Perceptions of One’s Own and Romantic Partner’s Opposite-Sex Friendships

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Declaration

I declare that this report does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree in any University, College of Advanced Education, or other educational institution; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

I further declare that the ethical principles and procedures specified in the Faculty of Life and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee document have been adhered to in the preparation of this report.

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Signed: ___________________________
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Abstract

The present study sought to explore whether factors such as employment, gender, children, education and attachment style affect the formation and/or maintenance of opposite-sex friendships for individuals who are simultaneously involved in a long-term romantic relationship. In addition, the present study aimed to explore factors which may increase the risk for romantic relational conflict in individuals who do have opposite-sex friendships. This was achieved by examining whether avoidance and anxiety dimensions, beliefs about whether opposite-sex friendships are possible and friendship closeness contributed to participants feeling threatened by their romantic partner’s opposite-sex friendship; as well as participants’ comfort level with their own opposite-sex friend. Finally, the present study explored correlates between the participant’s level of attraction to their own opposite-sex friend and other variables such as gender, attachment style and friendship closeness. The 64 males and 238 females who were involved in a long-term romantic relationship completed an online questionnaire. Overall, the findings suggested that although structural opportunity factors may not affect the formation and/or maintenance of opposite-sex friendships in individuals, attachment dimensions and general beliefs about opposite-sex friendships were the most important contributors to participants’ increased feeling of threat by their partner’s opposite-sex friendships and feelings of comfort with their own opposite-sex friend. The implications of the present findings and future directions were discussed.
Perceptions of One’s Own and Romantic Partner’s Opposite-Sex Friendships

Overview

Since the 1970’s, structural and social opportunities for men and women to initiate and maintain friendships have increased dramatically (Peplau, Hill & Rubin, 1993), and are likely to continue to grow well into the 21st century (Monsour, 2002). Societal changes such as the increased presence of women in the workforce (Gini, 1998), educational settings (Kalmijn, 2002), and the growing use of the internet (Monsour, 2002), have provided greater opportunities for men and women to develop nonromantic relationships (Peplau et al, 1993). In fact, a number of opposite-sex friendship studies have shown that these types of relationships form frequently and are on the increase (e.g., Reeder, 2003; Rose, 1985). Sapadin (1988), for example, sampled professional men and women and found that 89% of this sample group reported having had opposite-sex friendships. Additionally, Rose (1985) found that all of the undergraduate male students and 73% of the female graduate students who participated in his study reported having at least one opposite-sex friend in addition to their romantic relationship.

In an era when society is progressing towards heterosociality, that is, the integration of men and women in society, it is important to highlight the benefits that these friendships provide. Platonic opposite-sex friendships, that is, “…a voluntary, nonfamilial, nonromantic, relationship between a female and a male in which both individuals label their association as a friendship” (Monsour, 2002, p.26), have been found to enrich one’s social network, providing companionship as well as an insider’s perspective on how opposite-
sex members think, feel and behave (Monsour, 1997). In addition, having a friendship with a member of the opposite-sex may also provide an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of opposite-sex family members, coworkers, romantic partners and peers (Bleske & Buss, 2001; Swain, 1992).

Until recently, there has been relatively little attention directed to the study of opposite-sex friendship (Monsour, Harvey & Betty, 1997; Reeder, 2003). The limited research in opposite-sex friendships probably reflects the lack of societal expectations of such friendships, which have been often interpreted in terms of heterosexual coupling or sexual relationship (Swain, 1992). As a result, opposite-sex friendship literature, “…is young, fragmented, meager and fundamentally atheoretical” (Monsour, 2002, p.1).

More recently, however, the subject of opposite-sex friendships has become increasingly interesting to researchers and laypersons alike (Reeder, 2003). Researchers have attempted to clarify whether, and what type of, attraction exists between opposite-sex friends (Reeder, 2000); the challenges posed by these relationships (O’Meara, 1984; Monsour, Harris & Kurzweil, 1994); and gender differences in the frequency and preferences for opposite-sex friendships compared to same-sex friendships (Reeder, 2003; Rose, 1985; Sapadin, 1988). The majority of these studies, however, have focused on adolescents or young, single adults, predominantly from a university population, mainly because of the easy access of university students and the rich structural opportunities which universities offer to form friendships between men and women (Monsour, 2002). Conversely, with the exception of Booth & Hess (1974), Kalmijn (2002) and Werking (1997), there is a paucity of research into the opposite-sex friendships of adults who are either older or
in long-term romantic relationships (either married or de-facto) (Monsour, 2002; Werking, 1997). Yet, different structural and social value systems being held by individuals in different parts of their lifecycle would generate different results in the formation and/or maintenance of opposite-sex friendships (Monsour, 2002). In addition, individuals who have opposite-sex friends and are in a committed romantic relationship have more to lose. Conflicts may arise in their romantic relationship due to one partner’s friendship with the opposite-sex which may affect both the romantic relationship and the opposite-sex friendship.

Opposite-sex friendships decrease dramatically with marriage (Booth & Hess, 1974; Kalmijn, 2002). The role obligations which come from having a romantic partner, especially with children, may put an individual at a structural disadvantage for initiating and/or maintaining opposite-sex friendships (Booth & Hess, 1974). Likewise, the potential jealousy of a spouse may deter the formation or maintenance of other-sex friendships (Patford, 2000). Notwithstanding these difficulties, various studies have found that there are still individuals in long-term romantic relationships who are able to maintain close platonic friendships with the opposite-sex (Kalmijn, 2002; Werking, 1997).

Although not examined as yet, some of these individual differences may stem from a person’s attachment style. Monsour (2002) hypothesized that an individual’s attachment development may be a factor influencing the differences between those individuals who initiate and maintain opposite-sex friendships and those who do not. The attachment literature is vast and results from numerous studies support the hypothesis that the quality of early
attachment to primary care givers influences adult interpersonal relationships (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Simpson, 1990). Examining and utilizing attachment theory may help to provide some theoretical background and structure to the, as yet, largely atheoretical literature in this area (Monsour, 2002).

The introductory section of this thesis reviews the literature on opposite-sex friendships with a particular focus on studies which have examined individuals in long-term relationships with opposite-sex friends. A review of attachment principals will also be discussed and provides a context for the suggestion that an individual’s attachment style may influence the formation and perceived quality of an opposite-sex friendship for those who are in long-term romantic relationships. This will be followed by the research aims and hypotheses.

**Adult Opposite-sex Friendships**

*Definition of Opposite-Sex Friendship.* There has been some difficulty in defining a platonic opposite-sex friendship within the literature (Monsour et al., 1994; O’Meara, 1989), partly due to the inherent difficulty of defining friendship (Fehr, 1996; Rawlins, 1992). Most individuals instinctively know what friendship means; however, to define the essence of the concept of friendship has been difficult (Fehr, 1996). Rawlins (1992) has defined friendship as a voluntary, equal, personal and mutual involvement characterized by positive affection. Similarly, opposite-sex friendships share these same qualities but with the added consideration of potential romantic and
sexual interest, which may be implied in a relationship between a man and a woman (Monsour, 2002; Werking, 1997). Therefore opposite-sex friendship has been defined as “…a voluntary, non-familial, nonromantic, relationship between a female and a male in which both individuals label their association as a friendship” (Monsour, 2002, p. 26). Nonromantic, however, does not mean that the relationship is necessarily devoid of any love or sexual attraction, but that these emotions are generally monitored and regulated more than in romantic relationships (O’Meara, 1989).

**Barriers to Opposite-Sex Friendships.** Sexual attraction is not precluded from the definition of opposite-sex friendships. However, it serves a different function than in a romance (Monsour et al., 1994). In a romantic relationship, sexuality and passion is expected and welcomed, whilst in opposite-sex friendships they are “factors to be continually monitored, contended with, and regulated through negotiation” (O’Meara, 1989, p.534). Therefore, sexual undertones in an opposite-sex friendship may be viewed as threatening or challenging because they could compromise the integrity of a friendship between a man and a woman (Werking, 1997). Although viewed as a challenge, research examining sexual attraction in opposite-sex friendships has found that high levels of sexual attraction and/or sexual tension are present in only a minority of opposite-sex friendships. For example, with a sample of 186 undergraduate students, Kaplin & Keys (1997) found that 64% of males and 36% of females reported low to moderate sexual attraction to their closest cross-sex friend, whilst only a small minority of men and women reported high levels of attraction. In addition, romantic status did not affect the level of
physical attraction reported by men and women. Similarly, in a study utilizing 138 undergraduates, Monsour, Beard, Harris and Kurzweil (1994) found that the majority of platonic friends in the study reported experiencing very little or no sexual feelings towards their opposite-sex friend.

Another barrier to the formation and maintenance of opposite-sex friendship is what O’Meara (1989) formalized as the “Audience Challenge” faced by men and women in those relationships. The ambiguous nature of opposite-sex friendships lends itself to relational misinterpretations by outside observers. This is partly due to potential sexual and romantic undertones which exist in an opposite-sex friendship (O’Meara, 1989), and partly due to societal beliefs that see all opposite-sex friendships as a natural stage in the coupling process rather than a legitimate friendship (O’Meara, 1989; Swain, 1992). As a result, opposite-sex friends may strive to present a correct impression of their relationship, by continually monitoring themselves to prevent misinterpretations by relevant audiences (Rawlins, 1992). Most often, relevant audiences in adulthood tend to be romantic partners and working associates (Monsour, 2002).

**Marital Status.** The most powerful barrier, however, to the formation of opposite-sex friendships has been found to be marital status (Booth & Hess, 1994; Kalmijn, 2002). Marriage or a long-term romantic relationship, where a couple has invested time and commitment, has been found to be both a strong structural and social barrier to the formation of opposite-sex friends (Booth & Hess; Kalmijn; Rose, 1985). Some studies have found that marriage can affect a person’s entire friendship network (Rawlins, 1992; Werking, 1997) because
of the amount of time, effort and role commitments involved that are required to maintain such relationships. The structural barrier to forming opposite-sex friendships is even more noticeable when a couple has children (Kalmijn, 2002; Rawlins, 1992). Interestingly, however, this barrier effect is more pronounced for opposite-sex friendships than for same-sex friendships (Kalmijn, 2002; Werking, 1997).

Results from a longitudinal study (Kalmijn, 2002) suggest support for the notion that marriage and the impact of children negatively impact on the formation and maintenance of opposite-sex friendships. A random sample of 730 young adults, living in a representative sample of 25 municipalities in Holland in 1987, were initially interviewed as young adults (18 to 26 years), and subsequently at five year intervals over a period of ten years. Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Booth & Hess, 1974; Rose, 1985), results revealed that over time, opposite-sex friendships more than same-sex friendships, decreased substantially for both these men and women, once they were married, and decreased even further when such couples started to have children. This effect was more pronounced for married women and for both men and women who did not attend college.

