

ATTACHMENT AS A PREDICTOR OF FRIENDSHIP QUALITIES IN COLLEGE YOUTH

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This study examined the relationship between adult attachment style and friendship qualities in a sample of 330 undergraduates using the Adult Attachment Measure (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and the Friendship Qualities Scale (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994). Results indicated that securely attached individuals showed higher levels of transcending problems in their friendships and lower levels of conflict, while avoidant individuals showed higher levels of conflict and lower levels of companionship. Interactions between attachment style, sex of the participant, and the sex of the friend (same/opposite sex) suggested the combined impact of these variables on specific friendship qualities.

A substantial research literature has addressed the relationship between the quality of early attachment to primary caregivers and adult interpersonal relationships, particularly romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). By contrast, attention has only recently turned towards understanding how attachment styles predict friendships or other nonromantic relationships (Grabill & Kerns, 2000; Kerns & Stevens, 1996), although the warrant for this research has been clearly articulated (Grossmann & Grossmann, 1991; Lieberman, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 1999). Importantly, Lieberman et al. have argued for the importance of investigating attachment relationships among peers, given

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the increasingly important role that they may play as individuals move into, and through, adolescence. Markiewicz, Doyle, and Brendgen (2001) provide one recent example of work designed to address these peer relationships. Their work demonstrates an important link between attachment style and friendship quality in adolescents, noting that secure attachment predicted the quality of what individuals characterized as their "best friends".

This study extends the findings of Markiewicz et al. (2001) by examining the relationship between attachment style and a range of interpersonal qualities within a mixed-sex sample of late adolescent college students. Like Markiewicz et al. we conceptualized friendship qualities as consisting of several discrete domains outlined by Bukowski, Hoza, and Boivin (1994). These eight friendship qualities consist of companionship, help-aid, help-protection, closeness-affective bond, closeness-reflected appraisal, security-reliable alliance, security-transcending problems, and conflict. Based on conceptual and empirical work within the attachment literature we expected secure attachment to be related to higher levels of perceived companionship, help, closeness, and security within their close friendships, and lower levels of interpersonal conflict.

In addition, the relationship between attachment style and friendship qualities might be expected to vary according to the gender of the individual and his or her friend (e.g., same or opposite sex). For example, Tucker and Anders (1999) reported sex differences in attachment styles, with avoidant women reporting less relationship satisfaction than avoidant men, and anxious men showing less accuracy in their perceptions of their partners' love, faith, and dependability (see also, Matos, Barbosa, Milheiro De Almeida, & Costa, 1999). However, no work to date has explicitly addressed the impact of gender and sex of friend (same or opposite) on the relationship between attachment and friendship qualities, so no specific predictions can be made regarding the interaction of these variables.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 330 undergraduates (218 women and 112 men) recruited from a research pool of undergraduate students (mean age = 17.72 years, age range = 17-22). The majority of the participants were White (68.2%), followed by Hispanic (11.6%), African American (9.2%), Asian (6.1%), and other (4.9%).

PROCEDURE

All procedures were conducted in conformity with the APA ethical guidelines. The researcher met with participants in small groups for "a study of nonromantic friendships," administering to them the following instruments in order: a short demographics sheet (age, sex, and ethnicity), The Adult Attachment Measure

(Hazan & Shaver, 1987), and The Friendship Qualities Scale (Bukowski et al., 1994).

The Adult Attachment Measure (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) is a self-report measure consisting of three short paragraphs designed to categorize individuals into attachment styles: secure, insecure avoidant, or insecure anxious-ambivalent. Respondents choose the one paragraph that best describes their experience of themselves. Factor analytic studies of the measure's construct and discriminant validity were supportive of the utility of the measure in relation to the prediction of attachment style using other categorical measures. These and other psychometric properties of the measure can be found in Hazan and Shaver.

