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## Communication in same-gender friendship dyads

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COMMUNICATION IN SAME-GENDER  
FRIENDSHIP DYADS

by

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B.A., University of Kansas, 1983

Submitted to the Department of  
Communication Studies and the  
Faculty of the Graduate School  
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partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts.

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## ABSTRACT

Based on a 1982 study by Lynne R. Davidson and Lucile Duberman, this study compares three communication content levels and seven interactional patterns in same-gender dyadic friendships among older people. These content levels of communication (topical, relational, and personal) and interactional patterns (spontaneous communication, trust, nonverbal communication, dependency, conflict, competition for power, and shared value systems) were examined to determine gender differences. A fifty-item scaler questionnaire tapping interactional patterns and content levels was used to determine self-reported frequency of the levels and patterns within their same-gender friendships. Findings in this study show that women relate on all three content levels, while men report more topical communication in their same-gender friendships. Data on interactional patterns reveals few differences between older women and men except in the areas of spontaneous communication and trust. Women report significantly greater amounts of trust in their same-gender friendships and men report more spontaneous communication. These findings suggest that as men and women age, there appear to be fewer stereotypical interactional patterns involved in their same-gender friendships. However, the content of their communication within these relationships remains congruent with previous research

findings. Women's communication with other women covers a broader range and depth than men's communication with other men.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a plethora of scientific information about relationships has been generated by many social science disciplines. Such studies give insights into how relationships are formed and maintained, the factors that enhance their quality, and possible explanations for their deterioration. Within the communication discipline, researchers have examined relationships from several perspectives. For the isomorphic theorists, the interaction between communicators is the unit of analysis, while symbolic theorists study how individual perceptions of messages affect their relational relevance. Symbiotic researchers focus on how qualitative variations in communication behavior affect the growth or decline of social bonds (Duck, Lock, McCall, Fitzpatrick, & Coyne, 1984, pp. 3-4).

Among the types of relationships that have been explored, friendship is perhaps the most unique. Although there is no single definition that captures the essence of friendship, it is viewed as an interpersonal relationship, often characterized by voluntary association and affective ties, similar personalities, and commonality of attitudes, values, and interests (Aries & Johnson, 1983, p. 1184). Friendship is a personal relationship, and its uniqueness stems from three connected features of the relationship: friendship is

between individuals, so there is no formal role structure; it is private and not institutionalized, thus its form is negotiable; and due to its voluntary nature, people are free to reveal themselves as they really are (Allan, 1979, p. 34). These features allow for tremendous flexibility and variation in the relationship and may account for the difficulty in formulating an adequate definition.

The current interest in social and personal relationships is due, in part, to the rapid changes being experienced in the structure of many of our traditional institutions such as marriage or community. These changes are widely viewed as contributing to the erosion of such institutionalized relationships, resulting in the loss of a source of self-affirmation and intimacy (Bensman & Lilienfeld, 1979, pp. 56-57). As such, friendship takes on a new importance as a relationship that allows us to express the authentic self and, in return, receive affirmation of individual worth and acceptance. Furthermore, the role of friend is the only social role extending from early childhood to old age. Therefore, studying friendship, more than any other relationship, affords a potentially greater comprehension of social development over the life span (Tesch, 1983, p. 268).

#### Purpose of Study

This study examines same-gender dyadic friendship among older adults (over age 60) with regard to specific

content levels of communication (topical, relational, and personal) and interactional patterns (spontaneity, trust, nonverbal, conflict, power, dependency, and shared value systems) in order to evaluate gender differences in the levels of interaction and content. The significance of examining same-gender dyadic friendships among older people is tied to the fact that in old age, interaction with friends is strongly related to life satisfaction, perhaps even more than contact with relatives. There is a choice involved in non-kin friendship, whereas kinship obligation enters into relationships with family members (Tesch, 1983, p. 272). Friendship takes on even greater importance as kinship ties weaken (Bell, 1981, p. 12).

Until recently, empirical research in dyadic relationships has generated mostly descriptive, attitudinal data rather than behavioral correlates of friendship. In this light, this thesis assumes a symbiotic approach, with its major focus on self-reported behaviors involving content levels of communication and interactional patterns within same-gender dyadic friendships. This research extends a study done by Lynne R. Davidson and Lucile Duberman in 1982; however, rather than doing a content analysis of subjects' personal accounts of their usual conversations with their best friends, Likert-like scales were used to gather data which were then analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance. Additionally, the Davidson and Duberman study limited the

domain to young, single adults because of the assumed likelihood of this age group and marital status being dependent on friendship.

To maintain validity across studies, the Davidson and Duberman (1982) operational definitions for each category were used in this study. A summary of those definitions includes:

Content levels

Topical - nonintimate, external level - centers on topics like politics, current events, movies; external to the individuals and the dyadic relationship;

Relational - interactional level - centers on exchanges between the two people in terms of the friendship;

Personal - internal level - centers on feelings and thoughts about oneself and one's private life (p. 813).

The seven interactional factors identified by Davidson and Duberman (1982) are operationally defined as follows:

Interactional patterns

Spontaneous communication - perceived ability to speak openly and frankly without having to censor words;

Trust - perceived reliability in the other to maintain confidentiality;

Nonverbal communication - perceived ability to communicate using gestures and body language with shared meaning;

Conflict - perceived extent of disagreement and argument within the dyad;

Competition for power - perceived ability to "win" in a conflict situation or to dominate in decision-making situations;

Dependency - extent to which respondent perceives the particular dyad as essential;

Shared value systems - perceived similarity of opinions, beliefs, ideals, and attitudes (pp. 816-819).

Findings for the Davidson and Duberman (1982) study revealed that women relate on all three content levels, while men relate primarily on the topical level. Results on the seven interactional factors found men to report significantly more spontaneous communication, trust, and conflict in their interactions with other men. Women reported a significantly higher frequency of nonverbal communication and competition for power.

In accordance with the Davidson and Duberman (1982) study, the purpose of this study is to explore the following two research questions:

1. Will there be any statistically significant differences in the range of communication content

(topical, relational, and personal) between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men?

2. Will there be any statistically significant differences in the perceived interactional patterns (spontaneous communication, trust, nonverbal communication, conflict, power, dependency, and shared value systems) between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men?

It is anticipated that the results of this study will support the findings of the 1982 Davidson and Duberman study, generalizing their findings to include older men and women. By examining the content levels of interaction, disclosure patterns that either enhance or inhibit intimacy should emerge, and inferences can be made about gender differences in interaction patterns in same-gender dyadic friendships of older people based upon content rather than context.

The following chapter will include a review of literature on friendship definitions, patterns, and functions as well as pertinent self-disclosure and intimacy literature, examining sex differences in these areas across the adult life span. Chapter three will discuss the procedures and methodology employed in this study, and chapter four will state the outcomes revealed in this research. Finally, chapter five will discuss these findings in relation to the Davidson and Duberman (1982) study, including any limitations of this study and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Friendship

Labeling someone a friend is subjective, and this label can range from being very broad and ambiguous in meaning to referring to specific individuals (Matthews, 1982, p. 142). The ambiguous nature of the friendship phenomenon makes it difficult to conceptualize, and furthermore, its subjectivity makes it hard to investigate. Additionally, friendship is not an easy relationship to recognize or track, because friendship has no structural anchors or socially sanctioned beginnings or endings (Brissett & Oldenburg, 1982, p. 325). Most definitions, however, do include the dimensions of voluntary association, reciprocity, proximity, intimacy, and similarity.

Some researchers have attempted to rid the friendship relationship of part of its ambiguity by defining the boundaries and clarifying some of the quantitative aspects. For example, Mayta Caldwell and Letitia Peplau (1982) suggest three friendship types: intimate friends, good friends, and casual friends. Intimate friends are very close and confide about personal feelings and problems; good friends enjoy doing things together and talking about important interests; and casual friends mainly share activities (p. 725). Robert Atchley (1972) identifies two types of friendship:



those marked by closeness, continuous interaction, and mutual concern (true friends) and cursory contacts (associates) (p. 317). By narrowing the boundaries, friendship is less obscure and able to be more suitably studied.