As suggested by Booth & Hess (1974), attending university and being employed provides a rich structural opportunity for initiating and maintaining opposite-sex friendships, given the close proximity between males and females, the supportive normative structure, and the time for interacting. However, a lack of structural opportunity to meet members of the opposite-sex does not fully explain why opposite-sex friendships that were previously
formed before marriage are not as likely to be maintained as same-sex friendships (e.g., Kalmijn, 2002).

Somewhat related to the audience challenge is the influence that an individual’s long-term romantic partner may have on the formation or maintenance of a friendship with a member of the opposite-sex. As previously discussed, sexual and romantic ambiguities which exist in opposite-sex friendships have led to societal beliefs that these friendships cannot exist, or at best, are fraught with too many complications (O’Meara, 1989; Rubin, 1985). If one or both partners in a long-term romantic relationship or marriage have internalized these beliefs, having an opposite-sex friend may act as a threat to the existing romantic relationship. Hence, some individuals would prefer to eliminate this threat by abandoning the friendship (Swain, 1992), or be deterred from forming an opposite-sex friendship to avoid future complications or conflicts with their existing romantic partner (Werking, 1997).

Research has shown that when individuals in long-term romantic relationships do have opposite-sex friendships, they often occur within the confines of marriage or work and mostly involve superficial interactions, in an attempt to limit any ambiguities of the nature of that relationship for the benefit of their spouse (Booth & Hess, 1974). For instance, both Booth & Hess (1974) and Kalmijn (2002) found that most of the married women in their study who reported having male friends reported that those males were friends who were introduced to them by their spouse.

Some married individuals, however, do have quite close opposite-sex friendships which they feel do not pose a threat to the marriage.
For example, in a qualitative study of 19 married participants exploring their thoughts, feelings and experience of their opposite-sex friendships, Werking (1997) found that none of the 14 female participants with a close opposite-sex friend indicated that their spouse felt threatened by them having those friends. In addition, most of the participants found that having a friend of the opposite-sex often enhanced and complemented their marital relationship by providing them with an opposite-sex viewpoint and sounding board to any relational difficulties experienced in their romantic relationship. Notwithstanding this, Werking acknowledged that some of the married participants in her study expressed that as their friendship with their opposite-sex friend became closer; they felt as if they needed to monitor and coordinate their activities in ways that would not be misinterpreted by their spouse. Werking further suggested that to enhance an understanding of the interconnections between third party romantic relationships, that is, marital partners and opposite-sex friendships, it would be necessary to ascertain marital partners’ perception of their spouses’ close opposite-sex friendships, such as how threatened are they by that relationship and which factors are more likely to increase this threat. Although Werking conducted detailed and lengthy interviews with her married participants, a comprehensive measure of what constituted and defined closeness for these participants was not entirely discussed.

_Friendship Closeness_. It appears from the scarce literature on opposite-sex friendships that in addition to individuals’ internalization of societal norms or beliefs about opposite-sex friendships, the level of closeness of these friendships seems to increase the potential threat that a spouse may experience towards their romantic partner’s opposite-sex friendship. Indirect support for
this was seen in the discussions of Werking’s (1997) participants and in Booth & Hess’s (1974) study which found that often the married participants with opposite-sex friends conducted superficial friendships, such as limiting the time spent together or going out in couples. The researchers suggested that the reason for this was to ensure that no unnecessary suspicions would arise from their spouse.

To date, no studies have directly examined the effects of friendship closeness to married individuals’ perception of their partner’s opposite-sex friendship. Some research studies have recognized that individuals may express the feeling of being close in different ways (Duck & Wright, 1993; Floyd, 1994). For example, women tend to express closeness to a friend through verbal and physical emotion, such as talking and emotional sharing (Duck & Wright, 1993; Tschann, 1988); whereas men tend to express closeness through shared activities, such as going to the football (Duck & Wright, 1993; Wright, 1989). Likewise, different individuals perceive feeling close to a friend differently (Monsour, 2002; Werking, 1997). For instance, for some individuals, trust and communication is most important even when they do not live in close proximity and thus are unable to see one another regularly (Werking, 1997). For others, close friendships are characterized by the involvement of regular activities, such as going out for meals together (Floyd, 1994). It is therefore, important to use a measure of friendship closeness which takes into account both expressive and instrumental dimensions of closeness, in an attempt to capture the different feelings and behaviours that characterize closeness for different individuals when using friendship closeness as a measure (Polimeni, Hardie & Buzwell, 2002).
Attachment Style

A review of adult opposite-sex friendship literature highlights individuals’ personal beliefs in the possibility of the existence of opposite-sex friendships, and their perceived closeness of that friendship as possible contributors to the increasing levels of threat an individual may experience towards their spouse’s opposite-sex friend. However, the feelings, thoughts and behaviour of individuals are not just guided by their internalization of certain societal or personal beliefs; there are other factors which may play an important role, such as prior experiences with opposite-sex friendships, personality, and attachment style. Monsour (2002) speculates that the ability to initiate and maintain an opposite-sex friendship may be partially influenced by an individual’s attachment style. Attachment theory provides a framework which explains differences in how individuals perceive, interpret and respond in their relationships with others (Bowlby, 1977). Furthermore, these individual differences are accentuated when the security of a long-term romantic relationship is perceived to be threatened, such as when a romantic partner’s opposite-sex friendship may be seen as a possible threat to that individual’s long-term romantic relationship (Guerrero, 1997). This next section will briefly review the principals of attachment theory.

According to Bowlby (1977), the nature and quality of the early attachment relationship between infant and caregiver has been shown to be largely influenced by the caregiver’s emotional availability and responsiveness to the child’s needs, particularly in threatening situations. Through continued interaction, a child develops internal representations, or “working models”
about whether the caregiver is someone who is responsive and caring, and also whether the self is worthy of care and attention (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978). Once formed, these globally positive or negative expectations and evaluations are thought to guide and explain differences in how people perceive, interpret and respond in their interpersonal relationships, and provide a conceptual framework for the continuity of social and personality development throughout one’s life (Bowlby, 1977). These working models are thought to become so ingrained that the ways in which they influence the individual may become automatic (Cassidy, 2000). Early attachment research by Ainsworth et al. (1978) used Bowlby’s conceptual framework in observational studies of caretakers’ responsiveness and warmth to infants’ distress. Based on infants’ differing emotional and behavioural reactions three primary attachment styles (secure, anxious-ambivalent and avoidant) were identified.

**Romantic Adult Attachment.** Research on adult romantic attachment began when Hazan & Shaver (1987), drawing on the similarities between the attachment relevance of parent-child relationship and romantic relationships, used attachment theory to examine whether infant and adult attachment styles were comparable. In a study conceptualizing romantic love as an attachment process, they found that adults nominated themselves into one of the three attachment categories in similar proportions to those delineated by Ainsworth et al. (1978) for infants. These results provided support to indicate that the major patterns of attachment style in infants described by Ainsworth et al. were similar to the attachment styles observed in adult romantic love.
Although the three category model of attachment differences was a popular measure, discrete categories do not allow an assessment of the degree to which a style characterizes a person (Collins & Read, 1990; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Other researchers, such as Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991) and Fraley, Waller and Brennan (2000), have preferred a dimensional measurement approach arguing that data detecting variations in romantic attachments were more consistent with a dimensional model of individual differences.

In an endeavor to identify the optimal dimensional system underlying adult romantic attachments Brennan, Clark & Shaver (1998) administered approximately 320 self-report items from a wide variety of inventories to a large sample of respondents. The analysis revealed that individual differences in adult attachment can be defined in terms of two orthogonal dimensions representing two distinct components of the attachment system – a self-model (anxiety) and an others-model (avoidance). The anxiety dimension reflects the degree to which an individual feels anxiety and apprehension over possible rejection and abandonment, as well as low self-worth. The avoidance dimension reflects the degree to which an individual depends on others for support and feels uncomfortable with physical and psychological closeness or feels reluctance to be intimate with others (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). The combination of the two dimensions, describes four styles of romantic attachment: dismissing, preoccupied, secure and fearful (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000).
Attachment Style and Opposite-Sex Friendships

As previously discussed, an individual’s attachment development can affect their feelings and perception about themselves and of others around them, which in turn influences their interpersonal relationships. According to attachment theory, the attachment system is most activated when an individual is confronted with potential separation and perceived relational threat (Bowlby, 1977). When an individual’s romantic partner has a close platonic friendship with someone of the opposite-sex, the individual may or may not feel threatened. The difference in how an individual may feel towards the romantic partner’s friendship to someone of the opposite-sex may be influenced by an individual’s attachment style (Guerrero, 1998). For example, as individuals who have a negative self-model tend to feel more apprehension over possible rejection in their romantic relationships (Fraley & Shaver, 2000) they may feel more threatened by their partner’s opposite-sex friend than individuals who have a positive self-model. Conversely, as individuals with a negative other-model have been found to feel uncomfortable with psychological intimacy and the need to depend on others for support, and are reluctant to be intimate with others (Fraley & Shaver), they may feel less threatened by their partner’s opposite-sex friend.

In addition, there is some evidence for attachment style differences in the experience of jealousy. Individuals who score high on attachment anxiety have been found to experience more jealousy (Hazan & Shaver, 1990), less trust (Collins & Read, 1990) and to experience more fear when jealous than individuals who are low in this dimension (Guerrero, 1998) because they are worried about being abandoned and have low self-worth as measured by the
Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire (Brennan et al., 1998). Those who reported themselves as high on the avoidant dimension were found to be less likely to experience intense jealousy when threatened by a third party (Guerrero, 1998). Based on these findings, it would be reasonable to suggest that an individual who is high on the anxiety dimension would therefore feel more threatened by their partner’s platonic opposite-sex friendship, irrespective of their marital satisfaction. Conversely, individuals who are high on the avoidant dimension may not feel as threatened by their partner’s opposite-sex friendship because they have a higher sense of self-worth and value autonomy and independence (Brennan et al.). Avoidant individuals have also been found to feel less comfortable with intimacy (Shaver & Hazan, 1988); therefore they may even prefer that their partner has a close friendship with someone of the opposite-sex, as it may lessen a perceived burden of providing it themselves.