For the Friendship Qualities Scale (Bukowski et al., 1994) participants were asked to complete two of these questionnaires, one for their "best friend of the same sex" and one for their "best friend of the opposite sex." The Friendship Qualities Scale is a 23-item measure of nonromantic relationship qualities, with items chosen to minimize scale overlap but still retain high internal consistency, $\alpha = 0.64$ to 0.83 (Bukowski et al.). These dimensions are companionship, help (aid and protection), closeness (affective bond and reflective appraisal), security (reliable alliance and transcending problems), and conflict. Participants rated each of their friendships (same and opposite sex) along each of the 23 items in the FQS, using a 5-point scale rating from 1 (*never or almost never true*) through 5 (*always or almost always true*). Higher scores reflected higher levels of the associated friendship quality. See Bukowski et al. for the psychometric properties of this instrument.

RESULTS

Of the 330 participants, 63.0% ($n=206$) classified themselves as securely attached, 21.4% as avoidant ($n=70$), and 15.6% as anxious-ambivalent ($n=51$), using the Adult Attachment Measure (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Three of the participants did not report their attachment style and were excluded from the study. Among the females in the sample, 135 were categorized as secure, 47 as avoidant, and 34 as anxious. For men, the numbers were 71 secure, 23 avoidant, and 17 anxious. No significant gender differences in the distribution of attachment styles was found, Chi square (2, 327) = .07, nonsignificant. This distribution is consistent with the findings of Hazan and Shaver.

Primary analyses began with a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) in order to examine the effects of gender, attachment style and friendship sex along the range of dependent variables in the study. The 3 (attachment styles) X 2 (gender of participant) X 2 (friendship sex; same or opposite) mixed factorial MANOVA was conducted along the 8 subscale scores of the Friendship Qualities Scale (Bukowski et al., 1994). Attachment style and participant gender

were between - subjects variables and friendship sex (same or opposite) was a within - subjects variable. Table 1 depicts the means and standard deviations of the conditions. Results of this MANOVA revealed significant main effects for the attachment style of the participant $F(2, 281) = 4.25, p < .02$, gender of the participant $F(1, 282) = 63.08, p < .0001$, and for the sex of the friend (same and opposite sex) $F(15, 268) = 354.97, p < .0001$. These main effects were qualified by two significant two-way interactions between attachment style and sex of the friend $F(30, 253) = 2.03, p < .001$, and between gender of the participant and sex of the friend $F(15, 268) = 4.64, p < .0001$. No significant three-way interaction between attachment, gender, and sex of friend was found. The significant effects were followed up using a series of univariate ANOVAs.

TABLE 1
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR ATTACHMENT STYLE BY PARTICIPANT SEX BY FRIENDSHIP QUALITIES (SAME- AND OPPOSITE-SEX FRIENDS)

