Who's the Boss? Patterns of Perceived Control in Adolescents' Friendships

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Abstract:

This study examined the nature and correlates of different patterns of perceived control in adolescents' relationships with their best friends. Participants included firstborn adolescents (*M* = 14.94 years), their younger siblings (*M* = 12.44 years) and both their mothers and fathers in 163 families as well as a best friend of each adolescent (*M* = 15 years). Data were collected from family members during home visits regarding adolescents' family relationships, friendships, and psychosocial adjustment; time use data were gathered during a series of 7 nightly phone interviews. Information was obtained from best friends during a brief phone interview. We developed a typology of 3 different patterns of perceived friendship control based on the combination of adolescents' and their best friends' ratings of relational control. Patterns of control in adolescents' friendships were associated with the distribution of control in both parents' marriages and adolescents' sibling relationships. Further analyses, designed to test developmental predictions, revealed connections between friendship control and other qualities of adolescents' friendships (i.e., intimacy, conflict, perspective-taking).

Keywords: friendships | control | family relationships | adolescence

Article:

The balance of power and control is a potentially important—but often overlooked—element of friendships (Veniegas and Peplau, 1997). In comparison to the hierarchical power structure that often characterizes the parent–adolescent dyad, peer experiences involve relationships with partners at a similar developmental level, and thus offer unique opportunities for youth to negotiate a more equal distribution of power and status than may be possible with parents (Piaget, 1932; Sullivan, 1953; Youniss, 1980). Presumably because of this emphasis on equality among peers, few studies have explored the nature and implications of an unequal distribution of power—or dominance by one partner over the other—in adolescents' friendships. The purpose

of this study was to explore the correlates of different patterns of perceived control in close friendships using adolescents' and their best friends' perceptions of control toward one another.

Despite a general emphasis on the egalitarian nature of adolescents' peer relationships (e.g., Hartup, 1993; Laursen, 1993), there is some suggestion that imbalances in power and status may exist. For instance, dominance in adolescents' dyadic interactions with peers has been documented in observational studies of the hierarchies that emerge in group settings (Paikoff and Savin-Williams, 1983; Savin-Williams, 1976, 1979, 1980). Savin-Williams and colleagues, in their work with young adolescents in summer camps, found that a majority of the dyadic peer exchanges they observed were unilateral, with 1 individual consistently dominating the pairs' interactions (Savin-Williams, 1979, 1980). A related pattern has emerged in work with older adolescents. Furman (2001) found evidence of power differences in adolescents' friendships (i.e., 16–19-year-olds) using a narrative interview approach. In another recent study, college students were able to identify friendships that they perceived as equal as well as those that they perceived as unbalanced in the distribution of power (Veniegas and Peplau, 1997). Consistent with these data, feminist scholars have called into question the assumption that friendships, by definition, are equal in power, and have suggested that an important step in friendship research is to explore the power structure of these relationships (Bliezner, 1994).

Power and control may be a particularly salient aspect of friendship for adolescents from European American backgrounds. These youth encounter cultural norms in their daily lives that emphasize masculine-oriented values, including power and status, competition, and individualism (Ferree, 1990). These norms, in turn, have implications for the nature of interpersonal relationships (Maccoby, 1998). Cross-cultural comparisons of the qualities of girls' and boys' friendships, for example, suggest that European American children are more assertive and more competitive with their peers than are children from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds (e.g., Bank, 1994; Knight and Kagan, 1982). Given societal norms and differences that have emerged in cross-cultural comparisons, learning about power dynamics in European American adolescents' friendships is an important step in expanding our understanding of friendship experiences in this population.

This study addressed the balance of perceived control in European American adolescents' relationships with their best friends. There are at least 3 patterns that may characterize adolescents' friendship experiences: (1) adolescents report *more* perceived control than their best friends; (2) adolescents and friends report similar levels of perceived control, a "balanced" friendship; and (3) adolescents describe *less* perceived control than their best friends. By considering the ratings provided by *both* adolescents and their best friends, we highlighted the contribution of each dyad member to the perceived balance of control/power in the relationship. We focused on adolescents' *perceptions* of control for 2 reasons. First, because much of the time that adolescents spend with other youth is not directly supervised by adults (Larson and Richards, 1991), adolescents' reports of their own relational control offer an important perspective on the dynamics of their relationships. Second, we believed that learning about the balance of control from adolescents' point of view represents an important first step in understanding control dynamics in adolescents' close friendships. Given previous work suggesting gender differences in dominance and control (Maccoby, 1990, 1998), we anticipated

that boys would be more likely than girls to be in relationships characterized by unequal distributions of control.

This study had 2 specific goals, both aimed at identifying the correlates of shared versus unequal patterns of control in adolescents' friendships. Our first goal was to explore family dynamics that may give rise to patterns of control in adolescents' friendships. Connections between control in family relationships (i.e., parent–adolescent, sibling, and marital control) and control in adolescents' friendships would support the notion that opportunities in the family for adolescents to observe and learn about interpersonal control may have implications for adolescents' friendship control. Our second goal was to explore the connections between the balance of perceived control in adolescents' friendships and other qualities of those relationships (e.g., intimacy, conflict) in an effort to increase our understanding of how such power dynamics may affect the quality of adolescents' friendships.

Family Dynamics and Adolescents' Friendship Control

To address our first goal, we examined the links between adolescents' perceived friendship control and control in parent–adolescent relationships, sibling relationships, and parents' marriages. Our predictions about the links between family and friendship control were grounded primarily in the social learning tenet that, through observations of and interactions with family members, girls and boys learn and practice social behaviors that are applied in their peer relationships (e.g., MacDonald and Parke, 1984; Putallaz, 1987). The premise that girls and boys may model parental control in their friendships is supported by a series of studies with young children (Kochanska, 1992; MacDonald and Parke, 1984; Putallaz, 1987) and by limited evidence in adolescence. Gold and Yanof (1985) found, for example, that adolescent girls' reports of their mothers' democratic treatment were positively associated with shared decision-making (labeled "mutual influence") with their best friends. Drawing on existing work and social learning theory, our first hypothesis was that adolescents who experience less control in the parent–adolescent dyad will report less perceived control in their friendships.