Accordingly, an individual’s attachment style may also influence their own opposite-sex friendships. It is possible that individuals with a negative self-concept (preoccupied and fearful), who have been found to have low self-worth and fear the rejection of their romantic partner (Fraley & Shaver, 2000) may find it more difficult to form or maintain friendships with the opposite sex than those with a more positive self-concept (secure and dismissive) who are characterized as having high self-worth, are confident and do not fear the rejection of their romantic partner (Fraley & Shaver). As a result individuals who have a negative self-model may be less likely to have opposite-sex friendships, and when they do they may feel less comfortable having such friendships than those with a more positive self-model, and this could ultimately threaten the longevity of that friendship.
The Present Study

Given the paucity of research in the area of adult opposite-sex friendships, the overall aim of the present study was to explore some of the factors which may influence the perception and experience of opposite-sex friendships for individuals in a long-term romantic relationship. In addition, the study endeavoured to enrich the currently atheoretical adult opposite-sex friendship literature by introducing the extensively researched and sound theoretical framework of attachment theory. This may offer a more comprehensive understanding of the factors which may be involved with opposite-sex friendships of individuals who are concurrently in a long-term relationship, in an attempt to identify which individuals are at a higher risk of experiencing potential difficulties within their romantic relationship and/or their opposite-sex friendships.

The present study’s first specific aim was to examine some of the determining factors which may contribute to differences between individuals in a long-term romantic relationship who report having opposite-sex friends and those who report having no opposite-sex friends. Research on opposite-sex friendship has indicated that structural opportunities such as gender, work status, education level and having children are factors which seem to affect the formation of opposite-sex friendships (Booth & Hess, 1974; Kalmijn, 2002). The present study therefore examined whether these factors still impact on the participants’ choices to form or maintain an opposite-sex friend. In addition, the current study examined whether the participants’ attachment style – secure, dismissive, fearful and preoccupied, also affected their choices to form and/maintain opposite-sex friends.
The second aim of the current study was an attempt to identify which individuals in long-term romantic relationships are at a higher risk in experiencing difficulties within their opposite-sex friendship, which may ultimately threaten the longevity of that friendship. This was achieved by exploring which factors are the most significant predictors of an individual feeling more threatened by their romantic partner’s opposite-sex friendship. As discussed previously, a person may feel more threatened by their romantic partner’s friendship with someone of the opposite-sex as a result of their general beliefs about opposite-sex friendships, such as whether or not they believe platonic opposite-sex friendships can exist, the degree of closeness of that friendship as well as their attachment style: The present study also examined whether participants’ attachment style and beliefs influenced the degree of comfort they feel with having their own opposite-sex friendship, whilst simultaneously being involved in a long-term romantic relationship. Even though some participants have chosen to maintain an opposite-sex friend, a constant feeling of discomfort may ultimately threaten the longevity of that friendship.

To measure the degree of friendship closeness, the Friendship Closeness Inventory (Polimini, Hardie & Buzwell, 2002) was used in the present study, because it provided both an emotional and behaviour closeness scale which includes both expressive and instrumental dimensions of closeness. In addition, the participants’ reported marital satisfaction was included to partial out its effects on the dependent measures when trying to measure the effects of attachment style, since previous researchers have found moderate
correlations between attachment style and marital satisfaction (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Although not a central aim, the current study sought to explore associations between the participants reported level of attraction to their opposite-sex friends and gender, friendship closeness (emotion and behaviour) and attachment dimensions (avoidance and anxiety), since the potential attraction between opposite-sex friendships has been regarded by past researchers as a potential barrier (e.g., O’Meara, 1989).

**Hypotheses.** The present study therefore predicted that: (a) participants who work are more likely to have an opposite-sex friend than those who do not work; (b) participants with a higher education level are more likely to have an opposite-sex friend than those who are less educated; (c) more males than females will have an opposite-sex friend; (d) more participants without children will have an opposite-sex friend than those who do have children; and (e) securely attached and dismissive participants would be more likely to have an opposite-sex friend than participants who have a fearful or preoccupied attachment style.

It was also expected that variation in the level of threat felt by participants, due to a partner’s opposite-sex friendship, would be predicted by the participant’s scores on both of the attachment dimensions (Avoidance and Anxiety), general belief about opposite-sex friendships, and perception of the degree of closeness (Emotional and Behavioural) they perceive their partner’s friendship to be with someone of the opposite-sex, whilst controlling for the effects of social desirability and marital satisfaction.
Due to the paucity of research on opposite-sex friendships with individuals who are involved with a romantic partner, the present study examined the following research questions in lieu of specific hypotheses: (a) Does the participant’s attachment style (Anxiety and Avoidance) and general belief on opposite-sex friendship contribute to their degree of comfort in having a friendship themselves with someone of the opposite-sex? If so, which is the strongest predictor? (b) Is the participant’s reported level of attraction to their own opposite-sex friend associated with their reported level of friendship closeness (emotion and behaviour) and/or attachment dimension (avoidance and anxiety)? (c) Is there a difference between romantically attached males and females in the degrees of physical attraction felt towards their opposite-sex friend?

Method

Participants

Participants were drawn from international internet sites and via a snowball effect the researcher’s own circle of friends. The sample comprised 302 participants (64 males and 238 females), who ranged in age from 18 to 50 years ($M=32.2$ years, $SD=8.86$). Approximately, 46.4% were from Australia, 39.4% from United States, 5.6% from England, 2.6% from Canada and 5.6% from Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Approximately 74.8% of the sample stated that they had completed some form of tertiary or postgraduate studies, 22.8% had only completed secondary level and 2.3% had only completed primary level. Approximately, 82% of the sample was employed and 83% were
not religious to moderately religious. All participants stated that they have been in a long-term relationship of at least one year, ($M=8.29$, $SD=7.7$). Number of children ranged from none to 5 children with 59.3% having no children and 40.7% having one or more. Approximately 69% of the sample group reported having a friend of the opposite-sex and 43% of these friends were themselves involved in a long-term romantic relationship. About 50% of participants’ partners had an opposite-sex friend and 28.8% of these friends were themselves involved in a long-term relationship.

**Materials**

Participants completed an online self-report demographic questionnaire, the Experiences in Close Relationship Questionnaire–Revised (ECR–R; Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000), the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988), the Friendship Closeness Inventory (FCI; Polimeni, Hardie, & Buzwell, 2002), the Perceptions of Participants’ Own and Partners’ Cross-sex Friendships Scale, and a Social Desirability Scale (SDS, Reynolds, 1982).

The demographic questions elicited background information concerning the participants’ gender, age, country of residence, religiousness, number of children, if any, and duration of the participant’s relationship with their current partner. Participants were asked to indicate the highest level of education completed by checking one of four categories. The four categories were coded in the following manner: primary = 1, secondary = 2, tertiary = 3 and postgraduate = 4. Participants were also asked to respond to their work status by checking yes or no. They were also asked to check yes or no for the question “Do you have opposite-sex friends who you consider to be “close
friends?” and to the question “Does your partner have opposite-sex friends which you consider to be their close friends”. A complete copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 1.

*Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire –Revised* (Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000) is a 36 item scale that measures respondents’ style of attachment by assessing two dimensions, participants’ levels of anxiety and avoidance in relation to romantic partners. Each subscale contains 18 items. Low levels of both anxiety and avoidance indicate a secure attachment style, a low score on anxiety and a high score on avoidance indicate a dismissive avoidant attachment style, high scores on anxiety and low scores on avoidance indicate a preoccupied attachment style and high scores on both avoidance and anxiety indicate a fearful avoidant attachment style. Fraley et al.’s scale of attachment was utilized because of their dimensional approach towards attachment style which has an advantage over the categorical model of adult attachment style. Items are scored on a 7- point Likert scale, where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly disagree”. Fourteen items are reverse scored and where necessary, item wording was adapted to emphasize current romantic relationship rather than all romantic relationships. Total scores on each scale can range from 18 to 126, with lower scores indicating lower scores on anxiety and avoidance. According to Fraley et al. (2000), the ECR–R scale has demonstrated strong internal consistency (alpha = .93 and .95) and test-retest reliability. In this study the avoidance item “I am nervous when partners get too close to me” was accidentally omitted, however it seemingly had little impact on the internal consistency of the scale.
The Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), is a 7-item scale and was designed to measure respondents’ relationship satisfaction. An individual’s marital satisfaction was included to partial out the effects of an individual’s relationship satisfaction on the dependent measures when trying to measure the effects of attachment style, since previous researchers have found moderate correlations between attachment style and marital satisfaction (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Although there are other respected marital satisfaction scales such as the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (Snyder, 1979) and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) the advantage of the RAS is its short length while still maintaining its high internal consistency and reliability (Hendrick, 1988). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “low satisfaction” to 5 = “high satisfaction”. Items 4 and 7 are reverse scored. The RAS has solid internal consistency (alpha = 0.86) and has been found to correlate significantly with measures of love, sexual attitudes, self-disclosure, commitment, and investment in a relationship (Hendrick, 1988). Construct validity has been demonstrated by its correlation with a longer criterion measure, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The scale was also effective in discriminating couples who stayed together from couples who broke up (Hendrick, 1988).

The Friendship Closeness Inventory (Polimeni, Hardie, & Buzwell, 2002), is a 46 item scale which was designed to measure both masculine and feminine styles of closeness within same-sex friendships in three domains of Emotional Closeness, Behavioural Closeness and Cognitive Closeness. For each subscale items are scored on a 7-point scale with 1 = “not at all” and 7 = “very frequently” or “a great deal” (depending on the content of the item). The
FCI was modified for the purpose of the current study and included only two of the three subscales. The two subscales were the Emotional Closeness subscale, which measures the felt closeness expressed towards friends, such as care, trust, affection, and enjoyment of each other’s company; and the Behavioural Closeness subscale, which measures the quantity and variety of the behavioural interactions with friends. The Cognitive Closeness subscale was omitted because the items appeared to be written for young single adults and were deemed inappropriate for people in a long-term relationship. All items were modified to measure the friendship closeness of the participants’ closest opposite-sex friend. Two forms of friendship closeness were used; one to measure the participants’ closeness to their own closest opposite-sex friend and another to measure the participants’ perception of their partner’s closeness to the partner’s opposite-sex friend. The alpha reliability of the Emotional Closeness and Behavioural Closeness subscales were 0.91 and 0.93 respectively (Polimeni et al, 2002). The alpha reliability of the total scale was 0.94. Correlations between the subscales indicated significant moderate correlations between the ratings on the Emotional Closeness and Behavioural Closeness subscales ($r = .48$, $p<.01$, Polimeni et al., 2002).

The Perceptions of Participants’ Own and Partners’ Opposite-Sex Friendships Scale was developed by the author to explore other aspects of the respondents’ perceptions of their own and their partner’s opposite-sex friendship. Eighteen items explored participants’ underlying beliefs about opposite-sex friendships and comprise of three sections. These included one item concerning participants’ general beliefs about opposite-sex friendships, that is, “In general I don’t believe men and women can have a close platonic
relationship”, eight items concerning feelings about one’s opposite-sex friendships (e.g., “Since I have been in my current relationship I feel more uncomfortable maintaining a close friendship with my opposite-sex friend”), and nine items concerning participants’ feelings about their partners’ relationship with a friend with the opposite-sex (e.g., “I don’t like how emotionally close my partner is with his/her friend”). For each subscale, items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale with 1= “strongly disagree” and 5= “strongly agree”.