Friendship Quality	Attachment Style					
	Secure		Anxious		Avoidant	
	Participant Sex					
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Companionship						
Same Sex Friend	11.9 (4.9)	15.1 (2.8)	11.8 (5.2)	14.9 (2.7)	9.2 (5.4)	14.4 (3.4)
Opposite Sex Friend	13.0 (4.1)	15.3 (3.7)	13.5 (3.0)	15.0 (3.5)	10.6 (3.2)	14.5 (3.1)
Conflict						
Same Sex Friend	7.3 (3.3)	7.8 (3.0)	7.8 (4.1)	9.5 (4.4)	6.9 (3.7)	8.7 (3.8)
Opposite Sex Friend	8.5 (3.2)	9.0 (3.4)	10.2 (4.2)	10.9 (3.8)	10.0 (3.2)	10.5 (3.6)
Help/Aid						
Same Sex Friend	13.7 (1.7)	14.4 (1.1)	13.8 (1.3)	14.2 (1.4)	13.7 (1.2)	14.1 (1.3)
Opposite Sex Friend	12.8 (2.6)	14.2 (1.7)	13.3 (1.3)	14.4 (1.0)	11.6 (3.1)	13.8 (1.8)
Help/Protection						
Same Sex Friend	8.8 (1.8)	9.2 (1.4)	8.5 (1.7)	9.3 (1.0)	9.0 (1.1)	9.1 (1.1)
Opposite Sex Friend	9.3 (2.0)	9.4 (1.2)	9.0 (2.0)	9.4 (1.5)	9.1 (2.8)	9.3 (1.4)
Security/Reliable Alliance						
Same Sex Friend	8.5 (1.7)	9.1 (1.2)	8.3 (1.5)	9.0 (1.4)	8.4 (1.5)	8.4 (1.6)
Opposite Sex Friend	8.3 (1.8)	8.7 (1.9)	8.3 (1.2)	8.6 (1.9)	7.4 (1.5)	8.3 (1.9)
Security/Transcending Problems						
Same Sex Friend	12.6 (2.4)	13.0 (2.0)	11.5 (3.2)	12.1 (2.5)	12.3 (2.4)	12.1 (2.4)
Opposite Sex Friend	11.5 (2.8)	12.7 (2.2)	11.5 (1.5)	11.6 (2.9)	10.0 (2.6)	11.6 (2.4)
Closeness/Affective Bond						
Same Sex Friend	11.3 (2.4)	13.5 (1.6)	10.5 (3.5)	13.7 (1.4)	11.3 (2.9)	13.3 (1.7)
Opposite Sex Friend	12.1 (3.1)	13.9 (1.5)	11.5 (2.9)	14.0 (1.7)	11.1 (3.0)	13.4 (1.9)
Closeness/Reflected Appraisal						
Same Sex Friend	8.6 (2.9)	8.6 (1.4)	9.0 (3.0)	8.9 (1.4)	9.6 (3.0)	8.8 (1.5)
Opposite Sex Friend	9.3 (2.5)	9.1 (1.2)	9.0 (2.7)	8.8 (1.5)	9.1 (1.6)	8.6 (1.9)

The results of the ANOVA along the measure of Companionship showed a significant main effect for attachment, $F(2, 301) = 4.53, p < .02$; as expected, avoidant attachment was related to lower perceived levels of Companionship ($M = 12.88$) than was anxious-ambivalent ($M = 14.30$), and significantly lower levels when compared to the secure attachment styles ($M = 14.18$), $p < .05$, Tukey's multiple comparisons procedure. A main effect for attachment was also found along the measure of friendship Conflict, $F(2, 322) = 5.41, p < .005$; secure attachment was related to lower perceived levels of Conflict ($M = 8.42$) than were avoidant styles ($M = 9.24$), and significantly lower levels than were anxious-ambivalent styles ($M = 9.72$), $p < .05$, Tukey's multiple comparisons procedure. In addition, a main effect for attachment was found along the measure of Transcending Problems, $F(2, 321) = 5.70, p < .004$. The direction of the differences showed that securely attached individuals perceived higher capacities for Transcending Problems in their friendships ($M = 12.29$) than did anxious-ambivalent individuals ($M = 11.55$), and significantly higher capacities than did those with the avoidant attachment styles ($M = 11.49$), $p < .05$, Tukey's multiple comparisons procedure.

Additionally, the ANOVAs revealed significant main effects for the sex of the participant along 5 of the friendship qualities on the Friendship Qualities Scale. Main effects were found along the measure of Companionship, $F(1, 305) = 85.44, p < .0001$, Aid, $F(1, 329) = 45.40, p < .0001$, Protection, $F(1, 327) = 52.96, p < .0001$, and Affective Bond, $F(1, 326) = 56.70, p < .0001$. The direction of the differences showed that women demonstrated significantly higher perceived levels of all of these qualities than did men.