Adolescents also may learn about relational control through their experiences with siblings (Dunn, 1993; Parke and Buriel, 1998). Siblings, more so than parents, provide opportunities to interact in peer-like situations from an early age (Dunn, 1993), setting the stage for similarities across sibling and peer relationships. Firstborn siblings, who were the focus of this study, may be more likely to exert control in their friendships, however, because dominance is a scripted part of their sibling roles (Bigner, 1974; Dunn, 1993). Consequently, our second hypothesis was that adolescents who experienced higher levels of control in their sibling relationships would be mostly like to perceive themselves as more controlling with their best friends.

Finally, parents' marital interactions may provide a model for adolescents to follow in structuring control patterns in their friendships. In support of this idea, research on emotional expressiveness in families suggests that children, particularly boys, model parents' marital behaviors in their peer interactions (Boyum and Parke, 1995). To our knowledge, only 1 study has focused specifically on marital dynamics and children's social dominance: McCartney and McKelvie (1985) found that boys who described their fathers as the dominant marital partner characterized themselves as having more dominant personalities. The fact that

this pattern was not evident for girls is consistent with the argument that power dynamics in the family may be most salient for adolescent boys, who are more likely to be socialized to play dominant and leadership roles (Wentzel and Feldman, 1996). Given patterns of gender-intensification, which suggest that girls and boys begin to spend more time with their same-sex parent in adolescence (Crouter *et al.*, 1995) and that same-sex parents play an influential role in socializing peer experiences (Updegraff *et al.*, 2001), our third hypothesis was that the status of the adolescent's same-sex parent in the marriage would be linked to the role that he/she assumed in the friendship (i.e., more, balanced, or less control). Consistent with previous work (McCartney and McKelvie, 1985; Wentzel and Feldman, 1996), we also expected that these connections would be stronger for boys than for girls.

Although it is rare for research on family–peer connections to explore how multiple family relationships are linked to peer experiences (Parke and Buriel, 1998), Bryant and DeMorris (1992) provide a conceptual framework for categorizing different levels of family influence on peer relationships; their perspective is consistent with a family-systems viewpoint (Parke and Buriel, 1998). Specifically, the distinction is made between relationships adolescents *participate in* (in this study, parent–adolescent and sibling) and those that they *observe* (in our case, the marriage relationship). Building on this framework, relationship connections may be most apparent when the focus is on relationships in which adolescents directly participate (i.e., parent–adolescent and sibling). From a social learning perspective, the opportunity to learn and practice relational control with family members may facilitate application in adolescents' friendships.

It is also important to consider the differences across these family relationships in their power structures. Although the parent–child dyad is hypothesized to become more symmetrical during the adolescent years (Cooper and Cooper, 1992), relationships between parents and their offspring are typically described as more hierarchical than parents' marriages and adolescents' sibling relationships. If greater similarity in structure across marital, sibling, and friend relationships lays the foundation for associations between family and friendship control, control in parents' marriages and adolescents' sibling relationships should be more strongly linked to adolescents' friendships than parent–adolescent relationship experiences.

Friendship Qualities and Adolescents' Friendship Control

Our second goal was to examine the friendship experiences associated with balanced versus unequal distributions of perceived control. Toward this end, we assessed adolescents' and their friends' perceptions of intimacy, perspective-taking, and conflict in their relationships, and collected daily information on their time spent together. In addition, we examined the qualities of adolescents' friendship experiences—from the perspective of the target adolescent—2 years later. On the basis of existing research and theory, 2 contrasting hypotheses were proposed about the connections between control and other elements of adolescents' friendships.
First, developmental scholars have emphasized equality and shared power as key features of girls' and boys' friendships that emerge in late childhood and early adolescence (Berndt, 1982; Hartup, 1993; Laursen, 1993). Several studies show that, when children and adolescents are asked to describe their friendships, they highlight the egalitarian properties of these relationships (Berndt and Perry, 1990; Furman and Buhrmester, 1985, 1992). Further evidence of the importance of equality in adolescents' friendships comes from the work of Berndt and colleagues

on sharing versus competition between friends (for a review, see Berndt, 1994). Berndt *et al.* (1986) showed that adolescents (as compared to younger children) placed more emphasis on friendship equality (e.g., by sharing more and thus competing less during interaction tasks) and that, for these youth, equality was associated with more positive descriptions of the friendship. Veniegas and Peplau (1997) found that college students described friendships that were equal in power as more emotionally close than those that were unequal. This work provides the bases for our fourth hypothesis: Adolescents and their friends will report more positive friendship experiences (e.g., more emotional intimacy, less conflict) in balanced as compared to unequal friendships. We anticipated that this pattern would be particularly evident for girls' friendships, because dominance and control are less characteristic of girls' peer interactions (Maccoby, 1990, 1998), and therefore potentially more harmful to the quality of their relationships.

An alternative scenario is that adolescents who are perceived as more or less controlling than their friends will not report less positive experiences than those in balanced friendships. Instead, differences in the distribution of control may reflect individual preferences and styles of interacting that friendship pairs have come to agree on over time. Being the less controlling member of the dyad may be beneficial for some youth who, for example, prefer being a follower rather than a leader (Savin-Williams, 1979). Drawing on his theory of social cognition, Selman (1980) argues that good friendships are those in which ". . . the parties get to go through mutual experiences, discover each other's 'personality' and traits, and become familiar with each other's complementary and common interests" (p. 140). Youniss (1980, p. 40), integrating the work of Sullivan and Piaget, similarly proposes that when children achieve "equity" (Piaget, 1932) or "sensitivity" (Sullivan, 1953), they are able to recognize and accommodate for each other's individual differences in their peer relationships. Thus, during the course of the friendship, adolescents may establish a distribution of perceived control that reflects their understanding of each other's preferences for balanced or unequal roles in the relationship. From this perspective comes our fifth hypothesis (a contrasting prediction to hypothesis 4) that the unequal distribution of perceived control will be associated with positive perceptions of the friendship.

As a final step, we explored adolescents' perceptions of their friendship qualities 2 years later with either the same best friend or a new best friend, taking into account the balance of perceived control in their friendship in the first year of the study. These longitudinal data provided an opportunity to explore several additional issues. First, we examined whether adolescents who had balanced relationships with their friends were more likely to maintain their friendship over the 2-year period as compared to those who perceived themselves as more or less controlling than their friends. This pattern would be expected if equality was essential in adolescents' friendships (in accordance with our fourth hypothesis). Second, we compared adolescents' levels of control 2 years later (as a function of their initial pattern of friendship control) with either the same or a new best friend. Similar levels of control with both the previous and the new best friend would support the argument that interpersonal styles generalize across relationships (Caspi and Elder, 1988; Dunn, 1993). Finally, we explored adolescents' perceptions of their friendships 2 years later to provide additional insights about the potential consequences of the division of perceived control for the other qualities of adolescents' friendships.