The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Short form) developed by Reynolds (1982) is a 13-item scale that assesses respondents’ tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner. This can create unwanted variance that should be statistically controlled for to improve results. The Social Desirability Scale was therefore included to control for these effects on the measures. Reynolds reported adequate scale reliability with an alpha coefficient of .76. Items are scored on a 5-point scale with 1= “not true of me” and 5= “very true of me”. Eight items were reversed scored. Total scores can range from 13 to 63, with higher scores reflecting a higher tendency to answer in a socially desirable manner.

Procedure

To recruit participants, a cover sheet describing the study with the website address linking to the questionnaire was distributed to the researcher’s network of friends and associates. The study was also publicised on online forums and general discussion boards, including allForums, The NEST, MSN and Quarterlifecrisis. Data was collected over a 3 month period. In order to
participate, respondents were required to be heterosexual, range from 18 to 50 years and to be in a romantic relationship for at least one year. An introductory message informed participants that the study was exploring how people felt about their own opposite-sex friendships and how they felt about their partner’s opposite-sex friendships. Respondents were assured their responses were completely anonymous, and were advised to contact the researcher’s supervisor via email or mail should they have any further queries. Completion of the survey was considered a demonstration of informed consent.

Results

The survey data was downloaded from the Internet website and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14.0. No missing cases and no values out of range were found.

Factor Analysis

The Friendship Closeness Inventory (FCI) (Polimeni, Hardie, & Buzwell, 2002), was designed to measure the closeness between same sex friendships on three domains Emotional, Behavioural and Cognitive Closeness. For the purpose of this study however only the Emotional and Behavioural Closeness subscales were thought appropriate to measure closeness between opposite-sex friendships in both participants’ own opposite-sex friendships and the participant’s perception of their partner’s closeness of their opposite-sex friendship. Given the changes in the use of the FCI the items were factor analysed for this sample.
One factor analysis was conducted to determine the structure of the 24 items relating to participant’s closeness to their own opposite-sex friend and another to determine the structure of the 25 items relating to the participant’s perception of their partner’s closeness with their opposite-sex friend. As the sample size was 302, only factor loadings of .3 and above were considered significant at $p < .05$.

*Participant’s closeness to their own opposite-sex friend.* An exploratory maximum likelihood factor analysis was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of .89 indicated moderate to high amount of shared variance, and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity further indicated the variables were correlated, $\chi^2(276)=2637$, $p < .001$, and were therefore suited for factor analysis. Whilst the initial analysis extracted five factors with eigenvalues greater than one, the solution did not show simple structure with many items loading on more than one factor. As the scree-plot suggested only three factors, it was decided to run another analysis requesting a three-factor structure with an oblimin rotation as some correlation between the factors was expected. Although the goodness of fit test was significant, $\chi^2(207) = 449$, $p < .0001$, the three-factor structure indicated a simple structure where all items were significant and all items except two (items 63 & 66) loaded on one factor only. As the communalities for items 63 “I sometimes do something special to surprise my friend” (.31) and 66 “I feel I can tell my friend how much our friendship means to me” (.68) suggested that the three factors accounted for some variance among these items, they were kept in the analysis.
The final solution is shown in Table 1. The first factor, labeled Emotion Closeness, explained 33% of the total variance. The items underlying this factor imply feeling close to one’s opposite-sex friend through the expression of emotional intimacy such as personal problems and innermost feelings. The second factor, labeled Behaviour Closeness, accounted for 13% of the total variance. The items loading on this factor suggest closeness through the amount of interaction the participant has with their opposite-sex friend, such as going to the cinema or having meals together. The third factor, which only explained 5.5%, was labeled Affection Closeness. The items underlying this factor suggest feeling close through the expression of verbal and physical affection, such as showing or telling their opposite-sex friend how much they mean to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/item</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
<th>F3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closeness through Expression of Emotional Intimacy (Emotional Closeness)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel I can confide my personal problems to my friend</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel I can express my innermost feelings to my friend.</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel I can ask my friend about their personal problems</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closeness through Behaviour (Behaviour Closeness)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I attend social events, e.g. football/concerts, with my friend</td>
<td></td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We go to the pub/restaurant/cafè together</td>
<td></td>
<td>.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We plan a social event together</td>
<td></td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I go for a walk/drive with my friend</td>
<td></td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. We go to the cinema together</td>
<td></td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. We spend a social evening together</td>
<td></td>
<td>.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. We go on trips together</td>
<td></td>
<td>.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. We keep one another company .68
9. I loan him/her money .56
10. We clown around .51
11. I discuss things of a non-personal nature (cars, sports, work) with my friend .47
12. We make fun of each other in a light-hearted way .41
13. I sometimes do something special to surprise my friend .33 .31

Closeness through Expression of Affection (Affection Closeness)
1. I feel affection for my friend .79
2. I feel I can tell my friend that I like/love them .69
3. I praise my friend .61
4. I express support for my friend .59
5. I feel that my friend cares for me .59
6. I feel I can tell my friend how much our friendship means to me .39 .57
7. I feel comfortable hugging my friend .46
8. I really understand my friend .39

| Eigenvalue | 7.916 | 3.1 | 1.3 |
| % Var | 32.98 | 12.9 | 5.5 |

Note. Factor loadings of .3 or above are reported. % Var = amount of variance accounted for by the factor

Participant’s perception of how close their partner’s friendship is with their opposite-sex friend. A maximum likelihood factor analysis requesting a three-factor structure (to be comparable to the one for own closest opposite-sex friend) was conducted with an oblimum rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of .85 indicated moderate to high amount of shared variance, and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity further indicated the variables were correlated, $\chi^2(300)=1965.8, p< .001$, and were therefore suited for factor analysis.

The scree plot confirmed only three factors, and although the goodness of fit test was significant, $\chi^2(228) =459, p< .0001$, the three-factor structure showed simple structure where all items were significant and loaded on one factor only.
The three-factor structure is shown in Table 2. The first factor, labeled Partner Affection Closeness, explained 28.7% of the total variance. The items underlying this factor suggest participants’ perception of how close their partner feels towards their opposite-sex friend through their expression of verbal and physical affection, such as showing or telling their opposite-sex friend how much they mean to them. The second factor, labeled Partner Behaviour Closeness accounted for 15.3% of the total variance. The items loading on this factor suggest participants’ perception of partner’s closeness to their opposite-sex friend through the amount of interaction they have with their opposite-sex friend, such as going to the cinema or having meals together. The third factor, which only explained an additional 6% of the total variance, was labeled Partner Emotion Closeness. The items underlying this factor suggest that the participant’s perception of how comfortable their partner feel in expressing emotional intimacy with their opposite-sex friend, such as, confiding secrets or personal problems.

Table 2
Results of Factor Analysis for Closeness Scale for Participant's Perceptions of Partners' Opposite-Sex Friendship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closeness through Expression of Affection (Partner Affection Closeness)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. My partner feels that his/her friend respects him/her</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My partner feels that his/her friend cares for him/her</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My partner expresses support for his/her friend</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My partner can praise his/her friend</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My partner really understands his/her friend</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My partner feels that he/she can tell his/her friend how much the friendship means to them</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My partner feels affection for his/her friend</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My partner feels comfortable hugging his/her friend</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. They discuss things of a non-personal nature (cars, sports, music, work)</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. My partner feels he/she can tell his/her friend that he/she likes/love them</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Closeness through Behaviour (Partner Behaviour Closeness)

1. They spend a social evening together .80
2. They go on trips together; e.g. vacation/weekend .78
3. They plan social events together .77
4. They go for a walk/drive together .77
5. They go to the cinema together .71
6. They go to the pub/restaurant/café, together .70
7. They attend social events; e.g., football, concerts, together .67
8. My partner would loan his/her friend money .60
9. They keep each other company .58
10. My partner sometimes does something special to surprise his/her friend,(e.g., gift) .47
11. They clown around .30

Closeness through Expression of Emotional Intimacy (Partner Emotion Closeness)

1. My partner feels he/she can ask about his/her friend's personal problems .93
2. My partner feels he/she can confide in his/her friend .78
3. My partner feels he/she can express his/her innermost feelings to his/her friend .67

Eigenvalue 7.19 3.83 1.49
% Var 28.74 15.33 5.97

Note. Factor loadings of .3 or above are reported. % Var = amount of variance accounted for by the factor

The Perceptions of participants’ own and partners’ opposite-sex friendships scale. As this scale was developed for the purpose of this study the eight items relating to perceptions the participants have regarding their own opposite-sex friend and the nine items relating to the perceptions the participants have regarding their feelings towards their partner’s relationship with an opposite-sex friend were factor analysed.

A maximum likelihood with an oblimin rotation factor analysis was conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of .72 indicated a moderate amount of shared variance, and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity further indicated the variables were correlated, $\chi^2(28)=420.6, p<.001$, and were therefore suited for factor analysis.
The analysis extracted two factors with eigenvalues greater than one. The solution showed simple and clear structure with all items significantly loading on only one factor. In addition the goodness of fit test was not significant, \( \chi^2(13) = 20.4, p > .05 \), indicating that this model fits the data well.

The two-structure model is shown in Table 3. The first factor, labeled Comfort Feeling with Friend, explained 30.6% of the total variance. The items underlying this factor imply feeling quite comfortable and open in regards to their romantic long-term partner about the relationship the participant has with their own opposite-sex friend. The second factor, labeled Attraction, accounted for 16% of the total variance. The items underlying this factor indicate the level of physical attraction the participant feels towards their opposite-sex friend, such as flirting and seeing their friend as physically attractive.