Friendship also serves a variety of functions, depending on the level of the relationship. Aristotle maintained that friendship has three functions: a utility function, useful in that friends are material resources that can be drawn upon for some benefit; a pleasure function, providing gratifying stimulation; and a virtue function, possessing admirable qualities and characteristics (Reisman, 1981, pp. 210-211). Friendship can also serve reactive or interactive functions which have to do with power and status versus compatibility and intimacy. These functions offer a source of continuity to individuals since friendship tends to serve similar functions in all life stages (Candy, Troll, & Levy, 1981, p. 460). For women, best friendships serve a therapeutic function in the sense that these relationships promote personal growth and provide interpersonal support and/or facilitate behavioral change (Davidson, 1978, p. 192).

The manner in which individuals define friendship and the functions this relationship serves result in emerging patterns that appear to vary according to gender. Several studies have indicated that men's friendships are centered

more around shared activities (Bell, 1981; Caldwell & Peplau, 1981; Cozby, 1973; Dickens & Perlman, 1981; Powers & Bultena, 1976; & Wright, 1982). However, G. H. Yoon (1978) analyzed best friendship patterns and found that although female friendships were shown to be more expressive and to fill more emotional needs, male friendships were not necessarily more utilitarian or instrumental. While male best friendships were based on similar attitudes and interests and involved sharing activities, they did exchange confidences but less frequently (p. 1553). These patterns appear to be the distinguishing feature in the quality of friendship.

In order for high quality friendships to thrive, Michael Argyle and Monika Henderson (1984) found that six rules must be maintained:

1. Standing up for the other in his/her absence;
2. Sharing news of success with him/her;
3. Showing emotional support;
4. Trusting and confiding in each other;
5. Volunteering help in time of need; and
6. Striving to make him/her happy while in each other's company (p. 231).

Although the definition, functions, patterns and rules influence the nature and direction that friendship takes, the levels of self-disclosure and intimacy contribute to the breadth and depth of this relationship.

### Gender Differences in Self-Disclosure and Intimacy

Self-disclosure, or the willingness to reveal significant aspects of self to others (Gerdes, Gehling, & Rapp, 1981, p. 989), plays an important part in friendship development and maintenance. A literature review on self-disclosure done by Paul Cozby (1973) revealed that there are inconsistencies regarding gender differences in self-disclosure, although there does seem to be some indication that either women disclose more or there is no difference in self-disclosure patterns of women and men. It is significant to note, however, that none of these studies has reported that men are higher disclosers, perhaps indicating actual gender differences (p. 76). Disclosure includes the dimension of intimacy which Helen Mayer Hacker (1981) views as a form of risk-taking involving rewards and punishment. She feels that women and men are socialized to value and even perceive intimacy differently and this attitude spills over into both same-gender and cross-gender friendships (pp. 385-389).

Numerous studies pointing to women as higher disclosers have often looked at the intimacy dimension of their disclosures. Hacker states that self-disclosure is highest in female same-gender friendships, and she proposes the following reasons for this high intimacy level:

1. women do not have institutionalized power differentials;

2. women are trained to value personal relationships and the rewards of intimacy and to develop empathetic skills;
3. past experience with self-disclosure in growing up has been positive so the rewards are perceived as greater than the costs; and
4. women's homogeneous lifestyle facilitates self-disclosure (p. 388).

Men, on the other hand, are socialized to be less intimate in their self-disclosures. Hacker offers some possible explanations for the resulting differences in male disclosure patterns:

1. disclosure of feelings is weak and feminine, therefore disvalued;
2. the need for intimacy may not be perceived since the rewards may be blocked; and
3. status may be gained from withholding confidences (pp. 388-389).

In our society, there appears to be a double standard for disclosure. Valerian Derlega and Alan Chaikin (1976) studied sex-typed disclosure behaviors and found that expressive males and nonexpressive females were seen as less adjusted than males who were silent and females who disclosed (p. 379). These differences in patterns of self-disclosure are assumed to result from social learning wherein expressiveness is sanctioned for women and censored for

men (Chelune, 1976, p. 259). Judith Fischer and Leonard Narus (1981) feel that it is not so much that men's relationships lack intimacy, but rather that men fail to develop their intimate relations as fully as women. This characteristic can be traced to the behavioral rigidity of the sex-typed person with its consequent effect on the development of close relationships (p. 446).

Barriers to intimacy are created by this socialization process. Women's relationships are developed around the themes of intimacy and interpersonal relations, while for men, the themes are competition and status (Aries, 1976, p. 13). In nonintimate areas, Brian Morgan (1976) found that men and women disclose similarly. It is when more personal issues are involved that differences emerge, with men revealing less of themselves (p. 166). Robert Lewis (1978) suggested that some of these barriers to intimacy between men are due to the prescribed role that views all men as competitors, the fear of being labeled homosexual, an aversion to openness and vulnerability perpetuated by non-disclosure, and a lack of affection-giving male role models (pp. 110-115). Regardless of the causes, the results of these attitudes are carried into friendships where men interact with each other in terms of their roles, limiting their interaction to doing things together (Bell, 1981, p. 405).

Similarly, socialization plays a major factor in women's

intimate expressive behaviors. Women define their relationship as one that is self-revealing and accepting (Bell, 1981, p. 406). They learn from the rewards of sharing intimacy that personal relationships are a positive experience to be highly valued. The influence of the women's movement is seen as a facilitating factor in promoting a type of sisterhood that encourages close, intimate relationships among women (Fischer & Narus, 1981, p. 453). Constance Safilios-Rothschild (1981) contends that women's close, intimate friendships with each other are important in sustaining their relationships with men (p. 380).

Explanations, other than gender-linked norms, for gender differences in self-disclosure and intimacy that are posited include situational factors, the topic content of the information disclosed, and subject bias in research studies. There are those who feel that situational factors affect disclosure patterns in our society since individuals regulate self-disclosure by compliance to situational appropriateness (Gerdes, Gehling, & Rapp, 1981, p. 990). Others maintain that these differences in self-disclosure are related to topic content found in self-disclosure parameters based on the amount of information disclosed (breadth), intimacy of information disclosed (depth), and the time spent describing each disclosure item (duration) (Cozby, 1973, p. 75). Perhaps gender differences emerge due to topic content interacting with the variable of gender. When we assign intimacy

levels to the types of information connected with masculine and feminine roles and then operationalize high intimacy topics to feminine content, we limit our findings. If we were to compare talking about personal successes (masculine content) rather than talking about personal problems (feminine content), a different picture might emerge (Derlega, Durham, Gockel, & Sholis, 1981, p. 434). Yet another possible explanation that Derlega, et al., propose for these gender differences in self-disclosure involves the subjects chosen for research studies. Much of the published work in self-disclosure has used strangers as subjects which may bias results since there is some evidence that the obligation to reciprocate is stronger among strangers than among friends (p. 445). These differences in self-disclosure and intimacy indicate a heavy toll for men and reflect the influence that cultural sex-role stereotypes bear on friendships.

#### Gender Differences in Adult Friendship Patterns

Knowledge of these behavioral differences in self-disclosure and intimacy aids in comprehending the differences in friendship patterns that adults experience. In general, researchers have found that adult friendships are strongly stratified with respect to social status, attitudes, and demographic characteristics such as age and gender (Verbrugge, 1977, p. 592). People who are considered close friends or intimates are more often nonfamily than family

(Nahemow & Lawton, 1974, p. 211), and these intimate relationships are perceived as more synchronous when they involve members of the same gender (Knapp, Ellis, & Williams, 1980, p. 277).