METHOD

Participants

Family Members

Data from 197 firstborn adolescents (*M* =14.94 years; SD = 0.72), their younger siblings (*M* = 12.44 years; SD = 1.0), and both their mothers and fathers were collected as part of a short-term longitudinal study of the connections between parents' work experiences, family relationships, and adolescent development (Crouter *et al.*, 2001; McHale *et al.*, 2000). The families were recruited via letters sent home to families of students in 7 counties (including 13 school districts) in a northeastern state. Letters described the study and requested that parents return postcards to express their interest in the project. Eligible families included nondivorced couples with a firstborn in the 8th, 9th, or 10th grade at the onset of the study and a secondborn child approximately 1–3 years younger. Because the larger goals of the study were to examine the effects of parents' work experiences on family dynamics, all fathers were employed full time and all but 1 mother worked at least part time for pay. Although it was not possible to calculate an exact response rate due to school district concerns about confidentiality, we used census data from the counties in which the school districts were located to estimate the proportion of the county populations that were eligible for the study. These proportions were then applied to school enrollments for students in the 9th and 10th grades (using the National Center for Educational Statistics Common Core of Data) to estimate the number of eligible families. Dividing the number of families recruited by those estimated to be eligible yielded a response rate of 34% for the participation of 4 members of each family. This response rate is comparable to the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) rate of 37% for only 3 members in a family.

Our participation rate was 95% for eligible families who expressed an interest in the project. Nine families were excluded from this study because, despite the initial screening procedures, they failed to meet 1 or more of the study criteria, and an additional 25 families were excluded because data were missing from adolescents' best friends. (See explanation below regarding missing data from friends.) The final sample consisted of 163 families with almost equal numbers of firstborn girls (*n* = 81) and boys (*n* = 82). Because of the attrition of 4 families (2% of the sample), 159 families are included in the Year 3 analyses.

Reflecting the demographics of the small towns and rural areas of the region, all families were Caucasian, with the exception of 4 mixed race families, and from working and middle class backgrounds. At the onset of the study, mothers' and fathers' years of education were 14.33 (SD = 2.10) and 14.26 (SD = 2.33), respectively, representing an average of 2 years of education beyond high school. Average annual incomes in Year 1 were $21,160 (SD = $14,852) for mothers and $40,433 (SD = $27,113) for fathers. Parents reported that they had been married an average of 17.52 years (SD = 3.22). More than half of the families (56%) had 2 children, 33% had 3 children, and the remainder included 4 or more children.

Friends

Information was gathered at Year 1 from a close friend of each firstborn adolescent for this study. A total of 163 friends agreed to take part in the study (an 87% participation rate). In most cases missing data resulted because adolescents refused to provide the name of a friend (n = 16). Some refusals, however, came from friends (n = 5) or parents of friends (n = 4). There were no significant differences between the present sample (n = 163 families in which adolescents provided the name of a close friend to participate in the friendship interview and friends agreed to participate) and nonparticipating families from the larger study (n = 25) in family background characteristics or adolescents' reports of friendship qualities with 1 exception: Participating adolescents described their friendships as more intimate than did adolescents whose friends did not participate, $F(1, 195) = 8.46$, $p < 0.01$.

Adolescents' friends averaged 15 years of age (SD =1.19). A majority of friends' parents reported intact marriages (81%). Education levels of friends' parents were similar to those of parents in the larger study: Mothers/guardians and fathers/guardians reported an average of 14.39 (SD = 2.29) and 14.72 (SD = 2.35) years of education, respectively.

Procedure

Family Members

Data collection involved both home visits and a series of nightly telephone interviews during 3 annual visits. Separate interviews lasting approximately 2–3 h were conducted with adolescents, their younger siblings, and both parents. For the analyses reported in this study, we used the following home interview measures at Year 1: (1) adolescents' ratings of their friendship experiences and psychosocial adjustment; (2) mothers' and fathers' reports of background characteristics, marital control, and parent–adolescent decision-making control; and (3) adolescents' and their younger siblings' ratings of sibling control. In addition, adolescents' descriptions of their friendship qualities also were available 2 years later (at Year 3). We focused primarily on Year 1 measures because collecting data from adolescents' best friends was unique to the first year of the study.

In describing their friendships, firstborn adolescents were first asked to list their close friends. From this list, they were then asked to choose 1 person of the same sex (who was not a member of their immediate family and who lived in the area) as their best friend. If adolescents indicated that they had more than 1 best friend, they were asked to choose the best friend they had known the longest. All measures of friendship quality were completed about the person whom adolescents identified as their best friend. During the home visit at Year 1, informed consent was obtained from parents and adolescents to contact the adolescent's best friend.

In the 2–3 weeks following the home visit, daily time use data were collected from adolescents during a series of 7 nightly phone calls (5 weekdays, 2 weekend days). Specifically, these calls were designed to gather information about adolescents' daily home and personal activities (i.e., excluding school activities). Using a cued-recall strategy (McHale *et al.*, 1992), adolescents reported on their involvement in 63 daily activities (e.g., watch TV, play sports, eat a meal), including how long each event lasted (in min) and who else participated (e.g., siblings, friends,

parents). From these data at Years 1 and 3, we calculated a measure of adolescents' involvement with their best friend.

Friends

After parents/guardians orally consented to their teenagers' participation, a packet including a consent form, background questions (to be completed by a parent), and a copy of questionnaires was mailed to each adolescent's best friend. Within 1 week of mailing the forms, friends were contacted to complete a phone interview. Friends were asked to follow along in their packet as the interviewer read the items and recorded their answers. Friends' reports of control, intimacy, and conflict with adolescents were used in this study. Because best friends were identified by the adolescents (rather than through a reciprocal nomination procedure), we asked each friend whether the target adolescent was someone they considered one of their closest friends. Almost every friend (97.5%) agreed that the target adolescent was one of their closest or best friends.8

Measures

The measures for this study are described in an order that parallels their presentation in the results section. We first describe the measure of friendship control, which was used to define the 3 friendship types. The next set of measures included four indicators of adolescents' adjustment; adjustment measures were employed to test for potential group confounds that would be treated as covariates in the primary analyses. The last 2 sets of measures focused on family relationship and friendship qualities, respectively.