Table 3
Results of Factor Analysis for Participants’ Perceptions of the Relationship with their Own Opposite-Sex Friend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
<th>F1</th>
<th>F2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Comfortable in Having an Opposite-Sex Friend (Comfort Feeling with Friend)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel I cannot be completely honest with my partner about the amount of time I am in contact with my friend</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am very open about my friendship to my opposite-sex friend with my partner</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My partner is comfortable with me having friends of the opposite-sex</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Since I have been in my current relationship I feel more uncomfortable maintaining a close friendship with my opposite-sex friend.</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attraction towards Opposite-Sex Friend (Attraction)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. There is some sexual attraction between me and my opposite-sex friend</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My friend and I occasionally flirt</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I find my friend physically unattractive</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I enjoy the attention I receive from my opposite-sex friend</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Eigenvalue | 2.45 | 1.3 |
| % Var | 30.58 | 16.19 |

Note. Factor loadings of .3 or above are reported. % Var = amount of variance accounted for by the factor.
An exploratory maximum likelihood factor analysis was conducted on the items relating to the feelings participants have towards their partner’s friendship with an opposite-sex friend. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy of .88 indicated moderate to high amount of shared variance, and Bartlett’s test of Sphericity further indicated the variables were correlated, $\chi^2(36) = 494.4, p< .001$, and were therefore, suited for factor analysis. Whilst in the initial analysis the scree plot indicated two factors there was only one factor with eigenvalues greater than one. In addition, the solution did not show simple structure, with many of the items in the second factor not significant. It was therefore decided to run another analysis requesting a one-factor structure. Although the goodness of fit test was significant, $\chi^2(27) = 64.5, p< .0001$, the one-factor structure indicated a simple structure where all items were significantly loaded on the one factor.

The final solution is shown in Table 4. This factor, labeled Less Threatened, explained 44.6% of the total variance. The items underlying this factor imply feeling threatened or apprehensive towards one’s partner’s relationship with their opposite-sex friend.
Table 4.

*Results of Factor Analysis for Participants' Perceptions of their Partner's Relationship with their Opposite-Sex Friend*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/item</th>
<th>Factor Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant's Feelings of Threat towards their Partner's having an Opposite-Sex Friend (Less Threatened)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I trust my partner, but I don't trust his/her friend (R)</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sometimes I feel annoyed when my partner spends time with his/her friend (R)</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I do feel insecure about my partner's friendship with his/her friend (R)</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I feel comfortable about my partner's friendship with his/her friend</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I don't like how emotionally close my partner is with his/her friend (R)</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am happy that my partner has friends of the opposite-sex</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I feel comfortable with my partner and their opposite-sex friend having the occasional lunch or dinner together</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Whether my partner has a close friend of the opposite-sex or not makes no difference to the quality of my relationship with my partner (R)</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I know I shouldn't feel insecure about my partner's friendship with his/her friend (R)</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eigenvalue 4.00  
% Var 44.62

Note. Factor loadings of .3 or above are reported.  % Var = amount of variance accounted for by the factor

*Data Screening*

Prior to analysis an Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) was carried out assessing univariate outliers and normality. EDA indicated that moderate outliers were found in Avoidance, Anxiety, Marriage Satisfaction, Participants’ closeness through their expression of emotional intimacy towards their own opposite-sex friend (Emotion Closeness), Participants’ comfort level with their own opposite-sex friend (Comfort Feeling with Friend) and Participants’ partner’s closeness with their opposite-sex friend through their behaviour (Partner Behaviour Closeness). All outliers were rescored to within three standard deviations above or below the mean. After the rescorign of the outliers, Anxiety and Avoidance scales were found to be significantly positively skewed and Marital Satisfaction, Emotion Closeness, Comfort...
Feeling with Friend and Less Threatened scales were significantly negatively skewed and the Behaviour Closeness subscale was significantly Kurtotic. This indicated, that the sample tended to be low on anxiety and avoidance, and high on; marital satisfaction, emotional closeness to opposite-sex friend, comfortable about having an opposite-sex friend and less threatened by their partner’s relationship with an opposite-sex friend. However, skewness is often typical with scales such as Anxiety, Avoidance and Marital Satisfaction. That is, in a normal sample it is often the case that the majority of participants tend to be less anxiously and avoidant attached and more securely attached and satisfied with their marital relationship. In addition, Tabachnick & Fidell (2001) contend that when sample sizes are large variables with significant skewness do not often deviate enough from normality to make a large difference in the analysis. As the present study had a sample size of 302, it was decided to continue with the analysis. However, results should be interpreted with caution.

Sample Descriptives. To assess the internal consistency of the scales used in the present study, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were calculated. All scales demonstrated adequate levels of reliability. In addition means, standard deviations and ranges of scores were calculated for each of the subscales. These are shown in Table 5.
### Table 5

**Means, Standard Deviations, Range of Scores and Alpha Coefficients of all the Subscales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure Coefficients</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Theoretical Range</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>42.54</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>18-126</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>35.32</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17-119</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Satisfaction</td>
<td>28.75</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>7-35</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Desirability</td>
<td>42.12</td>
<td>7.85</td>
<td>13-65</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Closeness</td>
<td>15.03</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affection Closeness</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>8.98</td>
<td>9-63</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Closeness</td>
<td>48.39</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>12-84</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Emotion Closeness</td>
<td>13.37</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>3-21</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Affection Closeness</td>
<td>49.7</td>
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\[N = 302\]

Hypothesis Testing Differences in Participants with and without an Opposite-Sex Friend

**Work status.** In order to compare those participants who work with those who didn’t on whether they had an opposite-sex friend or not a 2x2 crosstab was conducted. The results indicated that although more participants who were in paid work had an opposite-sex friend than participants who didn’t work, 70.2% compared to 64.8% as expected, this difference was not significant, at the .05 level of significance.

**Education level.** In order to compare whether participants who had a higher education level were more likely to have an opposite-sex friend than
those with a lower level of education a 2x4 crosstab was conducted. Results indicated that there was a significant difference between those who just completed primary school level and those who completed secondary and tertiary level, 28.6% compared to 76.8% and 68% respectively, \( \chi^2(2) = 7.416, p < .05 \).

**Gender.** To compare whether there was a difference between males and females in those that have an opposite-sex friend and those that do not, a 2x2 crosstab chi-square was conducted. Results indicated that there was a significant difference between males and females, \( \chi^2(1) = 4.19, p < .05 \). As expected a higher percentage of males had an opposite-sex friend than females, 79.7% compared to 66.4%. This difference, even though significant was not large and considering that the amount of females in this study greatly outweighed males these results should be interpreted with caution.

**Children.** To examine whether participants without children were more likely to have an opposite-sex friend than those who did not, a 2x2 crosstab was conducted. Inconsistent with expectations, results indicated that there was no significant difference between participants without children and those with children in whether they had an opposite-sex friend. All participants were more likely to have reported having an opposite-sex friend than not.

**Attachment style.** A K-means cluster analysis was conducted on anxiety and avoidance scores, requesting four clusters. These were clearly
recognizable as the four attachment styles, with, for example, preoccupied being high on anxiety and low on avoidance.

To compare whether individuals with attachment style differences influenced their choice to have or not have opposite-sex friend a 2x4 crosstab was conducted. Results indicated that, as expected, the percentage of participants with secure and avoidant attachments who had an opposite-sex friend was higher than those with preoccupied or fearful attachments, 69.7% and 78.6% compared to 62.1% and 63.9% respectively. However, Pearson Chi-square was not significant at the .05 level.

Hypotheses predicting levels of threat and comfort scores

Prior to conducting the multiple regression analyses, the data was checked and the underlying assumptions were met. Histograms and residual plots indicated that the linearity, normality and homoscedasticity were met amongst the predictor variables and dependent variables. Mahalanobis distance revealed no multivariate outliers and Multicollinearity was not a problem. Pearson correlation coefficients, between the variables used in the multiple regression analyses are reported in Table 6.
### Table 6

**Intercorrelations between Variables used in the Multiple Regression Analyses**

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*N=302, *p<.05, **p<.001*
Predicting Feelings of Threat. To examine whether attachment style (anxiety and avoidance), marital satisfaction, general belief and participants’ perception of their partner’s closeness to their opposite-sex friend (partner emotion, partner affection and partner behaviour closeness) were able to predict participants’ feeling threatened by their partner’s relationship with an opposite-sex friend, a multiple regression was performed.

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with participants’ reported level of threat at their partner’s relationship with an opposite-sex friend, as the dependent variable. To control for the effects of social desirability, which correlated significantly with the independent variables and the dependent variable, it was entered in the first step of the regression equation. Attachment style (anxiety and avoidance) and marital satisfaction were entered in the second model of the regression and positive general belief about opposite-sex friendships was entered in the third step. Only the perceived emotional closeness of partner friendship with an opposite-sex friend was entered in the fourth step since closeness through affection and behaviour did not significantly correlate with the dependent variable.

As shown in Table 7, when statistically controlling for the effects of social desirability, the inclusion of avoidance, anxiety and marital satisfaction explained an additional 22.9% of the variance in participants’ reported level of threat from their partners’ opposite-sex friendship. Having a positive general belief about opposite-sex friendships contributed an additional 16.2% and participant’s perception of how emotionally close the partner’s relationship with the opposite-sex friend was, explained a significant additional 5.3% of the variance. Altogether the variables in model 4 explained 50% of the variability.
in the reported level of threat participant’s felt from their partner’s relationship with an opposite-sex friend. The strongest predictor was anxiety followed by general belief, then partner emotion closeness and finally avoidance. Social desirability and marital satisfaction were not significant predictors in the final model. Overall, participants who were high on the anxiety dimension, had a more negative belief and perceived their partner’s relationship to be more emotionally close also reported higher levels of feeling threatened by their partner’s relationship with an opposite-sex friend. In contrast, though a weaker relationship, participants who were higher on avoidance reported feeling less threatened by this relationship.

Table 7
Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Level of Threat Scores

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Predicting Feelings of Comfort. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted with participants’ comfort level in having an opposite-sex friend as the dependent variable. To control for the effects of social desirability, it was entered in the first step of the regression equation. Attachment style (anxiety and avoidance) and marital satisfaction were entered in the second model of the regression and participants’ general belief on opposite-sex friendships was entered in the third step.

As shown in Table 8, when statistically controlling for the effects of social desirability, the inclusion of avoidance, anxiety, marital satisfaction and general belief explained an additional 15.6% of the variance in comfort levels in having an opposite-sex friend. In model 2, only avoidance attachment and general belief contributed significantly towards the dependent variable, with avoidance as the highest predictor. Participants who were higher on the avoidance dimension also reported lower comfort levels in having an opposite-sex friend. Participants who reported having a more positive general belief on...
opposite-sex friendships also reported feeling more comfortable with having an opposite-sex friendship.

Table 8

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Level of Comfort Scores*

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*Note. N = 184*

*p<.05; **p<.001.

Attraction level and Gender. Prior to hypothesis testing, the assumptions underlying ANOVA were tested. Assumptions of normality, linearity, and independence of observations were met.

A univariate ANOVA was performed with gender as the independent variable and attraction as the dependent variable. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was met, $F(1,184) = .287, p>.05$. The analysis indicated that although males ($M = 13.80, SD = 1.87$) did report slightly higher
attraction levels than females ($M = 13.49$, $SD = 1.60$) the difference was not significant. However, considering that the numbers of females ($N = 143$) outweighed males ($N = 43$), these results should be interpreted with caution.