Factors that contribute to gender differences in friendship are due to normative constraints and lifestyle variations. Although the number of friends and patterns of friendship among adults is quite diverse (Reisman, 1981, p. 230), marriage places tremendous limitations on cross-sex friendships, allowing less time with these friends and lower degrees of intimacy (Dickens & Perlman, 1981, p. 111). Conventionality or nonconventionality of values and attitudes toward life reveal differences at another level; gender lines are not as apparent among nonconventional women and men (Bell, 1981, p. 418). Adults do have close friendships, but they tend to be with members of the same gender (Aries & Johnson, 1983, p. 1182). In addition to the predominance of same-gender friendships throughout the life cycle, there are several significant gender differences. Men have more extensive activity-oriented relationships while women have more intensive relationships (Dickens & Perlman, 1981, p. 121). Research findings also suggest that women spend more time alone with their friends while men spend more time with friends in a group. The context of these contacts may contribute to differences in content of conversations in friendships (Aries & Johnson, 1983, p. 1184).



The significance attached to friendship tends to fluctuate throughout the life span. In young adulthood, there appears to be considerable dependence on friends, at least prior to marriage (Davidson & Duberman, 1982, p. 812). The importance of friendship declines during middle adulthood, mainly due to career and family obligations (Reisman, 1981, p. 213). Withdrawal due to marriage also stems from our cultural view of exclusivity wherein threats to the maintenance of coupleness are to be minimized (Johnson & Leslie, 1982, pp. 34-35). In middle age, friendships usually center around the work setting, participation in voluntary organizations, or in the neighborhood (Arling, 1976, p. 758). Thus, it appears that need and accessibility affect the desire to maintain friendships in this age group.

#### Friendship in Older Adulthood

Friendship with age peers experiences a rebirth in later adulthood as a sustaining factor in a person's self-esteem and sense of usefulness (Chappel, 1983, p. 82). There is a reciprocity involved in these friendships that stems from shared interests and mutual assistance. These friendships also involve qualitative differences from earlier friendships. For example, this is the stage of life when older adults are exiting long-held roles, experiencing age segregation in a youth-oriented society, encountering physical limitations, and sharing adjustment to impending death. Because of common life experiences, values, and perspectives,

friendship is seen as important to adjustment and satisfaction in this period of life. In older adults, family relationships are important, but they constitute a separate domain of involvement rather than a compensation for friends (Arling, 1976, p. 762).

In older adulthood, friendships are formed primarily between persons with status homogeneity in the areas of gender, age, marital status, race, and social class. This similarity provides a basis for solidarity as they join persons in a similar social position who share the same relation to the larger society (Rosow, 1970, p. 60).

While American elderly prefer existing friends to the prospects of having to make new ones, all of their age peer friendships share common benefits and problems. The benefits are centered around opportunities for social interaction, mutual assistance, reminiscence, and emotional support (Chown, 1981, pp. 233-234). Of course, these benefits are derived from relationships based on depth and satisfying degrees of interaction. In forming and maintaining relationships in older adulthood, many problems are incurred as well. The described benefits can be diminished by factors that limit social interaction in this age group: retirement affects involvement with friends acquired at work; illness lessens physical mobility; there is an increased chance of elderly people being forced to move away from friends; the actual number of friends is often reduced

by death; and at times, the reciprocity of friendship is reduced because of imbalance of costs and rewards (Chown, 1981, pp. 233-235).

Although this picture looks rather bleak, studies do not show that the elderly suffer from intense loneliness or isolation, but more research needs to be compiled on the extent and intensity of friendships in this age group. A study by Irving Rosow (1970) revealed that a large concentration of age peers in a given proximity with shared status yields drastic increases in interaction and in friendships (p. 61).

Among this age group, gender differences in friendship patterns continue to prevail, with women developing or maintaining more intimate same-gender friendships (Powers & Bultena, 1976, p. 740). Older married women are twice as likely to indicate someone other than their spouse as confidante while older married men rely on their wives for intimacy (Abu-Laban, 1981; Chappel, 1983).

### Summary

The preceding review of literature demonstrates the existence of gender differences in self-disclosure, intimacy, and friendship. The review of self-disclosure literature points to women as engaging in more intimate levels of self-disclosure, whereas men appear to limit their interactions to more topical, less revealing disclosures. Much of the literature stresses this pattern as being a result of social learning for both women and men. Social norms encourage

sex-typed behavior that limits interaction for men to activity-oriented, nonthreatening exchanges and fosters personal, intimate interactions for women. These behavioral differences in self-disclosure become salient features in the friendship patterns experienced by men and women. While close friends are generally found among members of the same gender, the quality of these relationships is affected by the normative restrictions brought into the friendship. In young adulthood, there appears to be more dependency on same-gender friendships, whereas in middle adulthood, work and family obligations place limitations on these involvements. Renewed interest in same-gender friendships emerges, however in later adulthood. Throughout these life stages, women's friendships continue to have qualitative differences from men's with women persisting in the development and maintenance of more intimate same-gender friendships.

The Davidson and Duberman (1982) study offers further insight into gender differences in friendship by examining the content levels of communication that women and men report. Their findings indicated no significant differences between women and men in nonintimate, topical communication. However, they found that women report significantly greater frequency of communication at the relational and personal levels. Thus, it appears that women relate on all three content levels while men report relating primarily on the topical level.

Davidson and Duberman (1982) findings on the interactional patterns revealed that women report significantly higher nonverbal communication and competition for power while men report significantly higher interaction in the dimensions of spontaneous communication, trust, and conflict. There were no significant differences between women and men in the areas of dependency and shared value systems.

These differences reviewed from prior research and the results of the Davidson and Duberman (1982) study, upon which this thesis project expands, suggest that the Davidson and Duberman findings might be generalized to an older sample of adults. Although other studies in this age group (over age 60) reveal differences, they do not examine the content levels of interaction. The study for this thesis examines perceived levels of the content of interaction among same-gender friends in an effort to reveal such gender differences in patterns of self-disclosure and intimacy among older people.

## CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore gender differences in communication content levels and in perceived interactional patterns in same-gender friendship dyads among older people. Subjects were asked to complete a fifty-item questionnaire reporting the frequency with which they either talked about or experienced each statement with their closest same-gender friend who was not a relative. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert-like scale.

This chapter will include descriptions of the methods involved in obtaining the data for this study. These descriptions will be divided into five parts: preparation of questionnaire, sample, design and procedure, friendship variables, and research hypotheses.

#### Preparation of Questionnaire

The scalar items used in the questionnaire were based on the open-ended questions used in the 1982 Davidson and Duberman study. Through interviewing several people over age 60, consulting with people in the field of communication, conferring with people from agencies dealing with the elderly, and examining the questions used in the Davidson and Duberman study, a list of potential survey items was generated averaging approximately eight items per category.

To ensure the validity of these potential survey items,

they were divided into two major groups: those items designed to tap content levels, and those items intended to describe interactional patterns. Seven graduate students in Communication Studies were given the Davidson and Duberman operational definitions for each of the categories within the two major groups and asked to sort each item into its appropriate category. Five items were ultimately selected from each category (see Appendix B), using only those items having sorter agreement of .71 or better.

These fifty items were combined to form the survey questionnaire, and a five-point Likert-like scale measuring frequency levels of self-reported behaviors was designed with response choices of never, seldom, sometimes, and frequently (see Appendix C). A non-response was considered the fifth choice. For analysis, these response choices were given values of:

0 = non-response

1 = never

2 = seldom

3 = sometimes

4 = frequently

### Sample

Subjects in the target group for this study were 20 female and 20 male adult volunteers over age sixty from the Lawrence, Kansas vicinity. Care was taken to include subjects

from varying income levels, educational backgrounds, and living arrangements.

A criteria group of 25 female and 20 male college students from the University of Kansas basic communication courses also participated. These subjects were primarily from the 18-21 years-of-age bracket. Findings from this group were used as a criteria base from which comparisons could be made with results of the Davidson and Duberman (1982) findings. The criteria group findings also served as a reliability check for the instrument in this study of older adults. Participation in the college criteria group was also voluntary and fulfilled a course requirement for the students.