Perceived Friendship Control

Adolescents and their friends described the degree of relational control they perceived over their partner on a scale adapted from Stets (1995a). For each of 10 items, adolescents and their friends reported on *perceptions of their own controlling behavior toward their partner* (e.g., "I keep him/her from doing things I don't like"; "I make him/her do what I want"). The items were rated on a5-point scale (*never* to *very often*) and summed to create an overall score with higher numbers reflecting greater control. The reliability and construct and content validity of this scale has been established previously (Stets, 1995a,b). Cronbach's alphas were 0.76 and 0.82 for adolescents' ratings at Years 1 and 3, respectively, and 0.78 for friends' reports at Year 1.

Adolescent Adjustment

Indices of adolescents' adjustment at Year 1 included depressive symptoms, misconduct, general self-worth, and perceived peer competence. To measure *depressive symptoms,* adolescents completed the short form of the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Devins and Orme, 1985). Each of 12 items (e.g., "I felt depressed") was rated on a 4-point scale (*rarely* to *most of the time*) and summed; higher scores indicated higher levels of depression. Cronbach's alpha was 0.80.

Behavioral misconduct was assessed using the Risky Behavior Scale (Eccles and Barber, 1990). Adolescents rated the frequency with which they engaged in each of 17 problematic or high-risk

behaviors during the past year (e.g., skip a day of school, get drunk, smoke cigarettes, get into a fist fight with another kid, damage public or private property) on a 4-point scale (*never* to *more than 10 times*). All items were summed for a scale score (alpha = 0.84).

Adolescents completed the *peer competence* and *general self-worth* subscales of Harter's (1988) Self-Perception Profile for Adolescents. For each item, adolescents chose 1 of 2 statements that best described them (e.g., "Some teenagers have a lot of friends" but "Other teenagers don't have very many friends" for peer competence; "Some teenagers like the kind of person they are" but "Other teenagers often wish they were someone else" for general self-worth) and indicated whether the statement was "really true" or "sort of true." Higher scores on these summed 6-item scales indicate greater perceived peer competence (alpha = 0.78) and self-worth (alpha = 0.84).

Family Relationship Correlates

Beginning with parents' perceived *marital control*, both mothers and fathers rated the degree of control they perceived exerting over their spouse using Stets's (1995a) measure of relational control. As described above for friendship control, the 10 items were rated on a 5-point scale (ranging from *never* to *very often*) and summed to create an overall scale score. Cronbach's alphas were 0.77 and 0.81 for mothers' and fathers' ratings, respectively.

To measure *parent–adolescent control*, we assessed the degree of control parents exerted in making decisions about adolescents' daily lives (Dornbusch *et al.*, 1985). Mothers and fathers indicated the person or persons who typically made decisions for the adolescent during the past year in 8 domains (e.g., appearance, homework, social life).A3-point scalewas developed on the basis of adolescents' involvement in decisions (Bumpus *et al.*, 2001). A score of 1 was given when adolescents made independent decisions (i.e., "youth alone" makes decision). A score of 2 indicated that the adolescent typically made decisions along with one or both parents (i.e., parents indicated "mother and youth," "father and youth," or "parents and youth"). A score of 3 was given if the adolescent typically had no opportunity to make decisions in that domain (i.e., responses of "mother," "father," or "both parents"). Each parent's responses were summed across domains, with higher scores indicating higher levels of parental control over adolescents' daily decisions. Cronbach's alphas were 0.74 for mothers' reports and 0.78 for fathers' reports.

Sibling control also was assessed using Stets's (1995a) measure of relational control. Both adolescents and their younger siblings described the degree of control they perceived over their sibling using the 10-item scale described for parents' marital control and adolescents' friendship control. Sibling and friendship measures were presented in separate sections of the interview; these measures were not counterbalanced because previous work with similar samples revealed no effects for order of presentation (McHale *et al.*, 1992). Alphas were 0.84 for adolescents' ratings and 0.79 for their younger siblings' ratings.

Friendship Quality Correlates

At Year 1, adolescents and their friends described their friendship experiences. Two years later (Year 3), adolescents rated their friendship experiences with their best friend using the same measures of friendship quality employed at Year 1.

Friendship *intimacy* was measured with a 5-item scale designed to tap how close each person felt toward their friend (Blyth and Foster-Clark, 1987). Adolescents and their friends rated items on a 5-point scale ranging from *not at all* to *very much* (e.g., "How much do you share your inner feelings or secrets with your best friend?"); higher numbers on this summed scale score indicated greater perceived intimacy. For adolescents and their friends, Cronbach's alphas ranged from 0.72 (adolescents' reports at Year 1) to 0.83 (adolescents' reports at Year 3).

A measure of adolescents' and their friends' *perspective-taking* was adapted from Stets (1995a). Four items, rated on a 5-point scale (*never* to *very often*), tapped the degree to which adolescents and their friends believed that they were able to see each other's point of view (e.g.,"I understand his/her feelings quite well"; "He/she understands my feelings quite well"). Scale scores were created by summing the items, with higher scores reflecting a greater degree of perspective-taking in the relationship. Cronbach's alphas were 0.88 and 0.83 for adolescents' and their friends' ratings at Year 1, respectively, and 0.91 for adolescents' ratings 2 years later.

Conflict was assessed with a 9-item scale that tapped the extent that adolescents disagreed with, initiated conflicts with, or felt angry at their best friends (adapted from Stocker and McHale, 1992). All items were rated on a 5-point scale (*not at all* to *very nuch*) and summed to create the scale score, with high numbers indicating more conflict. Alphas were 0.71 for adolescents' and 0.76 for their friends' reports at Year 1, and 0.73 for adolescents' reports at Year 3.

The final measure of adolescents' relationships with their best friend was *temporal involvement* or time spent in shared activities. Involvement was measured by adolescents' reports of the activities (from the daily time use data) in which their best friend participated at Years 1 and 3. During the series of 7 phone calls, interviewers probed for the presence of adolescents' best friend (identified during the home interview) when adolescents reported that friends were involved in an activity. The number of minutes adolescents spent in activities with their best friends was summed across the 7 phone calls to create a measure of involvement at both phases. Although the labor-intensive nature of time use data prevented us from collecting this information from both adolescents and their best friends, this approach has some important advantages. Rather than relying on participants to remember the frequency and duration of events over an extended period of time, which increases the likelihood of memory and recall biases (Huston and Robins, 1982), adolescents only were required to report on their activities for the day that they were called. Gathering this type of specific information over a series of 7 days also provides a more accurate description of adolescents' time with friends than paper and pencil measures on which adolescents rate their general level of involvement or companionship (Huston and Robins, 1982). We were unable to establish a direct estimate of reliability of adolescents' reports of their time spent with their best friends; however, the correlation between adolescents' and their *younger siblings'* reports of shared time together, $r = 0.89$, $p < 0.01$, and $r = 0.88$, $p < 0.01$ at Years 1 and 3, respectively, provides evidence of the reliability of adolescents' estimates of time spent in joint activities.