*Attraction, Attachment Dimensions and Friendship Closeness.* There were no significant correlations between participants who were higher on the avoidance or anxiety dimensions and level of Attraction felt towards their opposite-sex friend. However, all of the friendship closeness measures (Emotion, Affection and Behaviour) correlated with level of attraction; $r = .15$, $p < .05$; $r = .18$, $p < .001$ and $r = .31$, $p < .001$, respectively. Interestingly, behaviour closeness had correlated the highest with attraction. Participants who reported greater behaviour closeness, that is, greater closeness through sharing activities together and seeing and doing more with each other also reported higher levels of attraction towards their opposite-sex friend.

*Discussion*

*Overview of aims*

Given the dramatic social changes that have taken place over the last 30 years (Peplau, Hell & Rubin, 1993; Swain, 1992), and the paucity of research in the area of adult opposite-sex friendships, the overall aim of the present study was to explore some of the factors which may influence the formation and/or maintenance of opposite-sex friendships for individuals who are in a committed romantic relationship. This was achieved by examining whether the structural opportunities, such as employment, gender, children and education are still
important factors which may enhance the formation or maintenance of opposite-sex friendships as outlined by Booth & Hess (1974) and Kalmijn (2002); and whether individual differences such as the participants’ attachment style exert some influence over their choice to have or not have an opposite-sex friendship.

In addition, the present study aimed to explore which determining factors may increase the risk for romantic relational conflict in individuals who do have an opposite-sex friendship, which could ultimately lead to the dissolution of that friendship. This was achieved by examining which predictors such as avoidance and anxiety dimensions, general belief and friendship closeness, contributed the most to a participant’s level of feeling threatened by their partner’s opposite-sex friendship; as well as exploring whether avoidance and anxiety dimensions and general belief contribute to a participant’s comfort level with their own opposite-sex friend, if they have one. Finally, the present study explored correlates between the participant’s level of attraction to their own opposite-sex friend and variables such as gender, attachment style and friendship closeness.

Findings

**Structural and personal differences between participants who have an opposite-sex friend and those who do not.** The results of the present study did not support the hypothesis that more participants who were employed would have an opposite-sex friend than those who were not employed. The results indicated that although more participants who were in paid work had an opposite-sex friend than participants who didn’t work, this difference was small and non-significant. Likewise, the hypothesis that more participants without children would have an opposite-sex friend than those with children was not
supported. The results of the present study did partially support the hypothesis that more educated participants would have opposite-sex friends than less educated participants. Interestingly, although there was a significant difference between those who had only completed primary school and those who have completed secondary and tertiary, there was no difference between those who have only finished secondary and those who have completed tertiary education. Finally, the hypothesis that more males would have an opposite-sex friend than females was supported.

In contrast to the findings of previous researchers (Booth & Hess, 1974; Kalmijn, 2002), the present study did not find that employment and having children impacted on whether individuals formed and/or maintained an opposite-sex friend and was only partially consistent with findings in the aforementioned studies that education impacts on the formation and/or maintenance of opposite-sex friendships. There may be several reasons for these discrepancies.

As Booth and Hess’s (1974) study was conducted in the early seventies, the inconsistent results of the present study may reflect the dramatic social changes which have occurred in Western civilizations since the 1970’s. As a result, more men and women of today, work, study and spend recreational time together than in the 1970’s (Peplau, Hill & Rubin, 1993; Swain, 1992). That is, there are more women in the workforce, educational arenas and recreational settings than in the 70’s (Peplau et al., 1993). In addition, today there are more white collar workers than blue collar workers (DiPete, 1993). Although the present study did not differentiate between types of employment, the non-significant difference may reflect the possibility that most of the participants
in the current sample were involved in white collar jobs, which would be consistent with Kalmijn’s (2002) study which found that participants who had a white collar job were also more likely to have an opposite-sex friend than those in blue collar jobs. This speculation is indirectly supported by the education differences found in the current study.

There were significant differences between primary school leavers and both secondary and tertiary graduates, but not between secondary and tertiary graduates. This seems inconsistent with the previous studies of Kalmijn (2002) and Booth & Hess (1974). Both these studies found that it was the attendance at universities that created a difference in opposite-sex friendships. However, a primary school leaver may be less likely to be working in a white collar job than an individual who has completed secondary or tertiary education. Therefore, it would be reasonable to speculate that perhaps the differences found in education levels between participants who had an opposite-sex friend and those who did not is more related to the increased opportunity of being employed in white collar jobs that the completion of either secondary or tertiary education may afford.

In contrast to Kalmijn’s (2002) study no difference was found between participants who have children and those who do not, in having or not having an opposite-sex friend. One explanation may be that the married women in Kalmijn’s study with children were also less likely to be working. This was not differentiated in their study. As a result it may have been the fact that they were not working which may have affected their opportunity to form or maintain opposite-sex friendships. As 82% of the participants in the current sample were
in some form of paid employment, the impact of having children may not have been significant.

However, as Kalmijn’s (2002) study was a much more recent study than Booth & Hess (1974), another explanation for the inconsistent findings of the present study may be related to the differences in the sample. Although less culturally specific, the sample in the current study was also less diverse, in terms of gender, socio-economic status, employment status and education level than Kalmijn’s sample. A very high percentage of the participants were women (79%), worked (82%) and had completed a tertiary education (75%). This lack of diversity may not have allowed enough variation amongst the participants in terms of the aforementioned variables to definitively determine whether they have an impact on the formation and/or maintenance of opposite-sex friends.

Interestingly, however, as anticipated and consistent with findings of previous researchers (Booth & Hess, 1974; Kalmijn, 2002), more males had an opposite-sex friend than females. As there were no gender differences between participants who are employed and those who are not in the present study, one possible rationale, as indicated by Reeder (2003), for the gender difference could be the belief that males derive more benefit from having female friends than females do from having male friends, and are therefore more motivated to either form or maintain these friendships. However, as the differences between the proportions of males and females having an opposite-sex friendship was small and the numbers of females greatly outweighed males, such speculation should be interpreted with caution.

Finally, although, as expected, more participants whose scores defined them as having a secure or avoidant attachment style had an opposite-sex friend
than those whose scores defined them as having a preoccupied or fearful attachment style, the difference was not significant and hence the hypothesis was not supported. However, when considering that the attachment style categories were calculated from a sample where participants on the whole scored low on both anxiety and avoidance dimensions, it is perhaps not surprising that the differences were not significant. Then again, as the differences were in the expected direction, it may be reasonable to suggest that, given a greater diversity in the range of scores in the current sample, a participant’s romantic attachment style may have had a greater impact on the formation and/or maintenance of opposite-sex friendships for individuals who are in a long-term romantic relationship. That is, participants with a negative self-model (fearful and preoccupied) are less likely to either form or maintain an opposite-sex friend than those with a positive self-model (dismissive and secure). This may be due to a combinational effect of the tendency of those who have a negative self-model to fear the rejection of their romantic partner, and low self-worth and the ambiguities inherent in having an opposite-sex friend.

Participants’ level of threat from their partners’ opposite-sex friend.  
The results of the present study, however, did support the hypothesis that attachment style (avoidance and anxiety), general belief and partners’ friendship (emotional) closeness together would predict variations (approximately 50%) in the participant’s level of threat from their romantic partner’s opposite-sex friendship.

In terms of mental models, as expected, participants who held a more negative model of themselves (anxiety) were most likely to report feeling
threatened by their partner’s opposite-sex friendship. In fact, a participant’s self-model was the highest predictor of reported level of threat towards a partner’s opposite-sex friendship. Most likely because of their low self-worth and high insecurity in — and preoccupation with—their romantic relationship (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Guerrero, 1998), such individuals maybe more primed to fear that they do not compare with potential rivals, and worry more that the existence of their relationship may be under threat, because of their negative self-model.

Conversely, participants who held a negative model of others (avoidance) were less likely to feel threatened by their partner’s opposite-sex friend. However, dimensional avoidance only contributed a small amount to the level of threat from a partner’s opposite-sex friendship, probably due to the cancelling effects of participants who scored higher on the anxiety dimension, that is, preoccupied and fearful, indicating that an individual’s model of themselves is a more important predictor in a potentially threatening situation, such as the introduction of an opposite-sex friend, than an individual’s model of others.

Another important predictor of a participants’ level of threat from their partner’s opposite-sex friendship over and above the participant’s attachment style was their general belief about opposite-sex friendships. Consistent with previous researchers (O’Meara, 1989; Monsour, 2002; Werking, 1997), participants who believed that opposite-sex friendships are not possible, perhaps due to the perceived inherent complications involved in these friendships, not surprisingly reported feeling more threatened by their partner’s opposite-sex friendships. What is interesting is that in the current sample the level of this
belief was low. This may indicate that societal view on opposite-sex friendships may be slowly shifting to a more positive one than had previously been the case. However, those who do have a more negative perception of opposite-sex friendships may find that they feel suspicious of their partner’s friendship with someone of the opposite-sex and therefore feel threatened. Ultimately, this may create a possible source of conflict in the romantic relationship.

Finally, the participants’ perception of their partner’s emotional closeness to their opposite-sex friend contributed only slightly to the participant’s level of threat over and above the participants’ attachment style and general belief. Interestingly participants’ partner closeness through affection and behaviour did not correlate with participants feeling more threatened. So although consistent with previous studies (Booth & Hess, 1974; Kalmijn, 2002; Werking, 1997), that a romantic partners’ closeness to an opposite-sex friend influences the degree an individual feels threatened by that friendship, only emotional closeness seems to be important with the present sample. The results may reflect the prevailing cultural norm of marriage which discourages the sharing of intimate information with outsiders (Patford, 2000; Swain, 1992). Self-disclosure has been characterized as a process that eventually leads to the formation of a more intimate relationship (Leaper, Carson, Baker, Holliday & Myers, 1995). Individuals involved in a committed romantic relationship may view the sharing of intimate and personal information with their partner’s opposite-sex friends as more threatening, because it may lead to a more intimate relationship where the possibility of developing more romantic feelings is increased. Alternatively, it may see self-disclosure as the exclusive role to be
provided by the romantic partner, this may increase the likelihood that feelings of competition and jealousy may develop.

Given the large proportion of females, the present findings also fits evolutionary suggestions that whilst men are more threatened by their romantic partner’s sexual infidelities, women are more threatened by a partner’s emotional infidelity (Fenigstein & Peltz, 2002). A woman’s partner’s emotional investment to another woman may lead her risking his time, resources, protection and commitment, which seriously compromises the safety and security of her children (Fenigstein & Peltz). Women, more than men, may therefore be primed to feel threatened by a partner’s emotional closeness to another woman lest it may lead to serious romantic inclinations.