#### Design and Procedure

The hypotheses for this study called for a factorial design to measure perceived communication content levels and perceived interactional patterns. One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used as the statistical procedure with  $p < .05$  as the confidence level.

Two procedures were employed in administering the survey questionnaire. Physical limitations of several of the older adults necessitated the interviewer reading all statements and recording all responses. However, most subjects read and recorded responses themselves, including all members of the criteria college group.



### Friendship Variables

The three content levels of communication identified in the 1982 Davidson and Duberman study were classified according to levels of intimacy in conversations. As a validity measure, the Davidson and Duberman operational definitions were used for each category. Their study referred to the nonintimate level as topical communication, the intimate level as personal communication, and the level in between these two as relational communication. The seven interactional variables isolated by Davidson and Duberman (spontaneous communication, trust, nonverbal, conflict, competition for power, dependency, and shared value systems) involved perceptions of the levels of frequency of these patterns in their same-gender friendships. Spontaneous communication and trust were defined in terms of perceived confidence in self and others, respectively. Spontaneous communication involved being open and frank, and trust concerned reliance on maintaining confidentiality. Frequency of nonverbal communication was connected to exchanging nonverbal signals with shared meaning. Conflict and competition for power were regarded as interdependent with conflict measured by the perceived extent of disagreement or argument in the relationship. Competition for power was defined in relation to conflict as the perceived ability to dominate in decision-making and to triumph in arguments. Dependency was defined as the perceived

reliance on the particular friendship as vital. Finally, the shared value systems category examined the perceived level of similarity in highly regarded areas such as beliefs, ideals, and attitudes.

### Research Hypotheses

Based on the research of Davidson and Duberman (1982), two major hypotheses were posed concerning the communication content levels and interactional patterns in normal conversations:

1. There will be no statistically significant differences in the range of communication content (topical, relational, and personal) between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.
  - a. There will be no statistically significant differences in topical communication between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.
  - b. There will be no statistically significant differences in relational communication between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.
  - c. There will be no statistically significant differences in personal communication between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

2. There will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived interactional patterns (spontaneous communication, trust, nonverbal communication, conflict, competition for power, dependency, and shared value systems) between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.
  - a. There will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived spontaneous communication between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.
  - b. There will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived trust between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.
  - c. There will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived nonverbal communication between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.
  - d. There will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived conflict between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.
  - e. There will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived competition for power between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

- f. There will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived dependency between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.
- g. There will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived shared value systems between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

## CHAPTER 4

## RESULTS

The questionnaire results were analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a confidence level of  $p < .05$  indicating statistical significance. Between group factors were gender (male versus female) and perceived communication content level (topical, relational, or personal). Also, perceived interactional patterns (spontaneous communication, trust, nonverbal communication, conflict, competition for power, dependency, and shared value systems) were analyzed in relation to gender.

Results for both the older adult target group and the college criteria group are reported and then compared to the findings of the Davidson and Duberman (1982) study. The purpose of the criteria group is to act as a criteria base from which comparisons can be made between the results of the Davidson and Duberman study and the findings for the target group (older adults) of this study. The criteria group also acts as a reliability check for the instrument used in this study.

The results for perceived communication content levels are given first, followed by the data on the perceived interactional pattern variables.

Content Levels of Communication

1. Topical

Results of the ANOVA for the older adult target group, as presented in Table 1, reveal that there are no significant differences for the females and males in terms of topical communication. These findings support the null sub-hypothesis:

there will be no statistically significant differences in topical communication between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

The mean scores for the older adult females ( $\underline{M} = 15.95$ ) and males ( $\underline{M} = 17.45$ ) show that men engage in topical communication with more frequency, but not at a statistically significant level ( $p < .0559$ ).

Table 1  
ANOVA for Variable  
Topical

<u>(Target Group)</u>					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	22.5000	1	22.5000	3.8881	.0559
Within groups	219.9000	38	5.7868		
Total	242.4000	39			
	Females	$\underline{M} = 15.95$			
	Males	$\underline{M} = 17.45$			

Data presented in Table 2 for the college criteria group also support the null sub-hypothesis, but his group shows an almost negligible difference in reported frequency of topical communication for males ( $\underline{M} = 14.55$ ) and females ( $\underline{M} = 14.04$ ).

Table 2  
ANOVA for Variable  
Topical

(Criteria Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	2.8900	1	2.8900	.3767	.5426
Within groups	329.9100	43	7.6723		
Total	332.8000	44			

  

Females	$\underline{M} = 14.04$
Males	$\underline{M} = 14.55$

These findings are consistent with the Davidson and Duberman (1982) results that indicate no significant differences in topical communication for women and men.

## 2. Relational

Findings presented in Table 3 for the target older group concerning the relational communication variable indicate that there is a significant difference in the reported frequency of communication at this level for males and for females ( $\underline{F} = 9.373$ ,  $\underline{p} < .05$ ). These results reject the null sub-hypothesis:

there will be no statistically significant differences in relational communication between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

Mean scores for females ( $\underline{M}$  = 12.85) and males ( $\underline{M}$  = 9.55) demonstrate the extent of this difference in reported frequency of relational communication, i.e., women report significantly more relational communication behaviors within their same-gender friendships.

Table 3  
ANOVA for Variable  
Relational

(Target Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	108.9000	1	108.9000	9.3730	.0040
Within groups	441.5000	38	11.6184		
Total	550.4000	39			
	Females	$\underline{M}$ = 12.85			
	Males	$\underline{M}$ = 9.55			

As shown in Table 4, the criteria group data also fails to substantiate the claim that there are no differences between men and women in their use of relational communication within their same-gender friendships ( $\underline{F}$  = 10.4142,  $\underline{p}$  < .05). The female ( $\underline{M}$  = 15.92) and male ( $\underline{M}$  = 12.85) means for this criteria group also indicate a higher frequency of reported



interaction for both females and males at this level than the target group.

Table 4  
ANOVA for Variable  
Relational

(Criteria Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	104.7211	1	104.7211	10.4142	.0024
Within groups	432.3900	43	10.0556		
Total	537.1111	44			
	Females	$\bar{M}$	= 15.92		
	Males	$\bar{M}$	= 12.85		

The Davidson and Duberman (1982) study revealed similar results, showing that women reported significantly higher degrees of relational communication in their same-gender friendships.

### 3. Personal

It was expected that there would be no differences in the reports of older men and women as to frequency of their personal levels of communication. The data do not support the null sub-hypothesis that:

there will be no statistically significant differences in personal communication between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

Rather, there is a significant difference, as shown in Table 5 ( $F = 7.3758$ ,  $p < .05$ ). As mean scores for females ( $M = 15.95$ ) and males ( $M = 13.80$ ) indicate, women express significantly more personal information about themselves to their close female friends than men do to their close male friends.

Table 5  
ANOVA for Variable  
Personal

(Target Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	46.2250	1	46.2250	7.3758	.0099
Within groups	238.1500	38	6.2671		
Total	284.3750	39			

  

Females	$M = 15.95$
Males	$M = 13.80$

Similarly, findings for the college criteria group do not confirm the prediction of no differences in the dimension of personal communication levels ( $F = 6.0784$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In this group, the female means ( $M = 16.96$ ) and the male means ( $M = 15.15$ ) again demonstrate that women perceive higher levels of personal communication within their female-female friendships (see Table 6).

Table 6  
ANOVA for Variable  
Personal

(Criteria Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	36.4011	1	36.4011	6.0784	.0178
Within groups	257.5100	43	5.9886		
Total	293.9111	44			
	Females	$\bar{M}$	= 16.96		
	Males	$\bar{M}$	= 15.15		

The Davidson and Duberman (1982) study found that women engage in significantly higher frequencies of personal communication, and the results of this study support those findings.