RESULTS

Overview

Our first step was to define 3 different patterns of perceived friendship control—Balanced, More Control, and Less Control—based on the combination of adolescents' and their friends' ratings of perceived control. We then conducted preliminary analyses to determine if there were friendship group differences in background characteristics and adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. To achieve our first and second research goals, we explored the correlates of these 3 friendship types in 2 domains: (1) family experiences, including control in parent–adolescent relationships, adolescents' sibling relationships, and parents' marriages; and (2) friendship qualities, including intimacy, perspective-taking, and conflict (as reported by both adolescents and their friends at Year 1 and adolescents at Year 3), and involvement (based on daily time use data at Years 1 and 3).

Defining Patterns of Perceived Friendship Control

As a first step, we calculated a difference score of adolescents' minus their best friends' reports of perceived friendship control. The average difference between adolescents' and their best friends' ratings was close to 0, $M = -0.04$, SD = 6.95, range = −23 to 20. A score of 0 indicates that adolescents and their best friends reported similar levels of perceived friendship control, a positive score reflects greater perceived control by adolescents than by their best friends, and a negative score reflects less perceived control by adolescents than by their best friends. Although the use of difference scores has been criticized in studies of developmental change, it is highlighted as an appropriate and useful approach for assessing inter individual differences, such as differences between 2 individuals' perceptions of their family or relationship experiences (Dunn *et al.*, 1990; Rogosa and Willett, 1985; Rovine, 1994). A primary concern about difference scores—for any approach—is whether they are reliable. Recent discussions of the use of difference scores to study interindividual differences assert that difference scores can be as reliable as the individual scores from which they are derived (see Rovine, 1994), and that concerns about unreliability are alleviated when the individual scales making up the difference score are uncorrelated (Dunn *et al.*, 1990). In the present study, the bivariate correlation between adolescents' and their friends' reports of perceived control was not significant, $r = 0.07$. This nonsignificant association is not surprising given that each individual rated how much he/she perceived control over his/her partner, but more importantly it eliminates concern about the difference score as less reliable than adolescents' and their friends' individual ratings of control. Given that the primary purpose of our study was to examine patterns of perceived friendship control based on differences in adolescents' and their friends' perceptions of control, we believe this strategy was appropriate.

Our second step in defining patterns of perceived friendship control was to create 3 groups. Balanced friendships ($n = 69$; 42%) were defined as those friendships that fell within a 1⁄2 standard deviation from 0 (i.e., difference scores from −3.48 to +3.48). A cutoff point of a 1⁄2 standard deviation from 0 was used so that friendships labeled as balanced would include those where adolescents and their best friends perceived similar levels of friendship control. Friendship dyads with a difference score greater than 1⁄2 standard deviation above 0 were labeled "More Control" ($n = 49$; 30%) because the *adolescents* perceived themselves as *more* controlling than their friends. When the difference score was 1⁄2 standard deviation or more below 0, the group

was labeled “Less Control” (n = 45; 28%) because *adolescents* perceived themselves as *less* controlling than their friends. We used this grouping strategy to capture the conceptually distinct experiences of shared (i.e., balanced) versus unequal patterns of perceived control.

Preliminary Analyses

As a preliminary step, we determined whether the groups we created differed in the expected patterns of control and whether gender differences were apparent. We also tested for potential confounds that should be controlled for in our primary analyses. Specifically, we investigated whether friendship group differences existed in individual and family background characteristics and in adolescents’ reports of their psychosocial adjustment.

To determine that the groups differed in the expected patterns of control and to test for gender differences, we performed a 3 (Friendship Group) × 2 (Adolescent Sex) × 2 (Reporter: Adolescent versus Friend) mixed model ANOVA. As expected, there was a Friendship Group × Reporter effect, $F(2, 157) = 280.8$, $p < 0.001$. Follow-up tests revealed significant differences between adolescents’ and friends’ reports of perceived control (i.e., the difference score) across the 3 groups (see Table I). In addition, there was an overall Friendship Group effect, $F(2, 157) = 8.14$, $p < 0.001$, revealing that the average of adolescents’ and friends’ reports of perceived control was lower for the Balanced group as compared to the other two groups. As expected, an overall Sex effect showed that boys reported higher levels of perceived control than did girls, $F(1, 157) = 13.99$, $p < 0.001$ (M = 18.15; SD = 3.75 for boys; M = 16.14; SD = 3.44 for girls). In addition, there was an Adolescent Sex × Friendship Group × Reporter interaction, $F(2, 157) = 3.42$, $p < 0.05$. Followups on this interaction, however, were not significant. To further test for sex differences, we performed a 2 (Adolescent Sex)×3 (Friendship Group) chi-squared analysis. There were no significant sex differences in Friendship Group membership.

[Table 1 Omitted]

Age and Friendship Duration Differences

To consider the possibility of within-dyad differences in age (e.g., the older member of the pair perceives themselves as more controlling), a 2 (Adolescent Sex) × 3 (Friendship Group) × 2 (Reporter: Adolescent versus Friend) mixed model ANOVA was performed with adolescents’ and their friends’ ages as the within group-dependent variables. No significant differences were found. The 3 groups also did not differ in friendship duration (measured in months).

Family Background Characteristics

Our next step, a series of 2 (Adolescent Sex) × 3 (Friendship Group) ANOVAs to test for group differences in family size and parents’ education and income, revealed no significant group differences.

Adolescent Psychosocial Adjustment

A series of 2 (Adolescent Sex) × 3 (Friendship Group) ANOVAs to examine group differences in adolescents' self-reported well-being (i.e., depression, misconduct, peer competence, self-worth) revealed no significant friendship group differences. These analyses were reassuring in that only 1 confound of Friendship Group was identified: adolescents' and friends' average reports of perceived control. The average of adolescents' and friends' reports of perceived control was not significantly correlated with the difference in the 2 friends' reports of control, $r = 0.10$, ns. To account for this confound and to ensure that the foci of our analyses was on the correlates of perceived differences in friendship control, we included average level of perceived friendship control as a covariate in the primary analyses.