In addition to these main effects, two 2-way interactions were found. The first 2-way interaction was between the sex of the friend (same and opposite sex) and attachment style along three of the friendship quality subscales: Conflict, $F(2, 212) = 6.71, p < .001$, Security, $F(2, 319) = 4.63, p < .003$, and Closeness-Reflective Appraisal, $F(2, 324) = 5.65, p < .004$. The secure attachment group reported similar levels of Conflict in their same- ($M = 7.70$) and opposite-sex ($M = 9.01$) relationships, whereas the two insecure groups showed differences in this regard. Avoidant individuals reported more Conflict in their opposite-sex friendships ($M = 10.30$) than in their same-sex friendships ($M = 8.09$), and anxious individuals reported likewise (opposite-sex friendships $M = 10.62$; same-sex friendships $M = 8.82$, Tukey's, multiple comparisons procedure $p < .05$).

For friendship Security, the securely attached individuals again reported similar levels of Security in relation to same- ($M = 23.08$) and opposite-sex ($M = 20.73$) friends, in contrast to the two insecure attachment groups. Avoidant individuals perceived significantly higher levels of Security in relation to same-sex friends ($M = 22.31$) than in relation to opposite-sex friends ($M = 19.46$), Tukey's multiple

comparisons procedure $p < .05$, although anxiously attached individuals only tended towards significance in this regard.

For friendship Closeness-Reflective Appraisal, follow-up tests were inconclusive. Despite the significant interaction, posthoc simple effects testing failed to locate any significance differences among these means, qualifying the interpretability of this effect.

The second 2-way interaction was between the gender of the participant and his or her friend on 2 of the friendship quality subscales, Help-Aid, $F(1, 328) = 11.89, p < .0001$, and Security, $F(1, 323) = 35.63, p < .001$. Simple effects tests revealed that men and women perceived same- and opposite-sex friendships differently along the friendship quality Help-Aid, $p < .0001$; men perceived greater help from same-sex ($M = 13.65$) than from opposite-sex friends ($M = 12.38$), an effect that did not hold true for women, who reported similar levels of perceived help from same- ($M = 14.30$) and opposite-sex friends ($M = 14.00$).

For the friendship quality Security, the direction of the sex of the friend \times the sex of the participant interaction was similar, with the simple effects tests showing that men and women perceived same- and opposite-sex friendships differently along the friendship quality Security, $p < .05$. Women reported similar levels of Security in relation to opposite-sex friends ($M = 20.89$) and same-sex friends ($M = 21.69$), whereas men reported significantly higher levels of perceived security in relation to same-sex friends ($M = 24.96$) than in relation to opposite-sex friends ($M = 19.25$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study help to extend and clarify previous findings concerning the relationship between early attachment styles and qualities of subsequent close relationships. These findings generally support predictions regarding the relationship between attachment style and friendship qualities, although they provide some important qualifications in this regard, as well.

Insecurely attached individuals, for example, generally reported lower levels of Companionship in relation to their best friends, as well as lower levels of Security, as reflected in their expectations that their friendships would be less likely to be able to overcome hardships or difficulties (i.e., Transcending Problems) encountered across the course of their relationship. Additionally, in contrast with securely attached individuals, insecurely attached individuals also reported higher levels of Conflict with their best friends. This overall pattern of effects is consistent with the broader literature concerning the role of attachment style in other forms of close interpersonal relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Tucker & Anders, 2001).

In addition, a second set of effects emerged in relation to sex differences. In general, compared to the men in our sample, the women reported higher levels of Companionship, Protection, and Affective Bond in relation to their best friends. In addition, men tended to experience greater Aid, Security, and Help in relation to same-sex than in relation to opposite-sex friends, an effect that did not hold for women. Although no predictions were made regarding sex differences in this respect, these findings are consistent with sex differences in personal relationships and emotional expression noted elsewhere in the literature (Bukowski, et al., 1994; Wester, Vogel, Pressly, & Heesacker, 2002).