Examining these three dimensions of the content levels of communication (topical, relational, and personal) together indicate only partial support for the main null hypothesis:

there will be no statistically significant differences in the range of communication content (topical, relational, and personal) between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

Findings show that women tend to relate on all three content levels with their same-gender friends, while men report more reliance on the topical dimension in their communication with

other men. There are no statistically significant differences in topical communication, but the relational and personal dimensions indicate significant differences as summarized in Table 7:

Table 7  
Summary of Significant Findings  
in Content Levels of Communication

Level	Target Group	Criteria Group	Davidson and Duberman Group
Topical	-----	-----	-----
Relational	Females*	Females*	Females*
Personal	Females*	Females*	Females*

\* significance indicated at  $p < .05$

### Interactional Patterns

#### 1. Spontaneous Communication

Table 8 presents the statistically significant differences between the target older women and men on the dimension of spontaneous communication within their friendships ( $F = 8.0395, p < .05$ ). This finding rejects the null sub-hypothesis that:

there will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived spontaneous communication between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

Mean scores reveal that males ( $\bar{M} = 17.10$ ) in this target group report significantly higher degrees than females ( $\bar{M} = 15.40$ ) in the dimension of spontaneous communication.

Table 8  
ANOVA for Variable  
Spontaneous Communication

(Target Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	28.9000	1	28.9000	8.0395	.0073
Within groups	136.6000	38	3.5947		
Total	165.5000	39			

  

Females	$\bar{M} = 15.40$
Males	$\bar{M} = 17.10$

However, results presented in Table 9 for the college criteria group reveal no significant differences in perceived frequency of spontaneous communication for women and men. Mean scores indicate minimal differences for females ( $\bar{M} = 17.92$ ) and males ( $\bar{M} = 17.45$ ) on this dimension.

Table 9  
ANOVA for Variable  
Spontaneous Communication

(Criteria Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	2.4544	1	2.4544	1.3064	.2594
Within groups	80.7900	43	1.8788		
Total	83.2444	44			

Table 9 (continued)

---

Females	$\underline{M} = 17.92$
Males	$\underline{M} = 17.45$

---

Thus, the target group findings support the Davidson and Duberman (1982) findings that men report significantly more spontaneous communication than women. However, the criteria group results do not support these findings, but rather reveal no significant differences in this dimension.

## 2. Trust

Reported trust levels indicate that older women experience significantly more interaction at this level in their same-gender friendships than older men ( $F = 4.6683, p < .05$ ). As Table 10 reveals, the findings reject the null sub-hypothesis that:

there will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived trust between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

The mean scores reflect this difference, with females ( $\underline{M} = 17.60$ ) perceiving significantly higher levels of trust than males ( $\underline{M} = 15.60$ ) in the target group.

Findings for the college criteria group, presented in Table 11, also show that women's trust levels are significantly greater than those of men in their interactions with other men ( $F = 16.7332, p < .05$ ). However, comparison of

female and male means (female  $\bar{M}$  = 19.28, male  $\bar{M}$  = 17.05) show that perceived trust levels are relatively high for both genders in this criteria group, since the highest possible score for this dimension is 20.

Table 10  
ANOVA for Variable  
Trust

(Target Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	40.0000	1	40.0000	4.6683	.0371
Within groups	325.6000	38	8.5684		
Total	365.6000	39			
Females $\bar{M}$ = 17.60 Males $\bar{M}$ = 15.60					

Table 11  
ANOVA for Variable  
Trust

(Criteria Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	55.2544	1	55.2544	16.7332	.0002
Within groups	141.9900	43	3.3021		
Total	197.2444	44			
Females $\bar{M}$ = 19.28 Males $\bar{M}$ = 17.05					

When compared to the Davidson and Duberman (1982) findings of men perceiving significantly more trust in their same-gender friendships, both the target and criteria groups demonstrate a very different outcome. Females indicate significantly higher levels of trust for both groups in this study.

### 3. Nonverbal Communication

Analysis of the reports on perceived frequency of nonverbal communication reveals no significant differences between women and men in the target group (see Table 12). This finding supports the null sub-hypothesis that:

there will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived nonverbal communication between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

Mean scores indicate differences in females' ( $\underline{M} = 13.55$ ) reports of nonverbal communication and in those of males ( $\underline{M} = 11.65$ ), but not at a significant level.

Similar results, as presented in Table 13, were found in the nonverbal dimension for the college criteria group, but the findings of this group approached the significance level ( $p < .0523$ ), with the means for both females ( $\underline{M} = 15.96$ ) and males ( $\underline{M} = 14.60$ ) at a higher level than the target group.

While the Davidson and Duberman (1982) findings demonstrate significant differences, with women reporting more nonverbal communication, the target and criteria groups do



not show any significant differences in this dimension.

Table 12

ANOVA for Variable

Nonverbal Communication

(Target Group)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	36.1000	1	36.1000	2.8139	.1017
Within groups	487.5000	38	12.8289		
Total	523.6000	39			

  

Females	$\bar{M} = 13.55$
Males	$\bar{M} = 11.65$

Table 13

ANOVA for Variable

Nonverbal Communication

(Criteria Group)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	20.5511	1	20.5511	3.9849	.0523
Within groups	221.7600	43	5.1572		
Total	242.3111	44			

  

Females	$\bar{M} = 15.96$
Males	$\bar{M} = 14.60$

#### 4. Conflict

Findings, presented in Table 14, for the perceived conflict dimension of interaction within same-gender

friendships indicates no significant differences for the targeted older women and men. These results confirm the null sub-hypothesis that:

there will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived conflict between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

As shown in the mean scores, perceived interaction at this level received lower scores than some of the other variables previously considered (female  $\underline{M}$  = 11.20, male  $\underline{M}$  = 10.65).

Table 14  
ANOVA for Variable  
Conflict

(Target Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	3.0250	1	3.0250	.3940	.5340
Within groups	291.7500	38	7.6776		
Total	294.7750	39			
	Females	$\underline{M}$ = 11.20			
	Males	$\underline{M}$ = 10.65			

Table 15 also shows that there is no significant difference between women and men in the dimension of conflict for the criteria group. Mean scores for men ( $\underline{M}$  = 13.15) indicate a higher frequency of conflict reported than for women ( $\underline{M}$  = 12.72), but not at the level of significance.

Again, the Davidson and Duberman (1982) findings are not supported by the results in this study. Their results

indicated that males perceive significantly higher degrees of conflict in their male-male friendships. The target and criteria groups in this study show no significant differences in reported conflict levels.

Table 15  
ANOVA for Variable  
Conflict

(Criteria Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	2.0544	1	2.0544	.3882	.5366
Within groups	227.5900	43	5.2928		
Total	229.6444	44			
Females $\bar{M} = 12.72$ Males $\bar{M} = 13.15$					

##### 5. Competition for Power

As presented in Table 16, findings reveal no significant differences between men and women with regard to perceived competition for power. Thus the null sub-hypothesis is supported:

there will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived competition for power between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

The perceived competition for power dimension shows minimal mean score differences for males ( $\bar{M} = 12.75$ ) and females ( $\bar{M} = 12.30$ ).

Table 16  
ANOVA for Variable  
Competition for Power

(Target Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	2.0250	1	2.0250	.1637	.6880
Within groups	469.9500	38	12.3671		
Total	471.9750	39			
Females $\bar{M} = 12.30$ Males $\bar{M} = 12.75$					

The results for the criteria college group (see Table 17) also show no significant differences in perceived competition for power in male-male or female-female interactions. Although male means ( $\bar{M} = 12.00$ ) are higher than female means ( $\bar{M} = 11.16$ ), this is not statistically significant.