Analytic Approach

To address the goals of our study, we performed a series of mixed model ANCOVAs, using a 2 (Adolescent Sex) × 3 (Friendship Group) × 2 (Reporter: Mother versus Father, Adolescent versus Sibling, or Adolescent versus Friend) design with average perceived friendship control as the covariate. Reporter was treated as a within-groups factor and individuals' reports of family relationship and friendship quality were the dependent variables. We chose an ANCOVA, rather than a regression strategy, because by including both reporters (i.e., mothers and fathers, adolescents and siblings, or adolescents and friends) in the same analysis, we could treat the relationship dyad as the unit of analysis (Maguire, 1999). Using "Reporter" as a within groups factor has several advantages. It increases statistical power and is efficient; both partners' perspectives of the relationship are examined in 1 analysis. It also enables examination of 2 distinct issues that would not be possible in a single regression analysis: (1) between-subjects effects (i.e., overall friendship group effects) reflect group differences that describe both reporters' points of view; (2) interactions involving the Reporter factor (e.g., Friendship Group × Reporter interactions) indicate potentially important within-dyad differences in the way in which two relationship partners describe their experiences. Because cell sizes were unequal, we examined Type III sums of squares (Lewis and Kiren, 1977). Newman–Keuls post hoc tests were conducted to interpret all interactions; the significance level was set at $p < 0.05$. Effect sizes were calculated using the *d* statistic; $d = 0.20$ is a small effect, $d = 0.50$ is a moderate effect, and $d = 0.80$ is a large effect (Cohen, 1988; Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1989).

[Table 2 Omitted]

Goal 1: Family Dynamics and Adolescents' Friendship Control

The focus of these analyses was the connections between the pattern of perceived control in adolescents' friendships and perceived control in parents' marriages, the parent–adolescent relationship, and the sibling dyad. *Parent-Adolescent Decision-Making Control* To test our first hypothesis, we examined mothers' and fathers' reports of perceived control over adolescents' daily decisions. The 2 (Adolescent Sex) × 3 (Friendship Group)×2 (Reporter: Mother versus Father) mixed model ANOVA revealed no significant differences as a function of friendship group. (Means are displayed in Table II for descriptive purposes.)

Sibling Control

In this analysis we also included younger siblings' sex as a factor to test the possibility that perceptions of sibling and friendship control may be more closely linked when the comparison was a same-sex sibling and a same-sex friend. Relevant to our second hypothesis, the 2 (Adolescent Sex) × 2 (Younger Sibling Sex) × 3 (Friendship Group) × 2 (Reporter: Adolescent versus Younger Sibling) mixed model ANCOVA revealed an overall Friendship Group effect (i.e., differences in adolescents' and siblings' average ratings of sibling control across the 3 friendship groups), $F(2, 150) = 6.75$, $p < 0.01$, $d = 0.52$. Follow-up tests revealed that adolescents in the More Control group had sibling relationships characterized by higher levels of perceived sibling control than did adolescents in the other 2 groups, regardless of their younger siblings' sex (see Table II). There also was a main effect for average friendship control (i.e., the covariate), $F(1, 150) = 9.61$, $p < 0.01$, which was qualified by a Reporter × Average Friendship Control interaction, $F(1, 150) = 16.13$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.68$. Follow-up analyses revealed greater differences between adolescents' and younger siblings' reports of sibling control when average perceived friendship control was high (i.e., above the group median) as compared to low (i.e., below the group median).

Parents' Marital Control

A 2 (Adolescent Sex) × 3 (Friendship Group) × 2 (Reporter: Mother versus Father) mixed model ANCOVA revealed 2 significant effects. Central to our third hypothesis was the 3-way Adolescent Sex × Friendship Group × Reporter interaction, $F(2, 153) = 3.00$, $p < 0.05$. We broke this interaction down by conducting 3 (Friendship Group) × 2 (Reporter: Mother versus Father) ANOVAs and follow-up tests separately by adolescents' sex. The ANOVA including families with girls was not significant. For boys, however, there was a significant Friendship Group × Reporter interaction, $F(2, 77) = 3.61$, $p < 0.05$, $d = 0.89$; follow-up tests, performed to test for differences in mothers' versus fathers' ratings of marital control (i.e., the reporter difference) across the 3 groups, revealed that the More Control group differed from the Less Control group. When boys were less controlling in their friendships, fathers reported less relationship control than did mothers; however, when boys were more controlling, the difference in mothers' versus fathers' marital control favored fathers (see Table II). These findings suggest parallels between boys' friendship control and fathers' marital control.

Summary

After controlling for the average level of perceived friendship control, connections were found between the balance of perceived control in adolescents' friendships and both parents' marital control and adolescents' sibling relationship control, findings that support our second and third hypotheses. In particular, boys who were less controlling with their friends had fathers who reported lower levels of control than their wives, with the reverse pattern being true (fathers were slightly more controlling than their wives) for boys who perceived themselves as more controlling than their friends. In addition, perceived control in the sibling relationship was significantly greater in the families of adolescents who perceived themselves as the more controlling member of the friendship dyad. For these analyses, effect sizes were moderate to large.

Goal 2: Friendship Qualities and Adolescents' Friendship Control

To address our second goal, we examined the links between patterns of perceived friendship control and adolescents' and their friends' ratings of friendship quality. For the concurrent (Year 1) analyses, we performed a series of 2 (Adolescent Sex) × 3 (Friendship Group) × 2 (Reporter: Adolescent versus Friend) mixed model ANCOVAs with Reporter as the within-groups factor and average friendship control as the covariate. Dependent variables were adolescents' and their friends' ratings of intimacy, perspective-taking, and conflict, respectively. For the ANCOVA using temporal involvement as the dependent variable, there was no within-groups factor because only adolescents provided time use data. A second set of analyses examined adolescents' friendship quality ratings (i.e., intimacy, conflict) and temporal involvement 2 years later (Year 3). We begin by discussing sex and reporter (i.e., adolescent versus friend) differences and then turn to the findings involving friendship group differences and interactions involving friendship group.

Concurrent (Year 1) Friendship Qualities

We found overall sex effects (averaging adolescents' and their friends' ratings) for intimacy, $F(1,156) = 68.53$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.33$, and perspective-taking, $F(1, 156) = 16.29$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.67$. As expected, girls reported higher levels of intimacy and perspective taking than did boys. For the conflict analysis, the covariate was significant, $F(1, 156) = 16.62$, $p < 0.001$, suggesting a positive relationship between average control in the friendship dyad and conflict in the friendship.

