate students were asked via a brief questionnaire to assume that one of their good same-sex friendships had become tense and strained. They were asked to indicate first if they would probably discuss the difficulty with the friend and try to resolve it; try to tolerate the strain and emphasize the positive aspects of the friendship; or "other." Then they were asked to indicate what they would probably do if the difficulty were not resolved — continue to tolerate the strain and emphasize

Table IV. Number and Percentage of Females and Males Indicating Different Patterns of Probable Responses to Strain in Friendships^a

Sex	Confront		Tolerate	
	Maintain	Terminate	Maintain	Terminate
Females	157 (49%)	85 (26%)	62 (19%)	20 (6%)
Males	65 (38%)	29 (17%)	42 (25%)	33 (20%)

^aFemales' *n* = 324; males' *n* = 169.

the positive aspects of the friendship; terminate or ease out of the relationship; or "other."

Numerous write-in responses indicated that the questionnaire was an oversimplification of a complex issue. Apart from this, the choice of alternatives allowed for four patterns of responses: confront then maintain, confront then terminate, tolerate then maintain, and tolerate then terminate. The results of the survey are presented in Table IV.

The interview-based expectation was that most women would endorse the confront-then-terminate pattern while most men would endorse the tolerate-and-maintain pattern. This expectation was supported only to a limited extent: Slightly more women than men endorsed the expected pattern for women (26% versus 17%), and slightly more men than women endorsed the expected pattern for men (25% versus 19%). However, neither of these patterns was modal for either men or women; 38% of the men and 49% of the women favored confront-then-maintain as the modal pattern.

While it appears to be true that women are more likely to confront sources of strain in their friendships, the impression that women are more likely to terminate strained friendships was not borne out. Seventy-five per cent of the women, as opposed to 55% of the men, claimed they would confront and discuss sources of strain. However, essentially equal percentages of women and men (32% versus 37%) felt they would terminate the relationship. The major difference between men and women appears to be what they would do before terminating a strained friendship. Considering only subjects who would terminate, 53% of the men and only 19% of the women felt they would do so without confronting and discussing the problem. Another way of arriving at essentially the same point is to look at only the subjects who would initially tolerate strain without confrontation; 44% of the men, but only 24% of the women, who would initially tolerate rather than confront the strain felt they would eventually terminate the friendship. Thus, it appears that most women who decide against confronting strain in their friendships also decide to maintain the friendship in spite of the strain. However, it is close to an even chance that a man who decides against confronting such strain will eventually terminate the friendship without ever bringing up the troublesome issue.

The results of this study suggest that there are at least as many similarities as differences between men and women in the way they deal with strained friendships. Given this, it seems to be true that women are, indeed, more sensitive to strain, or at least less willing to tolerate such strain without some sort of direct action. Thus, part of women's more holistic involvement in their friendships seems to be a greater concern with the overall quality of the relationship.

Friendship: Side by Side and Face to Face

We have concluded from findings reviewed up to this point that, on the average, women's friendships are more person oriented while men's friendships are more activity oriented, and that women's friendships are more holistic while men's friendships are more segmented. Some later findings indicated that these "average" generalizations needed to be modified.

A study was conducted to explore the ways in which Voluntary Interdependence and Person-qua-Person – the two indicators of relationship strength – develop over time. Approximately five weeks after the beginning of the fall semester, volunteers from undergraduate psychology classes were asked to identify the person they considered to be their best friend from among the same-sex individuals they had known for a specified length of time. For example, for short-term acquaintances, the instructions were, "Think of as many people as you can of your own sex and approximate age whom you have met within the past month. Now think of the one individual from among these individuals that you most consider to be a friend, or the one you feel is most likely to become a friend." For long-term acquaintances, the instructions were, "Think of several people of your own sex and approximate age that you know best among the individuals you have been acquainted with for a year or more. Now think of the one individual from among these acquaintances that you consider your best friend." The original plan to plot mean VID and PQP scores by one-month intervals was not feasible because of the limited number of subjects in general, and the number of months with zero or very few entries in particular. The time intervals finally selected and the number of subjects in each were: 0-1 month, 16 females and 14 males; 4-6 months, 37 females and 28 males; 12 months or more, 53 females and 45 males. Mean VID and PQP scores for these time intervals are shown graphically in Figure 1.