Table 17  
ANOVA for Variable  
Competition for Power

(Criteria Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	7.8400	1	7.8400	.9705	.3301
Within groups	347.3600	43	8.0781		
Total	355.2000	44			
Females $\bar{M} = 11.16$ Males $\bar{M} = 12.00$					

In the dimension of competition for power, the Davidson and Duberman (1982) results showed women reporting significantly higher frequency. However, there are no significant differences indicated in the target or criteria groups in this study for the variable, competition for power.

#### 6. Dependency

Results for the variable of perceived dependency show that there is no significant difference between the reports of older women and men (see Table 18). Surprisingly, the mean scores for both males and females are identical on this dimension ( $\bar{M} = 17.00$ ). Again, the null sub-hypothesis is supported:

there will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived dependency between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

Table 18  
ANOVA for Variable  
Dependency

<u>(Target Group)</u>					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	0.0	1	0.0	0.0	1.000
Within groups	364.0000	38	9.5789		
Total	364.0000	39			
	Females	$\bar{M} = 17.00$			
	Males	$\bar{M} = 17.00$			

Interestingly, findings on the dependency dimension for the criteria group, presented in Table 19, reveal significant differences between women and men ( $F = 9.5351$ ,  $p < .05$ ), with women reporting a higher frequency of interaction at this level (female  $M = 18.88$ , male  $M = 16.90$ ).

Table 19  
ANOVA for Variable  
Dependency

(Criteria Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	43.5600	1	43.5600	9.5351	.0035
Within groups	196.4400	43	4.5684		
Total	240.0000	44			
	Females	$\underline{M} = 18.88$			
	Males	$\underline{M} = 16.90$			

For the dependency variable, the Davidson and Duberman (1982) findings show no significant differences between women and men, and the target group results support this finding. Interestingly, results for the criteria group reveal a significant difference, with women perceiving more dependency within their same-gender friendships.

## 7. Shared Value Systems

The findings presented in Table 20 reveal no significant differences for the target older adult group on the dimension of shared value systems, thereby supporting the

null sub-hypothesis:

there will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived shared value systems between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

Mean scores for females ( $\bar{M} = 17.60$ ) do show more frequency in reporting this dimension than for males ( $\bar{M} = 16.60$ ), but not at a significant level.

Table 20

ANOVA for Variable  
Shared Value Systems

(Target Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	10.0000	1	10.0000	1.6408	.2080
Within groups	231.6000	38	6.0947		
Total	241.6000	39			
	Females	$\bar{M} = 17.60$			
	Males	$\bar{M} = 16.60$			

Similarly, data presented in Table 21 for the college criteria group does not reveal any significant differences for men and women regarding their perceptions of shared value systems. Mean scores are very similar for both males and females (female  $\bar{M} = 17.68$ , male  $\bar{M} = 17.30$ ) in this group.

Table 21  
ANOVA for Variable  
Shared Value Systems

(Criteria Group)					
Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between groups	1.6044	1	1.6044	.2503	.6194
Within groups	275.6400	43	6.4102		
Total	277.2444	44			
	Females	$\bar{M}$	= 17.68		
	Males	$\bar{M}$	= 17.30		

All three studies show no statistically significant differences between women and men on the dimension of shared value systems.

Thus, findings for differences in the seven dimensions of perceived interactional patterns show little support for the main hypothesis:

there will be no statistically significant differences in the perceived interactional patterns (spontaneous communication, trust, nonverbal, conflict, power, dependency, and shared value systems) between same-gender friendship dyads of older women and men.

A summary of these findings shows similarity in the results for the perceived levels of trust in both the target and criteria groups. Women perceive significantly more frequent interactions in this dimension in both groups. However,



the Davidson and Duberman (1982) study shows males perceiving significantly higher degrees of trust. In addition, the target and criteria group findings both show no significant differences in the dimensions of nonverbal communication, conflict, competition for power, and shared value systems. The Davidson and Duberman results are varied for these dimensions: females reported significantly greater levels of nonverbal communication and competition for power; males indicated significantly higher degrees of conflict; and no significant differences were revealed in the shared value systems dimension. There are no significant differences for the criteria group concerning spontaneous communication, however, in the target group and in the Davidson and Duberman study, men perceive significantly more spontaneous communication than women. Also, the criteria group results show that women perceive significantly more dependency in their interactions than men do. There are no significant differences in this dimension for either the target group or the Davidson and Duberman study. This summary is demonstrated in Table 22.

Table 22  
 Summary of Significant Findings  
 in Interactional Patterns

Level	Target Group	Criteria Group	Davidson and Duberman Group
Spontaneous Communication	Males*	-----	Males*
Trust	Females*	Females*	Males*
Nonverbal Communication	-----	-----	Females*
Conflict	-----	-----	Males*
Competition for Power	-----	-----	Females*
Dependency	-----	Females*	-----
Shared Value Systems	-----	-----	-----

\* significance indicated at  $p < .05$

## CHAPTER 5

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study investigates gender differences in communication between same-gender friendship dyads. The focus is on gender differences in the range of content levels reported and on perceived interaction patterns, with a target population of older adults (over age 60). This research extends a study by Lynne R. Davidson and Lucile Duberman (1982) in which they arrived at some interesting conclusions about gender differences in communication content and interactional patterns among young, single adults. In effect, this study is exploring the generalizability of the Davidson and Duberman findings by using a different sample, older men and women.

By using the Davidson and Duberman (1982) operational definitions for the ten categories under investigation, it seemed feasible that an objective measure could be designed that would generate equally relevant quantifiable data. Due to this methodological change to more quantitative data, it was also necessary to administer the study to a population similar to the one used in the Davidson and Duberman study (young, single college students) to strengthen the comparisons made between their findings and those of the target group. Therefore, when discussing the conclusions about findings for this study, it is important to consider findings

for the criteria group as compared to the original Davidson and Duberman study.

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings on the dimensions of the content levels of communication and the interactional patterns under investigation. Limitations of this study and suggestions for future research will also be addressed.

#### Summary and Discussion of Content Levels

The findings for the content levels of communication in this study corroborate the Davidson and Duberman (1982) results that showed women relating on all three content levels (topical, relational, and personal) and men engaging primarily on the topical level.

In both the college criteria group and in the target older group, the topical level reveals no significant differences in the reports of men and women. Since topical communication falls within the realm of nonintimate communication, these results tend to confirm the view of Brian Morgan (1976) that men and women disclose similarly in nonintimate areas. It is interesting to note, however, that for older men and women, the results approach the confidence level with men reporting more topical communication. Perhaps this finding is due, in part, to an instrument limitation wherein the topical areas used in the questionnaire do not reflect enough diversity, thereby weighting the results.

Results on the relational dimension of content levels

are also consistent with the 1982 Davidson and Duberman findings. Men reported talking "less than women about their own interrelationships" (Davidson & Duberman, 1982, p. 815). This is quite likely tied to some of the barriers to increasing intimacy for men suggested by Robert Lewis (1978), particularly homophobia and aversion to vulnerability. Society has structured some rather negative sanctions for those who deviate from the prescribed masculine role as these results reflect.

Similarly, women in both the target group and the college criteria group report a significantly higher frequency of exchanges in the personal dimension than men. Again this is consistent with findings in the Davidson and Duberman (1982) study and in other research. Jourard (1971) implies that this phenomenon is tied to conditioning in the male role to conceal information that reveals the inner self (p. 35).

What these findings imply is that men and women continue to use essentially the same patterns of communication from young adulthood into later adulthood. The level of communication content appears to parallel the depth of interpersonal involvement. Older women report a pattern of deeper and broader communication content within their same-gender friendships, supporting the Davidson and Duberman (1982) inference that the findings destroy the stereotypical image of women as weaker because they relate primarily

on the personal level (p. 815). To the contrary, the evidence points to a more unified communicative approach to same-gender friendships for women in both populations with an entire range of intimacy levels utilized within their female-female friendships.

#### Summary and Discussion of Interactional Patterns

Data on interactional factors isolated by Davidson and Duberman (1982) are far less consistent among the populations in this study. In fact, the findings on interactional patterns among the groups studied are rampant with inconsistencies. However, some rather interesting findings do emerge.