The central thrust of the study concerned the interactive effects of attachment style and gender on perceived friendship qualities, and results provided qualified support for predictions in this regard. Specifically, the influence of attachment style was qualified by the sex of the friend in relation to qualities of perceived Conflict, Security, and Closeness (Reflective Appraisal). In contrast to securely attached individuals, both anxious and avoidant participants reported higher levels of Conflict in their opposite-sex than in their same-sex relationships, a pattern that was replicated in relation to perceived levels of Security as well. This finding is noteworthy because, as Bukowski et al. (1994, p. 476) indicate, "there is a general consensus among developmental psychologists that security is one of the most important properties of children and adolescents' relationships with their friends." As a result, the finding that insecurely attached individuals experienced less Security, and significantly greater Conflict in opposite-sex than in same-sex friendships, could carry important implications. On the one hand, it may highlight the relative importance and reliance upon same-sex friends for insecurely attached adolescents; whereas securely attached adolescents may be able to derive similar levels of security from their same- and opposite-sex friends, insecurely attached individuals may experience this only in the context of their same-sex friendships. On the other hand, this effect may also signal an opportunity to intervene at the level of opposite-sex friendships in order to develop higher levels of security and a greater sense of "reliable alliance" within these opposite-sex relationships.

These interpretations are further supported by findings concerning the role of attachment and sex of friends in relation to levels of perceived Reflective Appraisal. As Bukowski et al. (1994) note, "one of the most persistent themes in the theoretical literature regarding children's and early adolescents' friendship relations is that these relations are affordances for feelings of acceptance, validation, and attachment" (p. 477). Reflective Appraisal refers to this quality, measuring the extent to which the adolescents experience themselves as being important to, and valued by, their friends. As with Conflict and Security, the impact of attachment interacted with sex of friends in determining levels of Reflective Appraisal within friendships, suggesting that same- and opposite-

sex friends do not afford similar levels of Reflective Appraisal for secure and insecurely attached adolescents.

The overall pattern of these interactive effects highlights the differential role that same- and opposite-sex friends may play in relation to securely and insecurely attached adolescents. They generally support a view that highlights the relative significance of sex of friends for insecurely attached individuals in contrast to securely attached individuals. Put differently, securely attached adolescents tend to report similar qualities among their same- and opposite-sex friends, whereas insecurely attached individuals do not. Instead, they tend to indicate higher quality relationships with their same-sex friends than with their opposite-sex friends, at least in relation to selected friendship qualities. A definitive explanation for these differences must await replications of this effect, and further work specifically designed to address underlying causes. However, one possible interpretation might involve the relative "threat value" of opposite-sex friendships at a critical time of maturation. Given the documented differences in emotional experience and expression between men and women (Wester et al., 2002) it is possible that opposite-sex friendships provide a context for maximal discrepancy in this regard. Koback and Sceery (1988) have conceptualized insecure attachment in late adolescence as a dysfunction in affective regulation, with anxiously attached individuals prone to "hyperactivation" (e.g., alarm, preoccupation) and avoidant individuals prone towards "deactivation" (e.g., retreat, denial, minimization) in response to the presence of stressors. Whereas same-sex friendships might tend to minimize affective differences in emotional experience and expression, opposite-sex friendships might magnify these differences, presenting an ongoing source of relational stress or tension. One consequence of this disparity in emotional experience or expression might be to introduce greater threat and conflict and, correspondingly, to reduce levels of perceived companionship, security or closeness in opposite-sex friendships.

But this, and other, possible explanations remain to be tested in future research on attachment style and friendship formation in late adolescence. The current findings only suggest that the effects of attachment may be qualified by the sex of the friend, and even these tentative findings must be replicated and interpreted within the context of the study's limitations. These limitations include the quasiexperimental nature of the design, the absence of independent measures of same- and opposite-sex "best friend," and the self-report nature of the questionnaires that were used. Nonetheless, within the context of these limitations, this study demonstrated the relationship between attachment style, sex of friend, and a number of specific friendship qualities. Levels of perceived Conflict, Security and overall Closeness (Reflective Appraisal) all varied as a joint function of attachment style and the sex of the friend (same or opposite-sex), suggesting the interaction of these factors in the perception or development

of particular friendship qualities. These and other results highlight the value of future research that addresses the interaction of a number of variables in determining the influence of attachment on close relationships in late adolescence and early adulthood.

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