Participants feeling of comfort with their own opposite-sex friend. The present findings indicated that only attachment avoidance and general belief predicted a small amount of the participant’s comfort level in having an opposite-sex friend, with attachment avoidance being the highest predictor, whilst attachment anxiety was not a significant predictor. Therefore participants who were high on the avoidance dimension were less comfortable with having an opposite-sex friend. Likewise, participants who held a more negative view of opposite-sex friendships also were less comfortable with having an opposite-sex friend.

Interestingly, though participants who scored higher in the avoidance dimension reported feeling less threatened by their opposite-sex friend, they reported feeling more uncomfortable with their own opposite-sex friend. A possible explanation for these findings maybe that an individual may need
superior social and communication skills to overcome some of the challenges inherent in a friendship with the opposite-sex, whilst involved in a committed romantic relationship. These challenges include potential romantic and sexual attraction (O’Meara, 1989), differences in the way men and women might communicate (Monsour, 2002) and constant open communication with the romantic partner to ensure that the friendship is not misinterpreted (Werking, 1997). As individuals who are high in the avoidance dimension tend to be less social and communicative (Guerrero, 1997), they may find an opposite-sex friendship more stressful and uncomfortable than a same-sex friendship, where less explanations may be needed to justify the friendship.

An alternative explanation, however, is that the results may also reflect a general tendency for individuals who have a negative model of others to feel discomfort with any type of relationship rather than a particular discomfort with opposite-sex friendships. As previous studies (e.g., Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000) have indicated, individuals who are high in the avoidance dimension generally tend to feel uncomfortable with physical and psychological closeness and having to depend on others for support, and/or reluctant to be intimate with other individuals. As a comparison between opposite-sex friendships and same-sex friendship was beyond the scope of the present study, it is difficult to tell which explanation would be more fitting.

Surprisingly, the anxiety dimension did not influence the participants’ degree of comfort in maintaining an opposite-sex friendship whilst simultaneously being involved in a committed romantic relationship. Individuals with a negative self model tend to be more insecure and dependent in their relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). As they tend to need
constant reassurance and are overly preoccupied with their romantic relationship, it seemed reasonable to expect that being involved with an opposite-sex friend may cause some concern over their partner’s reaction in case it may cause some conflict. On closer inspection of the current results, however, fewer participants who scored high on preoccupied and fearful dismissive attachment style reported having an opposite-sex friend than those with a dismissive and secure attachment. Although speculation, this may suggest that those who may have felt uncomfortable forming or maintaining opposite-sex friendships do not maintain such friendships due to the fear of disrupting their romantic relationship. Those who have formed or maintained opposite-sex friendships during their long-term romantic relationship may have partners who are more supportive of such friendships, and hence participants do not feel uncomfortable maintaining opposite-sex friendships.

In addition, a participant’s belief that platonic opposite-sex friendships are not possible predicts to a small amount the participant’s reported level of comfort with their opposite-sex friend. A negative belief may cast doubt and suspicion as to the validity of that friendship. In addition, a negative belief about opposite-sex friendship may increase an individual’s concern as to how relevant others, such as their romantic partners, may view this relationship. Such worry and concern may lead to an individual feeling less comfortable with having an opposite-sex friend. Alternatively, as the items in the comfort scale asked how comfortable they are with their opposite-sex friends in relation to their romantic partners, it may be that participants who hold a negative belief of opposite-sex friendships may also be in a committed romantic relationship with a partner who also holds a negative belief about opposite-sex friendships, and
are therefore more uncomfortable because their romantic partners are less supportive of their friendship.

Attraction. In general, the participants’ reported level of attraction to their opposite-sex friend was moderate, above the midpoint of the theoretical range. This result is consistent with Kaplan & Keys (1997) whose findings also suggested that the vast majority of participants who were either single or romantically attached reported moderate levels of physical attraction to their closest opposite-sex friend. However, the results of the present study did not find that females and males differed in reported level of physical attraction to their opposite-sex friend. The present finding was inconsistent with the results found in Kaplan & Keys, whose findings suggested that males reported higher levels of physical attraction to their opposite-sex friend than females. Although attachment dimensions – avoidance and anxiety, did not correlate with the participants’ reported level of attraction to their opposite-sex friend, the participants’ reported level of friendship closeness – affection, emotion and behaviour, were significantly correlated with their reported level of physical attraction to their opposite-sex friend. More specifically, participants who reported higher levels of affection, emotion and behaviour closeness also reported higher levels of physical attraction to their opposite-sex friend. As participants’ attraction levels were not the central part of the current study, only the significant findings will be briefly interpreted.

Even though all closeness variables positively correlated with reported levels of attraction, the participants reported level of behaviour closeness had the highest correlation with reported level of attraction. One possible explanation for these findings is that a higher physical attraction to an opposite-
sex friend may motivate an individual to do more activities together, and
increase the enjoyment of each other’s company. As Sapadine (1988)
suggested, many of the participants in his study viewed physical attraction as
being one of the benefits obtained in opposite-sex friendships, since this type of
friendship allowed for lighthearted flirtation and teasing. Therefore, perhaps
rather than being viewed as a challenge, a moderate level of physical attraction
is required to maintain a closer friendship with an opposite-sex friend.

Implications

Overall, the results of the present study imply that in the current society
structural boundaries, such as employment, education and having children, may
play a less important role in the formation and maintenance of opposite-sex
friendships in individuals who are in a committed romantic relationship than
shown in previous studies (e.g., Booth & Hess, 1974; Kalmijn, 2002; Rose,
1985). In the present study, more than half of the participants in long-term
relationships reported having an opposite-sex friend and almost half of the
participants reported that their romantic partners had an opposite-sex friend.
These percentages are much higher than indicated in the aforementioned studies,
which provides further support to the studies which have indicated that opposite-
sex friendships are increasing (e.g., Monsour, 1994; Reeding, 2003). In
addition, in the current study, employment, children and education did not seem
to impact significantly, in the formation and/or maintenance of friendships.

A more important implication, however, is that an individual’s
attachment model and personal belief about opposite-sex friendships, especially
when concerning their partners’ opposite-sex friendships are important
predictors which contribute to an individual’s reported level of threat from their romantic partner’s opposite-sex friendship and, to a lesser extent, the individual’s comfort level with their own opposite-sex friendship. For individuals who have negative beliefs about opposite-sex friendships and/or score higher on the anxiety dimension, their partner’s involvement with an opposite-sex friendship may increase potential conflicts within the romantic relationship which could be destructive to that long-term romantic relationship.

Likewise, the potential conflicts that may arise within the romantic relationship may put individuals in a position where it may threaten their friendship with a member of the opposite-sex. Therefore, this knowledge may assist health professionals who specialize in family or couple therapy and encounter families or couples facing this problem by hastening the identification of some of the possible underlying causes. Therapists or counselors may use this information to help them explore clients’ underlying beliefs about opposite-sex friendships and how this may influence the clients’ feelings about their partner’s opposite-sex friendships. Accordingly, knowing that the individual’s attachment style may contribute to these fears may help guide health professionals to explore the role of attachment with their clients.

Limitations and future directions

Although the overall findings of the present study support the notion that perhaps structural opportunities to meet opposite-sex friendships may not be as important as personal differences when choosing to form and/or maintain opposite-sex friendships in married or de-facto individuals, there are a number
of methodological issues which should be considered. First, the sample was obtained from an online survey, which has been found to affect the ability to generalize the data due to the over-representation of certain groups, such as families with Internet-connected computers who are largely higher income earners and who have more years of education (Mueller, Jacobsen, & Schwarzer, 2000). Accordingly, the current sample largely comprised of highly educated, working, female participants. This may limit the extent to which the present study’s findings can be generalized to other populations. A related issue, as discussed previously, is that because of the over representation of participants who were employed and tertiary educated, the differences between participants who were employed and university educated and those who were not, may not have been large enough to uncover any significant differences. As such, future research should examine the impact of structural opportunities on opposite-sex friendships amongst participants with a greater variation in gender, types of employment, and education level.

Secondly, the levels of comfort and threat scales were developed for the purposes of the present study. Due to their simplicity, some relevant factors may have not been included in order to fully capture the nature of the factor. Although both scales afforded good alpha coefficients, they have not undergone any validity checks. Future research should probably develop a more sophisticated and comprehensive measure of feeling threatened, which may incorporate feelings of fear, insecurity and jealousy.

Thirdly, many of the scales used were skewed. Most participants reported high marital satisfaction, low anxiety and avoidance attachment, high positive general belief and moderate to high closeness to opposite-sex friends.
As a consequence, the results found in this study may be underestimations of the range of relationships. Future research should endeavour to use a sample which affords a higher range of these variables.

Finally, although the present study has predicted approximately half of the variance in feeling threatened by a romantic partner’s opposite-sex friend, half of the variance has not been accounted for. Almost 85% of variance has not been explained by an individual’s feeling of discomfort with their own opposite-sex friend. This indicates that there are other relevant variables which this study has not included. Future research may want to explore the role of past experience with opposite-sex friendships or personality variables, such as social anxiety. Guerrero (1997) contended that women and men who are socially anxious are particularly prone to anxiety when around members of the opposite-sex.

There are other research questions which could be explored. Have married or de-facto individuals who have opposite-sex friends, formed these friendships prior to the marriage or are they as likely to form new opposite-sex friendships after the marriage? How does this change for the romantic partner? How does an individual’s attachment style influence the management strategies one may use in their romantic relationship if they are threatened by their partner’s opposite-sex friendship?

Conclusion

The overall aim of this study was to explore adult opposite-sex friendships for individuals who are in long-term romantic relationships— an area, which although important, has been ignored by researchers (Monsour,
2002; Werking, 1997). The findings of this study suggested that attachment style and the individual’s belief about opposite-sex friendships have an important influence over the threatened feelings that an individual may experience over a romantic partner’s opposite-sex friendship. These feelings may lead to conflict within a romantic relationship and/or within the opposite-sex friendship. In addition, although the present findings suggested that structural opportunities may not be as important for the formation and/or maintenance of opposite-sex friendships in current society because of the increasing opportunities for interaction of men and women, further research is needed with a more representative sample. As the potential benefits of having opposite-sex friendships are high and these friendships are likely to increase, it will become more important to anticipate which individuals in long-term romantic relationships will experience difficulties or conflicts as a result of developing and/or maintaining opposite-sex friendships.