Mean VID scores for women describing acquaintances at the three time intervals were 39.8, 48.1, and 52.0, respectively. Corresponding means for PQP were 40.5, 49.4, and 51.5. Mean VID scores for men describing acquaintances at these intervals were 40.3, 49.2, and 50.5. Corresponding PQP means were 39.8, 41.8, and 49.3. These data could be interpreted with greater confidence if they were longitudinal rather than cross-sectional. However, they strongly suggest that, for women, the growth of friendship is marked by an essentially parallel development of behavioral interdependence and personalized interest

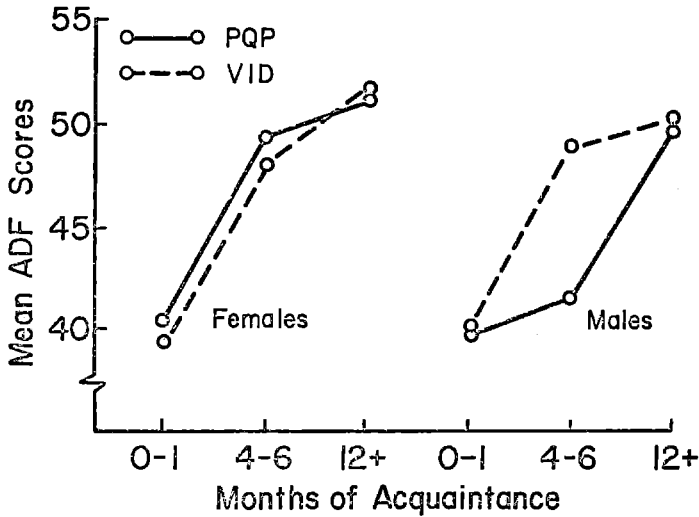


Fig. 1. Mean Voluntary Interdependence (VID) and Person-qua-Person (PQP) scores for females and males describing friends of varying lengths of acquaintance.

and concern. Both of these facets of friendship increase rapidly during the early stages of acquaintance and start leveling off after about 6 months.³ For men, the growth of friendship is marked by rapid increases in behavioral interdependence through the early stages of acquaintance and leveling off after about 6 months. However, the friends' personalized interest and concern for one another develops very gradually at first and then increases rapidly sometime after 6 months, eventually catching up with the level of VID. This outcome is consistent with the finding of Wheeler and Nezlak (1977) that men and women in their first year of college were markedly different in several aspects of their friendship participation early in the year. However, by the end of the year, these differences had diminished considerably. For example, men tended to increase and women to decrease in the intimacy of their social contacts. This difference over time may explain why Kandel (1978), who studied long-standing friendships among adolescents, failed to find differing patterns of similarity for the two sexes like those often reported by other investigators.

Thus, contrary to the earlier suggestion that women's friendships tend to be face to face while men's friendships tend to be side by side, it appears that

³ In an earlier presentation alluding to this study (Wright, Note 2), the results for women were reported differently. The difference stems from the fact that the earlier report was based on GF-corrected scores while the present report, following current practice, was based on a reanalysis using GF-uncorrected scores adjusted to the reference sample mean.

deep and long-standing friendships are both face to face and side by side for both men and women, even though the course of development is somewhat different.

This finding led to a reconsideration of the sex difference suggested previously that women tend to react to their friends in a more holistic way. Perhaps deep and long-standing friendships between men are just as holistic and just as multifaceted as those between women. To test this possibility, each of a large number of college undergraduates was asked to use the ADF to describe a same-sex acquaintance whom (s)he had known for a year or more and considered a very good friend. Such descriptions were obtained from 242 women and 177 men. For the female subjects, the mean and standard deviation on the Total Friendship scale were, respectively, 60.32 and 9.14. For the male subjects, the mean and standard deviation were 58.33 and 9.21. Intercorrelations among the different ADF scores for these subjects are presented in Table V. Although all these correlations except those between Maintenance Difficulty and Voluntary Interdependence were statistically significant, most of them were somewhat lower than the corresponding correlations shown in Table II. This was expected because the correlations in Table V were based on truncated distributions. More importantly for our purposes, in contrast to Table II, Table V shows a greater

Table V. Intercorrelations Among ADF Scores of Female and Male Subjects Responding to Very Good Friends^a