One of the most significant findings of this study is found in the trust dimension of interactional patterns. The 1982 Davidson and Duberman findings revealed that men reported significantly higher levels of trust than women. Interestingly, both the college criteria group and the older target group in this study show women as perceiving significantly higher levels of trust in their same-gender friendships.

Earlier research has supported the notion of women being more trusting than men (Kaplan, 1973 and Wrightsman, 1974). However, Davidson and Duberman (1982) supported their findings by linking trust with spontaneous communication and then proposing a relationship between low risk content (topical communication) and high self-perception

in openness and trust. Argyle and Henderson (1984) have suggested that trust is one of the rules that must be maintained in order for high quality friendships to thrive. If it is assumed that the quality of a friendship is related to the level of intimacy attained, then the report of high trust levels should more logically be connected to a higher investment in the relationship, i.e., higher levels of personal and relational communication. The results of this study, showing women as more trusting, support this linkage moreso than the alternative proposed by Davidson and Duberman. The findings in this study are also more consistent with prior research.

While there is a trust factor present in men's friendships with other men, it may involve a lower level of frequency as suggested by G. H. Yoon (1978) and as evidenced by the findings in both the college criteria group and the older adult target group. It is possible to infer that these contradictory results mirror that behavioral difference between men and women.

Thus, the findings for this study would be more compatible with the data on the personal and relational levels reported by men and women in all three groups. It is reasonable to assume a correlation between trust levels and the more intimate dimensions of communication, i.e., relational and personal content levels.

The only dimension of the Davidson and Duberman (1982)

study in this area that is supported by both the criteria group and the target group is the category of shared value systems. In the original Davidson and Duberman (1982) study, as well as in the criteria and target groups, no statistically significant differences were found in reported shared value systems. This finding upholds the general view that, by definition, friendship involves similarity which includes equivalent value systems.

In the remaining categories, outcomes reveal many inconsistencies. For example, the results for the target group agree with the Davidson and Duberman (1982) findings on the spontaneous communication dimension. In these two groups, men report significantly more spontaneous communication in their same-gender friendships, however, the criteria group shows no statistically significant differences. A possible explanation for this inconsistency involves the meaning attached to spontaneous communication. Perhaps the questionnaire statements tapping this variable allowed for too much ambiguity. To be open and frank on a topical level is a very different experience from being open and frank on a relational or personal level. Rather than yielding any inferential data, this category needs to be refined in terms of more concrete meaning.

In the Davidson and Duberman (1982) study, the nonverbal communication dimension attained the greatest statistical confidence level of all the interactional factors. Their



results showed women reporting more reliance on nonverbal communication than men. While women in the older target group and the college criteria group also exhibit a higher frequency of nonverbal communication, these findings are not at the statistical confidence level, although the criteria group approaches the confidence level ( $p < .0523$ ). Prior research indicates that women evidence higher degrees of nonverbal communication, due in large part to their submissive feminine roles (Schefflen, 1972). Possibly women in the older group perceive their relationships with other women as more egalitarian, lessening the reliance on nonverbal cues. Their mean scores ( $M = 13.55$ ) are sufficiently low to lend credence to this inference. It is also conceivable that there was a problem with the questionnaire items for this dimension. These items may not have specified the behaviors that they are aware of eliciting, skewing the results to show less of the nonverbal communication dimension.

The dimensions of conflict and competition for power are highly interrelated since power is generally circumscribed within the boundaries of conflict, i.e., power emerges from conflictual situations. Therefore, when discussing the results of these two variables in this study, it is important to keep that interdependency in mind.

In the Davidson and Duberman (1982) study, women reported significantly greater levels of competition for power, and men indicated significantly higher levels of conflict.

However, these reports were relatively low in degree for both men and women. In the target and criteria groups for this study, no statistically significant differences were found in degrees of conflict and competition for power. These findings for women are in accordance with stereotypical feminine roles that encourage cooperation. However, the outcome for males in this study does not reflect the stereotype of masculine socialization into competition. In the older target population, this finding might be explained by the fact that most of these men have exited the work role, thereby reducing the need for competitive functions in their masculine roles. The college criteria group findings, however, are more difficult to rationalize, other than the possibility that there is again a perceptual difference in what constitutes conflict and power. Perhaps this group of males does not view their conflicts in terms of arguments or in the win/lose dimensions that the questionnaire items draw upon.

Results are varied on the extent to which men and women perceive their dependency on same-gender close friends. Davidson and Duberman (1982) found the dependency dimension to yield unexpectedly low responses for both women and men. The college criteria group, on the other hand, reports greater degrees of dependency for women ( $\bar{M} = 18.88$ ) and at a significantly higher level than men ( $p < .0035$ ). The older target group findings, however, reveal no differences in

reported dependency at the confidence level, but again, their perception of dependency within that particular relationship is quite high (both male and female  $\bar{M} = 17.00$ ).

These differing outcomes appear to be perplexing, particularly in terms of the higher or lower mean responses. Perhaps they can be understood through considering variations in age cohort experiences. Since the Davidson and Duberman (1982) data was gathered in 1977, it is possible that their low responses reflect a backlash from the social movement in the 1960's and early 1970's promoting individual independence. Conversely, the current interpersonal focus is centered around mutuality and interdependence, possibly reflected in the criteria group results. Older adults, both male and female, may be freer to acknowledge their dependence on close friends since they are more acutely aware of the limitations that accompany the aging process and also less constrained by work and family obligations. Thus, they can be more open to reciprocally meeting needs with close age cohorts (Chappel, 1983), making that relationship appear more essential to them.

These findings on interactional patterns reveal much diversity across groups. For the target group (older adults), these outcomes reflect changes in communication at the interactional level. Although the communication content levels used in young adulthood seem to be utilized throughout the life span for both men and women, communication at the

interactional level appears to be altered somewhat. As women age, they seem to reap the rewards of their broader range of communicative behaviors as demonstrated in some of the findings on interactional patterns. Older women experience more trust in their same-gender friendships and they engage in less stereotypically submissive behaviors. Older men also experience a break with traditional sex-role stereotyping in their same-gender friendships. Their reports indicate a release from the earlier competitive functions in their masculine roles.

#### Limitations

There are several factors that contribute to limiting the generalizability of findings in this study, for example, rival hypotheses, biases, and instrumentation problems. It is quite possible that the marital status of the older target group could affect results by virtue of the fact that having a marriage partner could lessen the need for close friendships with the same gender. This factor could present a competing hypothesis that would distort findings. Another limitation of this study concerns the method of subject selection. Subjects voluntarily participated in this research due to the fact that random selection was virtually impossible, particularly among members of the target population. In addition, a much larger sample would be required before generalizations could be made about the findings of this study.

There are also several problems that need to be taken into consideration with regard to instrumentation. The first problem involves the wording of questionnaire items. There appears to be some indication that questionnaire items did not tap enough variety of experiences within categories and perhaps they did not probe the behaviors that subjects elicit when involved in a particular dimension (for example, nonverbal behaviors). A second problem with instrumentation involves defining key terms. A respondent's subjective definitions of words like "open and frank" may vary significantly from meanings attached by other respondents. A third problem centers around the precision of response choice referents, since it may be difficult to discriminate between degrees of frequency when selecting "seldom" or "sometimes," producing inflated or deflated results. A final instrumentation problem deals with internal reliability. The manner in which the response choices were presented (interval levels indicating increasing degrees) did not allow for the inclusion of negative questionnaire items, making it impossible to perform any internal reliability checks.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

There are several appropriate suggestions for future research, but clearly, data from a larger more representative sample is needed, using the instrumentation from this study, before findings can be generalized. Another suggestion

would be to design a study that statistically measures the interaction of gender, communication content, and interactional patterns examined in this study in order to see if communication content has a significant effect on the interactional patterns within same-gender friendships.