Appendix I: Copy of Questionnaire

Perceptions of One’s Own and Romantic Partner’s Opposite-sex Friendships

Principal Investigators: Bruce Findlay (Research Project Supervisor) Marie-Claire McCubbery (Postgraduate Diploma of Psychology)

Thank you for your interest in this study. This research has been designed to investigate the relationship between a person’s relationship style and their perceptions of their own opposite-sex friends and their perceptions of their partner’s opposite-sex friends. Specifically, the study is looking at platonic (i.e. nonsexual) friendships you and your partner have with people of the opposite-sex. **To participate, you must be currently in a romantic heterosexual relationship and have been with your current partner for at least one year.**

Participation in this study requires you to complete an online questionnaire, which should take about 45 minutes to complete. The questionnaire consists of statements and questions requiring you to select the appropriate answer. There is no right or wrong answers. You should try to answer as honestly as possible and do not spend too much time on any one question. Your first response is usually the best.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and your completion of the questionnaire will be taken to imply informed consent. If you choose to participate, any information obtained will be completely confidential and your anonymity will be assured. No identifying information is asked of you and no individual person will be identifiable from the data. Results of the study may appear in psychological publications but will only be reported as group data.

Participants should not experience discomfort, however if completion of the questionnaire raises issues about your relationship that cause you distress, please contact Swinburne Psychology Centre on +61 3 9214 865. In Australia, Lifeline can be contacted 24 hours a day on 13 11 14. If you live outside Australia, visit [http://www.lifeline.web.za/help.htm](http://www.lifeline.web.za/help.htm) to find out how you contact a telephone crisis help line in your country.

Any further inquiry or questions in regards to this study can be directed to my Supervisor, Dr. Bruce Findlay, Department of Psychology, at: bfindlay@groupwise.swin.edu.au

Should you have any queries or concerns that the supervisor has not answered satisfactorily, you may contact:

The Chair – SBS Research Ethics Committee School of Behavioural Sciences Swinburne University of Technology PO Box 218 Hawthorn, Vic, 3122

If you have any complaints about the way you were treated, please write to:

The Chair – SBS Research Ethics Committee School of Behavioural Sciences Swinburne University of Technology PO Box 218 Hawthorn, Vic, 3122

Please retain this information sheet for your records. Your participation is very important to the study and is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time and assistance.
1. What is your gender?
   a. Female
   b. Male
2. What is your age? ______ years
3. How long have you been in a romantic relationship with your partner? ______ years
4. Are you in paid work? Yes  No
5. What is your highest level of education completed?
   a. Primary School
   b. Secondary School
   c. Tertiary Education
   d. Postgraduate Education
6. What is your mother’s highest level of education completed?
   a. Primary School
   b. Secondary School
   c. Tertiary Education
   d. Postgraduate Education
7. How many children do you have? __________________
9. What is your ethnic background? _________________
10. To what degree do you consider yourself religious?
    1                      2                    3                           4                              5
      Not at all          Slightly        Moderately         Considerably             Extremely
11. What (if any) is your religion? ________________

   Adult attachment style Scale (Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000)

   Please rate to what extent you AGREE with the following statements:
   (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree)

12. I’m afraid that I will lose my partner’s love.
13. I don’t feel comfortable opening up to my romantic partner.
14. I often worry that my partner doesn’t really love me.
15. My partner only seems to notice me when I’m angry.
16. I often wish that my partner’s feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.
17. It’s easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.
18. When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else.
19. It’s not difficult for me to get close to my partner.
20. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.
21. My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.
22. Sometimes my romantic partner changes their feelings about me for no apparent reason.
23. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
24. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
25. It makes me mad that I don’t get the affection and support I need from my partner.
26. I worry that I won’t measure up to other people.
27. I talk things over with my partner.
28. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
29. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.
30. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feeling with my partner.
31. I find that my partner does not want to get as close as I would like.
32. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on my romantic partner.
33. I tell my partner just about everything.
34. I am very comfortable being close to my romantic partner.
35. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.
36. I prefer not to be too close to my romantic partner.
37. When I show my feelings for my romantic partner, I’m afraid he or she will not feel the same about me.
38. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.
39. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
40. I get uncomfortable when my romantic partner wants to be very close.
41. I worry that my romantic partner won’t care about me as much as I care about him/her.
42. I feel comfortable depending on my romantic partner.
43. I worry a lot about my relationships.
44. I find it easy to depend on my romantic partner.
45. I’m afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won’t like who I really am.
46. My partner really understands me and my needs.

Marital Satisfaction Scale, (Hendrick, 1988)

Please respond to the following items using the scales provided:

47. How well does your partner meet your needs?

1  2  3  4  5
Not at all  Slightly  Moderately  Considerably  Extremely

48. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

1  2  3  4  5
Not at all  Slightly  Moderately  Considerably  Extremely

49. How good is your relationship compared to most?

1  2  3  4  5
Much worse  Not as good  About the same  Better  Much better

50. How often do you wish you hadn’t gotten into this relationship?

1  2  3  4  5
Never  Seldom  Sometimes  Often  Very often
51. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all  A little  Moderate  Considerable  Very much

52. How much do you love your partner?

1 2 3 4 5
Not at all  A little  Average  Quite a bit  Very much

53. How many problems are there in your relationship?

1 2 3 4 5
Hardly any  Less than average  About average  More than average  A great many

54. Do you have opposite-sex friends who you consider to be “Close friends”? Yes/No

55. How many opposite-sex friends have you identified?

56. How long have you and your closest opposite sex friend known each other?

57. What is the status of your closest opposite-sex friend?
   Single
   Unmarried but in a relationship
   Married
   De-facto

The Friendship Closeness Inventory, (Polimeni, Hardie & Buzwell, 2002)

Thinking ONLY of YOUR closest opposite-sex friend, please rate how close that friendship is for you (1=not at all; 7=a great deal)

58. I feel I can confide my personal problems to my friend.
59. I feel I can ask my friend about their personal problems.
60. I feel I can express my innermost feelings to my friend.
61. I feel comfortable hugging my friend.
62. I praise my friend.
63. I sometimes do something special to surprise my friend (e.g. give a gift).
64. I feel affection for my friend.
65. I feel I can tell my friend that I like/love them.
66. I feel I can tell my friend how much our friendship means to me.
67. I express support for my friend.
68. I feel that my friend cares for me.
69. I really understand my friend.

Still thinking ONLY of YOUR opposite-sex friend rate how frequently you do these things together (1=not at all; 7=very frequently)

70. We spend a social evening together.
71. I loan him/her money.
72. I go for a walk/drive with my friend.
73. We plan a social event together.
74. We go on trips together.
75. I discuss things of a non-personal nature (cars, sports, work, music) with my friend.
76. We go to the cinema together.
77. We go to the pub/restaurant/café together.
78. I attend social events, e.g. football/concerts, with my friend.
79. We clown around.
80. We make fun of each other in a light-hearted way.
81. We keep one another company.
82. Does your partner have opposite-sex friends which you consider to be their close friends? Yes/No.
83. How many of your partner’s closest opposite-sex friends have you identified?
84. How long have your partner and their closest opposite-sex friend known each other?
85. What is the status of your partner’s opposite-sex friend?
   a. Single
   b. Unmarried but in a relationship
   c. Married
   d. De-facto
   Thinking ONLY in your PARTNER’S closest opposite-sex friend, in your perception, please rate how close that friendship is; (1=not all; 7=a great deal)
86. My partner feels he/she can confide in his/her friend.
87. My partner feels he/she can ask about his/her friend’s personal problems.
88. My partner feels he/she can express his/her innermost feelings to his/her friend.
89. My partner feels comfortable hugging his/her friend.
90. My partner can praise his/her friend.
91. My partner sometimes does something special to surprise his/her friend, (e.g. give a gift).
92. My partner feels affection for his/her friend.
93. My partner feels he/she could tell his/her friend that he/she likes/loves them.
94. My partner feels that he/she can tell his/her friend how much the friendship means to them.
95. My partner expresses support for his/her friend.
96. My partner feels that his/her friend respects him/her.
97. My partner feels that his/her friend cares for him/her.
98. My partner really understands his/her friend.
   Thinking ONLY in YOUR PARTNER’S closest opposite-sex friend, please rate how frequently they do these things together (1=not at all; 7=very frequently).
99. They spend a social evening together
100. My partner would loan his/her friend money.
102. They go for a walk/drive together.
They plan social events together.
They go on trips together; e.g. vacation or weekend.
They discuss things of a non-personal nature (cars, sports, music, work,)
They go to the cinema together.
They go to the pub/restaurant/cafè, together.
They attend social events, e.g., football, concerts, together.
They clown around.
They make fun of each other in a light-hearted way.
They keep each other company.

Please rate to what extent you AGREE with the following statements:
(1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree)
112. In general I don’t believe men and women can have a close platonic relationship.
113. I believe that to have friends of the opposite-sex provides me with a more balanced and richer network of friends which could ultimately benefit both me and my partner.
114. The gender of the person should not make a difference to the quality of that friendship.

Thinking ONLY of YOUR closest opposite-sex friend, please rate to what extent you AGREE with the following statements (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree):
115. Since I have been in my current relationship I feel more uncomfortable maintaining a close friendship with my opposite-sex friend.
116. I feel I cannot be completely honest with my partner about the amount of time I am in contact with my friend.
117. I enjoy the attention I receive from my opposite-sex friend.
118. I am very open about my friendship to my opposite-sex friend with my partner.
119. My friend and I occasionally flirt.
120. My partner is comfortable with me having friends of the opposite-sex
121. I find my friend physically unattractive.
122. There is some sexual attraction between me and my opposite-sex friend.

Thinking ONLY of YOUR PARTNER’S closest opposite-sex friend, please rate to what extent you AGREE with the following statements (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree):
123. I feel comfortable about my partner’s friendship with his/her friend.
124. I don’t like how emotionally close my partner is with his/her friend.
125. I am happy that my partner has friends of the opposite-sex.
126. I know I shouldn’t feel insecure about my partner’s friendship with his/her friend.
127. Whether my partner has a close friend of the opposite-sex or not makes no difference to the quality of my relationship with my partner.
128. I feel comfortable with my partner and their opposite-sex friend having the occasional lunch or dinner together.
129. I trust my partner, but I don’t trust his/her friend.
130. I do feel insecure about my partner’s friendship with his/her friend.
131. Sometimes I feel annoyed when my partner spends time with his/her friend.

Social Desirability Scale, (Reynolds, 1982)
Please respond to the following items using the scales provided:

1 2 3 4 5
Not true of me Very true of me

132. It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged.
133. On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my ability.
134. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.
135. There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right.
136. No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener.
137. There have been occasions when I took advantages of someone.
138. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.
139. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.
140. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.
141. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.
142. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others.
143. I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favours of me.
144. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.

Thank you very much for your precious time and cooperation.