	UV	MD	ESV	SAV	VID	PQP	TF (Total friendship)
Stimulation value (SV)							
Females	.52	.14	.47	.53	.41	.41	.51
Males	.55	-.17	.46	.56	.27	.39	.39
Utility value (UV)							
Females		-.29	.58	.63	.49	.38	.55
Males		-.41	.65	.62	.49	.51	.60
Maintenance difficulty (MD)							
Females			-.48	-.46	-.08	-.40	-.27
Males			-.47	-.44	-.08	-.39	-.28
Ego support value (ESV)							
Females				.73	.37	.46	.51
Males				.65	.36	.48	.52
Self-affirmation value (SAV)							
Females					.43	.53	.59
Males					.34	.48	.51
Voluntary interdependence (VID)							
Females						.26	.86
Males						.36	.83
Person-qua-person (PQP)							
Females							.72
Males							.78

^aFemales' $n = 242$; males' $n = 177$.

Table VI. Partial Correlations: Each Friendship Value, Including MD, with VID (PQP Partialled Out) and with PQP (VID Partialled Out) for Subjects Responding to Very Good Friends

Friendship values	Partial r s with VID ^d		Partial r s with PQP ^d	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Stimulation (SV)	.34 ^a	.15 ^c	.34 ^a	.33 ^a
Utility (UV)	.44 ^a	.38 ^a	.30 ^a	.41 ^a
Maintenance difficulty (MD)	.03	-.39 ^a	.07	-.39 ^a
Ego support (ESV)	.29 ^a	.23 ^b	.41 ^a	.40 ^a
Self-affirmation (SAV)	.36 ^a	.20 ^b	.48 ^a	.41 ^a

^a $p < .001$.

^b $p < .01$.

^c $p < .05$.

^dVID = voluntary interdependence, PQP = person-qua-person.

number of coefficients that are essentially equal for women and men and, where the correlations differ at all noticeably, the coefficients were greater for the male subjects as often as for the female subjects.

As before, partial correlations were computed to indicate the relationship between each of the friendship values and VID with PQP held constant, and between the friendship values and PQP with VID held constant. These partial correlations are presented in Table VI. A comparison of Table VI with the corresponding analysis presented in Table III reveals several differences. The most important of these for our purposes is the pattern of partial correlations between the friendship values and VID. In the previous analysis, involving descriptions of full range of acquaintances, VID was significantly related to three friendship values for females and only one for males. In the latter analysis, involving descriptions only of very good friends, VID is significantly related to four friendship values for females and five for males.

These latter findings suggest that when we are considering very high levels of friendship, men as well as women start making careful discriminations, and one's best friends, as opposed to very good friends, are friends "all the way."

CONCLUSION

Between-group differences are generally more interesting and seem more important than between-group similarities. Therefore, it is almost always tempting to emphasize differences and overlook similarities. By being selective about the kinds of variables considered and the particular cases examined, one could probably build a fairly convincing case for two kinds of friendship, one charac-

teristic of women and one characteristic of men. But in all probability, if we examined a sufficient number of cases on a sufficient number of dimensions, we would find much more similarity than dissimilarity in the manner in which women and men conduct their friendships.

The findings reviewed in the present report indicate that, in terms of trends and central tendencies, women's and men's friendships differ in ways that are interesting, persistent, and fully in keeping with traditional sex roles and socialization patterns that define women as affective and socioemotionally oriented and men as instrumental and task oriented. Thus, a woman is somewhat more likely to emphasize personalism, self-disclosure, and supportiveness in her friendships. A man is somewhat more likely to emphasize external interest and mutually involving activities. A woman is more likely to react to each of her friends, at whatever level, in a holistic and undifferentiated way. A man is more likely to see his different friends as serving different, more delimited functions or meeting more circumscribed needs. A woman is more likely to be concerned about the overall affective quality of her friendships. A man is more likely to try to overlook and work around sources of tension or strain. But these differences are not great and, in many cases, they are so obscure that they are hard to demonstrate. In any case, the differences between women's and men's friendships diminish markedly as the strength and duration of the friendships increases.

Finally, there is no evidence to support the contention that women's friendships are inferior to those of men. This contention would hold only to the degree that women's and men's friendships actually differ. And within this limit, the contention would hold only to the degree that one assumed instrumentality, activity-centeredness, and a task orientation to be better than interpersonal sensitivity, personalism, and a socioemotional orientation. If one assumed the opposite, then friendships between women would have to be considered superior to those between men.

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