Turning to findings regarding friendship group differences, there were no significant friendship group differences in adolescents' and their friends' ratings of *intimacy or perspective-taking*. For friendship *conflict*, there was a Friendship Group × Reporter interaction, $F(2, 156) = 4.06$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.83$. Follow-up tests, comparing adolescents' versus friends' reports of conflict across the 3 groups, revealed that adolescents in the More Control group reported more conflict than their friends, but that adolescents in the Less Control group did not (see Table III). For the final measure of adolescents' friendship quality, *temporal involvement*, no significant differences were apparent. The 3 groups of adolescents reported spending similar amounts of time in shared activities with their best friends.

Year 3 Friendship Qualities

These analyses included 159 adolescents due to the attrition of 4 families (2% attrition rate). One hundred adolescents (61%) indicated that the friend identified at Year 1 was still their best friend 2 years later. To examine friendship stability, we created 2 groups, adolescents who did versus who did not have the same best friend at Year 3, and conducted a chi-squared analysis to test for differences as a function of friendship group (i.e., Balanced, More Control, Less Control). No significant differences were apparent. Next, we conducted a series of 2 (Adolescent Sex) × 3 (Friendship Group) × 2 (Target Friend: Same versus New Best Friend) ANCOVAs, with average perceived friendship control as the covariate. The "target friend" factor was included to determine whether differences in friendship ratings were apparent for those who rated their relationship with a same versus a new best friend.

[Table 3 Omitted]

Sex differences were apparent for adolescents' ratings of *intimacy*, $F(1, 146) = 24.28$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.81$, *perspective-taking*, $F(1, 146) = 18.71$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.70$, and *conflict*, $F(1, 146) = 5.33$, $p < 0.05$, $d = 0.62$. Girls reported the highest levels of intimacy and perspective-taking and boys reported the highest levels of conflict. The covariate was significant in the conflict and control models, $F(1, 146) = 5.41$, $p < 0.01$, and $F(1, 146) = 37.36$, $p < 0.001$, respectively, suggesting positive relationships between average control in Year 1 and conflict and control in Year 3.

The analysis of adolescents' reports of friendship *control* in Year 3 revealed a between-groups effect for Friendship Group, $F(2, 146) = 21.53$, $p < 0.001$. Adolescents in the More Control group at Year 1 were the most controlling and adolescents in the Less Control group at Year 1 were the least controlling 2 years later, regardless of whether or not they had the same best friend (see Table IV). Effect sizes ranged from 0.57 (for the More Control versus Balanced group) to 1.26 (for the More Control versus Less Control group).

[Table 4 Omitted]

For adolescents' Year 3 reports of *intimacy and perspective-taking*, Adolescent Sex × Friendship Group interactions emerged, $F(2, 146) = 3.91$, $p < 0.05$, $d = 0.71$, and $F(2, 146) = 3.40$, $p < 0.05$, $d = 0.63$, respectively. To follow up these interactions, we tested for sex differences in each of the 3 friendship groups. Sex differences were apparent in adolescents' ratings of intimacy and perspective-taking in the Balanced and Less Control, but not the More Control group. These findings suggest that typical sex differences in intimacy and perspective taking (i.e., girls reporting more than boys) were not apparent at Year 3 for girls and boys who held more controlling roles in their friendships at Year 1.

For Year 3 *conflict*, there was an overall Friendship Group effect, $F(2, 146) = 2.95$, $p = 0.05$, $d = 0.51$; follow-up tests showed that more controlling adolescents reported more conflicts with their best friends than did adolescents who were in either the balanced or less control groups at Year 1. Finally, consistent with Year 1 findings, no friendship group differences were apparent in the degree of *temporal involvement* at Year 3.

Summary

These findings suggest that some, but not all dimensions of adolescents' friendships, are linked to the balance of control in the dyad. There was evidence that when adolescents were the more controlling members of the pair they reported more conflicts than their partner. In contrast, no group differences were found concurrently in the degree of intimacy, perspective-taking, or the amount of time spent together.

In Year 3, friendship group differences were evident for both adolescents who described their relationship with the same friend (61% of the sample) and for those who reported on their relationship with a new best friend. In the case of intimacy and perspective-taking, girls and boys in the More Control group reported similar levels of intimacy and perspective-taking, whereas sex differences were apparent in the Less Control and Balanced groups. Finally, adolescents who were more controlling at Year 1 reported the most conflict with their friends at Year 3.

These differences are apparent after taking into account the average level of perceived control in the dyad, and effect sizes ranged from 0.39 to 1.26. In general, the pattern of findings provided more consistent support for hypothesis 5 than for hypothesis 4, suggesting that adolescents with unequal distributions of perceived friendship control did not report less positive friendship experiences than those in balanced friendships.

Follow-Up Analyses

The loss of power and variability that may result when creating categories from continuous variables is a concern when using a grouping strategy. Therefore, in cases where no significant differences are detected, it is important to demonstrate that null findings are not the result of these limitations of grouping approaches. To address this concern, we treated the difference between adolescents' and friends' ratings of control as a continuous measure of control and examined the links between this index and family and friendship qualities using regression analyses. No new significant effects emerged, suggesting that our grouping strategy did not limit our ability to detect significant effects.

DISCUSSION

We studied the nature and correlates of perceived control in European American adolescents' friendships using a multi-method approach, including self-report data from adolescents, their best friends, their mothers and fathers, and their younger siblings and daily time use data from adolescents. The ways in which adolescents establish control and dominance in peer group settings have received considerable attention (e.g., Paikoff and Savin-Williams, 1983; Savin-Williams, 1976, 1979, 1980), but we know little about control dynamics in adolescents' *close friendships*. Although developmental scholars highlight shared power and control as key features of adolescents' friendships (Hartup, 1993; Laursen, 1993) and feminist scholars have called for more attention to power dynamics in friendships (Bliezner, 1994), empirical work on adolescents' peer relationships has focused largely on intimacy, loyalty, and emotional support (Berndt, 1994). This study took an initial step in addressing this gap between theory and empirical research by exploring patterns of perceived control in adolescents' relationships with their best friends.