It would also be intriguing to examine the effect of marital status on communication within both same-gender and cross-gender friendships. In addition, it would be interesting to investigate the effect of duration of the friendship on the quality of communicative interaction.

As indicated by others who have studied the friendship phenomenon, more longitudinal data is needed and further explorations into the varieties, functions, and qualitative nature of friendship over the life span are needed to provide greater understanding of this social role that plays a significant part in the satisfaction we experience throughout our lives.

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## Appendix A

## Consent Form

The Department of Communication Studies supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate. You are free to withdraw at any time.

This study is concerned with examining communication in male-male and female-female friendships. You will be asked to indicate responses that reflect how often you and a close friend talk about certain subjects or topics.

Your participation is solicited, but strictly voluntary. Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study. Be assured that your name will not be associated in any way with the research findings. We appreciate your cooperation very much.

Sincerely,

Sharon C. Condon  
Principal Investigator  
841-6586

---

Signature of subject agreeing to participate

## Appendix B

## Questionnaire Items by Category

Topical

My friend and I talk about current events.  
My friend and I talk about what's happening in the community.  
My friend and I talk about politics.  
My friend and I discuss the weather.  
My friend and I talk about foods we enjoy.

Relational

My friend and I discuss how we feel about one another.  
My friend and I talk about how much it means for us to be friends.  
My friend and I talk about how much we enjoy being together.  
My friend and I talk about it when we have hurt each other's feelings.  
My friend and I tell each other when we are angry with one another.

Personal

My friend and I talk to one another about things that make us happy.  
My friend and I talk to one another about our religious beliefs.  
My friend and I talk to one another about our feelings.  
My friend and I talk about our relationship with family members.  
My friend and I talk about our health.

Spontaneous Communication

My friend and I are open and frank when we talk to each other.  
My friend and I can talk about almost anything.  
My friend and I discuss our good or bad feelings about one another.  
My friend and I can talk openly to one another on most any topic.  
My friend and I can say almost anything without having to censor our words.

Trust

My friend and I feel sure that what we discuss will remain between us.

## Appendix B (cont.)

Trust (cont.)

My friend and I share secrets.  
 My friend and I rely on each other to keep confidences.  
 My friend and I can count on each other to keep confidential information between us.  
 My friend and I reveal personal information to each other.

Nonverbal Communication

My friend and I have certain gestures or ways of communicating that only the two of us understand.  
 My friend and I can comfort one another by touching.  
 My friend and I know when to leave each other alone without even saying a word.  
 My friend and I seem to sense when one of us needs the other without having to say it.  
 My friend and I sense what the other is thinking or feeling without saying a word.

Conflict

My friend and I experience arguments or disagreements when we are together.  
 My friend and I work on our disagreements until we resolve them.  
 My friend and I experience conflict in our relationship.  
 My friend and I quarrel with each other.  
 My friend and I have differences of opinion.

Competition for Power

When my friend and I quarrel, one of us is more often the "winner."  
 When my friend and I have an argument, one of us wins more than the other.  
 One of us generally makes the major decisions about our activities together.  
 When something needs to be done, one of us is more likely to decide the course of action.  
 When my friend and I make plans, one of us is more likely to make the final decision.

Dependency

My friend and I do things to help each other.  
 My friend and I do special favors for one another.  
 My friend and I ask each other for help.  
 My friend and I rely on the other being there for us when we need them.

## Appendix B (cont.)

Dependency (cont.)

My friend and I count on one another for assistance.

Shared Value Systems

My friend and I agree on the most important things in life.

My friend and I hold similar beliefs on many things.

My friend and I think alike about many things.

My friend and I have similar attitudes about important issues.

My friend and I share common beliefs and attitudes.

## Appendix C

Keeping your closest same-sex friend who is not a relative in mind, I would like you to indicate how often you talk about or experience the following statements using this scale:

- (A) Never
- (B) Seldom
- (C) Sometimes
- (D) Frequently

If you cannot determine an appropriate response for an item, leave it blank.

- |   |       |       |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. My friend and I agree on the most important things in life.  | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 2. My friend and I have similar attitudes about important issues.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 3. My friend and I talk about our relationship with family members.                                       | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 4. My friend and I think alike about many things.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 5. My friend and I are open and frank when we talk.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 6. My friend and I count on one another for assistance.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 7. My friend and I discuss how we feel about one another.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 8. My friend and I talk to one another about things that make us happy.                                   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 9. My friend and I have differences of opinion.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 10. My friend and I can talk about almost anything.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 11. When something needs to be done, one of us is more likely to decide the course of action to be taken. | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 12. My friend and I talk about what's happening in the community.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|   | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |



- (A) Never  
 (B) Seldom  
 (C) Sometimes  
 (D) Frequently

- |     |  |       |       |       |       |
|-----|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 13. | My friend and I sense what the other is thinking or feeling without saying a word. | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 14. | My friend and I do things to help each other.                                      | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 15. | My friend and I rely on each other to keep confidences.                            | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 16. | My friend and I can say almost anything without having to censor our words.        | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 17. | My friend and I know when to leave each other alone without even saying a word.    | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 18. | My friend and I talk about foods we enjoy.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 19. | My friend and I share common beliefs and attitudes                                 | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 20. | My friend and I can comfort one another by touching                                | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 21. | My friend and I ask each other for help.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 22. | My friend and I quarrel with each other.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 23. | My friend and I talk about our health.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 24. | My friend and I talk about how much it means for us to be friends.                 | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 25. | When my friend and I have an argument, one of us wins more than the other.         | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 26. | My friend and I feel sure that what we discuss will remain between us.             | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

- (A) Never  
 (B) Seldom  
 (C) Sometimes  
 (D) Frequently

- |     |  |       |       |       |       |
|-----|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 27. | One of us generally makes the major decisions about our activities together.           | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 28. | My friend and I seem to sense when one of us needs the other without having to say it. | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 29. | My friend and I reveal personal information to each other.                             | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 30. | My friend and I can talk openly to one another on most any topic.                      | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 31. | My friend and I rely on the other being there for us when we need them.                | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 32. | When my friend and I make plans, one of us is more likely to make the final decision.  | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 33. | My friend and I discuss the weather.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 34. | My friend and I experience arguments or disagreements when we are together.            | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 35. | My friend and I talk to one another about our feelings.                                | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 36. | My friend and I do special favors for one another.                                     | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 37. | My friend and I talk about it when we have hurt each other's feelings.                 | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 38. | When my friend and I quarrel, one of us is more often the "winner."                    | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 39. | My friend and I talk about politics.   | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 40. | My friend and I discuss our good or bad feelings about one another.                    | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| 41. | My friend and I tell each other when we are angry with one another.                    | A     | B     | C     | D     |
|     |  | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

- (A) Never  
 (B) Seldom  
 (C) Sometimes  
 (D) Frequently

- |     |  |   |   |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|
| 42. | My friend and I share secrets.   | A | B | C | D |
|     |  | — | — | — | — |
| 43. | My friend and I talk about current events.   | A | B | C | D |
|     |  | — | — | — | — |
| 44. | My friend and I experience conflict in our relationship.   | A | B | C | D |
|     |  | — | — | — | — |
| 45. | My friend and I talk to one another our religious beliefs.   | A | B | C | D |
|     |  | — | — | — | — |
| 46. | My friend and I hold similar beliefs in many things.   | A | B | C | D |
|     |  | — | — | — | — |
| 47. | My friend and I have certain gestures or ways of communicating that only the two of us understand. | A | B | C | D |
|     |  | — | — | — | — |
| 48. | My friend and I work on our disagreements until we resolve them.                                   | A | B | C | D |
|     |  | — | — | — | — |
| 49. | My friend and I count on each other to keep confidential information between us.                   | A | B | C | D |
|     |  | — | — | — | — |
| 50. | My friend and I talk about how much we enjoy being together.                                       | A | B | C | D |
|     |  | — | — | — | — |