Why do friendships end?
Investigating features of same-sex friendship dissolution

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Background: Friendships are beneficial, so why do they end?

• Research on the benefits of friendships:
  - Alloparenting, cooperative breeding (Hrdy, 2008)
  - Emotional support & better subjective well-being (van der Horst & Coffe, 2011)
  - Advice for various life events (Lewis et al., 2011)
  - Opportunities to raise in social status and hierarchy ranking (Geary et al., 2003; Vigil, 2007)
  - Alliances in conflict (Kurzban & DeScioli, 2009)

• Research on friendship length suggest sex differences:
  - Men have greater tolerance for conflict with non-kin and can thus stay friends with them for longer than women can (Benenson et al., 2009; Vigil, 2007)
  - Men’s friendships are more stable than women’s are (Benenson & Christoph, 2005; Geary & Flinn, 2002)

• But little research has systematically assessed why friendships end...

Method

Study 1: Sex differences in friendship length?

Both men and women reported higher friendship ratings at the height of their friendship compared to currently in their friendship, F(1, 352) = 298.49, p < 0.001, partial η2 = 0.48. This was qualified by a friend-ness by sex interaction, F(1, 352) = 3.97, p = 0.047, partial η2 = 0.01. Women reported higher friendship ratings at the height of the friendship and lower friendship ratings currently in their friendship compared to men.

Results

F \(\text{N} = 356) = 5.25, \ p = 0.07

Study 2: Sex differences in why friendships end?

Participants reported why friendships ended:

- Jealousy, lying, betray, broken trust, envy, gossiping
- Other people put you apart, romantic interest or new friend getting in the way, pursuing same romantic interest
- Change in social status, money, or other friendships/relationships
- Dying an ex, mate poaching, cheating with significant other

No longer have things in common, grow up, change in opinion, growing apart

Both men and women had heightened negative responses to the high conflict scenarios

• No sex difference in reported likelihood of ending friendship after conflict scenarios
  - Women more upset and resentful than men
  - Men more likely to react out of anger than women
  - Women more likely to confront in high-conflict, less likely to ignore in low-conflict scenarios

Women had more negative reactions to gossip-based and mate retention based conflict

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Conclusions and Future directions

• Investigating the role of fitness interdependence in decisions to end friendship
• Replicate study 1 with younger sample

What is the difference between relationships that “fizzle” out vs. acrimoniously end?
• High conflict brings higher costs, so only problematic when you have more to lose in social partner?
• Why doesn’t this happen in low conflict?
• Stake of conflict additive, tipping point for when friendships end?

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