



EUROPEAN UNION
Investing in Your Future

Project co-financed by the European Union through the European Social Fund, Sectoral Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007 – 2013.

FRIENDSHIP MAINTENANCE STRATEGIES AND QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIPS

Aleksandra Huić & Ivana Smolčić



University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology

Research project "Development of a new model of communication during conflicts in close relationships"



University of Zagreb



INTRODUCTION

Although a lot is known about relationship maintenance strategies in dating and marital relationships, friendship maintenance strategies receive far less research attention. However, since friendships form such a significant part of our lives and our close relationships, it is important to determine the behaviors that successfully sustain friendships and to understand how they contribute to the quality of friendships. Behaving in the way that maintains a friendship at a satisfying and committed level means to actively regulate one's behavior in order to reach the goal of having a high quality relationship. In their research, Oswald, Clark & Kelly (2004) found that maintenance strategies used by friends are quite similar to those used in dating and marital relationships. Behaviors that make friendships enjoyable and rewarding describe the strategy called positivity. Another group of strategies is about emotional and other kinds of support and is called supportiveness. Self-disclosure and sharing together make the strategy openness. And the last dimension of strategies is comprised of activities and behaviors friends do together and is labeled interaction. Their studies showed that the level of maintenance strategies depends on gender, such that female same-sex friendships utilize more supportiveness, openness and interaction than male same-sex friendships. Also, they found that both friends' self-reported behavior predicted dyad level satisfaction and commitment.

The aim of this study was to further explore the dyadic effects of maintenance strategies. Using the actor-partner interdependence model we expected that both actor and partner self-reported maintenance strategies will contribute to one's reported quality of friendship. We were also interested in whether this will hold for all maintenance strategies and for both male and female same-sex friendships.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

392 individuals who comprised 105 (54%) female-female friendship dyads and 91 (46%) male-male friendship dyads

age	19 – 30 years; $M = 23$ years, $SD = 2.57$
work status	70.4% students; 19.9% employed; 9.7% unemployed
home town	56.6% grew up in villages or small towns & 43.4% grew up in cities
length of friendship	6 months – 30 years; $M = 8.68$, $SD = 6.19$
type of friendship	82.2% best friends or one of their best friends; 16.8% close friends; 1% not so close
shared time	the majority live in the same town (83.3%)
a month	21.2% see each other daily; 40.8% regularly (couple of times a week); 30.9% occasionally (couple of times a month)
month	28.3% talk to each other on the phone daily; 44.5% a couple of times a week; 13.3% a couple of times a month
how they met	20.0% at college; 20.7% in high school; 10.4% in elementary school; 17.1% through other friends; 21.0% in other ways

INSTRUMENTS

Friendship maintenance strategies (Oswald, Clark & Kelly, 2004)

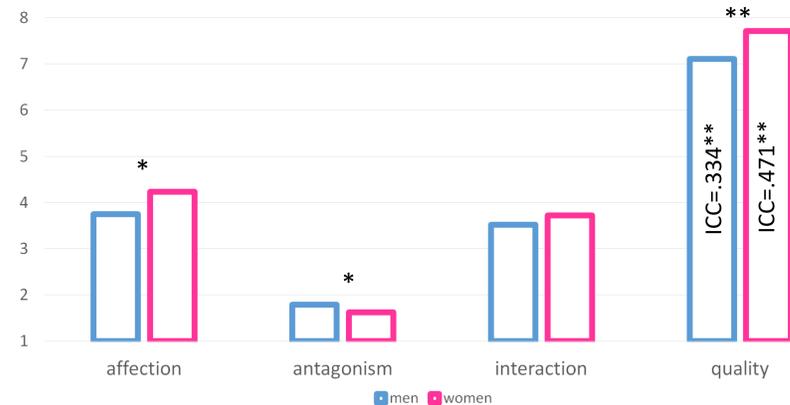
- 37 items; originally 4 dimensions, but the original structure was not confirmed
- revised version had 32 items and 3 dimensions:
 - affectionate behaviors – „accepting friend for who they truly are“; „giving emotional support“
 - antagonistic behaviors – „ignoring“; „threatening to end the friendship“
 - interaction and shared activities – „working together“; „retelling past memories“
- self-reported frequency of behaviors (1-never, 2-rarely, 3-sometimes, 4-often, 5-always)
- $\alpha_{affection} = .87$; $\alpha_{antagonism} = .70$; $\alpha_{interaction} = .81$

Quality of friendship - adapted from relationship satisfaction subscale (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998)

- 5 items; $\alpha = .89$

RESULTS

Gender differences in friendship maintenance strategies and friendship quality



Multilevel modeling with restricted maximum likelihood was used to estimate an APIM model assessing the effects of friendship maintenance strategies on quality of female and male same-sex friendships (for each dimension individually). Results revealed significant actor effects for all three dimensions of maintenance strategies, such that both men and women who show more affection, less antagonism and interact with friends more report on higher friendship quality. No partner effects were significant for male same-sex friendships. Actor effects explained between 10-25% of friendship quality. In female same-sex friendships we found a significant partner effect for expressing affection, and a marginally significant partner effect for interaction and sharing. Women with more affectionate female friends who interact and share more report on higher friendship quality. Actor and partner effects explained between 33% and 45% of friendship quality.

Quality of Friendship

	Quality of Friendship											
	Actor effect						Partner effect					
	Women			Men			Women			Men		
	b	SE	β	b	SE	β	b	SE	β	b	SE	β
Affection	1.15**	0.19	0.46	1.05**	0.17	0.41	0.80**	0.19	0.32	-0.27	0.17	-0.11
Antagonism	-0.62**	0.20	-0.22	-0.78**	0.18	-0.28	-0.08	0.20	-0.03	-0.08	0.18	-0.03
Interaction	1.35**	0.16	0.51	1.38**	0.18	0.52	0.27+	0.16	0.10	-0.04	0.18	-0.07

Note. b = unstandardized regression coefficient. SE = standard error of unstandardized regression coefficient. β = standardized regression coefficient. + $p < .10$, ** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In accordance with our expectations, and previous research with satisfaction and commitment (Oswald, Clark & Kelly, 2004), we found that regulating one's behavior by showing more affection, less antagonism and by interacting and sharing more with one's friend is related to higher quality friendships. However, although we expected significant partner effects for all friendship maintenance strategies, we found but a few, and only in female same-sex friendships. It seems that men's subjective experience of their friendship quality is not dependent on their friend's behavior. However, women with more affectionate friends who interact and share more with them report on higher friendship quality. But it seems that friend's antagonistic behavior does not contribute either to men's or women's friendship quality. Further studies should investigate the interactive effects of these maintenance strategies, especially since research on socio-emotional climate in marriages shows that expressing affection has an important buffering role for negative effects of antagonistic behavior (Caughlin & Huston, 2006). Our findings should be interpreted with caution, keeping in mind the differences between the original and revised operationalization of friendships maintenance strategies. It is likely that cultural norms influence behavior in friendships, and that further work is needed to investigate maintenance strategies in Croatian male and female same-sex friendships, and especially with regard to differences between friendship status (e.g. close friends vs. acquaintances).

Contact: Aleksandra Huić – ahuic@ffzg.hr