Our first step, developing a typology of 3 potential patterns of perceived friendship control, revealed substantial variability in European American girls' and boys' friendships in middle adolescence (i.e., 14–16 years of age). This variability, in combination with existing evidence of competitiveness and assertiveness in European American children's friendships (Bank, 1994; Knight and Kagan, 1982), underscores the importance of learning about the nature and implications of perceived power and control in adolescents' friendships. Furthermore, given that European American adolescents are exposed to cultural values that emphasize stereotypically masculine values, such as dominance, control, and competition (Ferree, 1990), power dynamics may be an especially salient aspect of their friendships. It will be important in future work to explore patterns of friendship control in samples of adolescents who have experienced contrasting societal and family values (e.g., collectivistic rather than individualistic values, egalitarian versus traditional gender roles).

Family Dynamics and Adolescents' Friendship Control

Our first goal of exploring control dynamics in the family was to provide clues about some of the possible antecedents of adolescents' patterns of perceived control with their best friends. Although we cannot draw conclusions about causal relations, our findings offer insights about which family relationships are linked to control dynamics in adolescents' friendships. We proposed 2 models in conceptualizing the links between different family relationships and patterns of control in friendship; one model highlighted differences in power structure across the 3 types of family relationships and the second focused on interactional versus observational learning in the family. Consistent with social learning predictions and with the idea that the power structure of parents' marriages may promote connections between marital and friendship control, we found support for our hypothesis that control in parents' marriages was associated with boys' perceived friendship control. In particular, we identified parallels between the role that boys assumed with their friends and the role that their fathers held (relative to their mothers) in the marriage. When fathers (as compared to mothers) reported lower levels of marital control, boys were the less controlling member of their friendship dyad; these boys' families differed significantly from those of boys whose fathers reported more marital control. Social learning processes may explain the similar roles of fathers and sons observed here. As with all studies of family socialization processes, however, without teasing apart biological versus environmental influences, we cannot rule out the possibility that biological factors may underlie similarities between fathers' and sons' social control.

That we did not find the same pattern for girls may not be surprising. First, several studies of European American adolescents suggest that boys may be socialized, more so than girls, to attend to power dynamics in family relationships (McCartney and McKelvie, 1985; Wentzel and Feldman, 1996). Because European American boys are often more directly encouraged to be independent and assertive and to hold leadership roles, they may pay closer attention to the distribution of power and control in family relationships (Wentzel and Feldman, 1996). Second, it is notable that in families with girls, mothers reported higher levels of marital control than did fathers across all 3 friendship types. Thus, it appears that girls in this sample had little opportunity to observe and/or model different patterns of marital control, i.e., mothers who were equal to or less controlling than their husbands.

The link between adolescents' sibling and friendship control also was significant. As predicted in our second hypothesis, boys and girls who were more controlling with their best friends had sibling relationships characterized by the highest levels of control. Given some evidence that relationships between siblings may become more egalitarian in adolescence (Buhrmester, 1992; Updegraff *et al.*, 2002), and potentially more similar in structure to friendships, sibling relationships may offer opportunities for both boys and girls to learn and practice relational control skills that they can apply in their friendships. Connections between patterns of perceived control with friends and control with siblings also could be explained by the premise that an individual's personality evokes similar reactions from different relationship partners (Caspi and Elder, 1988; Dunn, 1993). Adolescents with dominant personalities, for example, may hold the more controlling role in their relationships with both siblings and friends. The underlying process may be continuity across relationships in adolescents' interpersonal style rather than social

learning processes. Testing these alternative processes will be an important step in future research.

We did not find support for our hypothesis that parent–adolescent control (as measured by parents' control over adolescents' daily lives and decisions) would be associated with control in adolescents' friendships. Our finding that this indicator of parental control was not linked systematically to relational control in adolescents' friendships may imply that control processes in the parent– adolescent relationship are multidimensional. Thus, for example, a parent who sets firm limits on their offspring's social activities may be quite egalitarian in the course of everyday interactions with their children. The ideas about control that adolescents acquire in their experiences with parents and apply to other relationships may be quite specific to *relational* control. Further research is needed to study distinct dimensions of control in the parent–adolescent relationship and how these may be linked to adolescents' use of social control in other relationships.

A second possibility is that, because the parent–adolescent relationship is more hierarchical than adolescents' peer relationships, what adolescents learn about control in their interactions with their parents is not applicable to their friendships. The overall pattern of findings, i.e., lack of association between parent–adolescent and friendship control in the face of connections between marital and sibling control and adolescents' patterns of friendship control, provides support for our proposal that similarities in power structures across 2 relationships may be important to consider when exploring the linkages between relational control with family members and close friends. Similarities in the structural aspects of these relationships, in turn, may lay the foundation for social learning processes to operate.

Friendship Qualities and Adolescents' Friendship Control

Our second goal was to examine some of the potential implications of different patterns of perceived control for adolescents' friendships. We explored the connections between patterns of control in adolescents' friendships and other qualities of their friendships (i.e., intimacy, perspective-taking, conflict, time spent in shared activities) concurrently and 2 years later. We tested 2 contrasting hypotheses. On the basis of the writings of developmental scholars (Berndt, 1982; Hartup, 1993; Laursen, 1993) and some existing work with college-aged youth (Veniegas and Peplau, 1997), 1 possibility was that adolescents in balanced friendships would report more positive friendship experiences than those in more and in less controlling pairs. There was very little support for this idea. No overall differences were found across the 3 groups in emotional intimacy, time spent in shared activities, or perspective-taking in either Years 1 or 3, suggesting that the balance of perceived control was not associated with what are often viewed as positive elements of adolescents' friendships. These findings, together with analyses showing that adolescents in all 3 groups were equally likely to maintain their relationship with the same best friend across a 2-year period, suggest that there may *not* be serious negative consequences of unbalanced power in adolescents' friendships. This pattern of results held true even when we redefined more and less controlling friendships as those that fell at the upper and lower extremes of the distribution.

Findings regarding conflict also revealed that similar *amounts* of conflict were present in each of the 3 groups. Of potential importance, however, were differences across the groups in *who reported the conflict*. Specifically, adolescents reported more conflicts than their friends when they held a more controlling, but not a less controlling, role in the friendship. Because the conflict measure tapped adolescents' perceptions of the extent that they initiated conflicts in the friendship, it may be that when adolescents hold a more powerful role, they feel more comfortable initiating conflicts and disagreements with their best friend. These findings in combination with other work linking power issues and conflict in adolescents' friendships (Furman, 2001) suggest that these 2 aspects of friendship are intertwined.
It is also important to consider the possibility that adolescents' personality traits or interpersonal style may underlie both the degree that they initiated conflict with their best friend and the role that they assumed with their best friend (i.e., more controlling, balanced, less controlling). Our analyses revealed that adolescents who reported more controlling behaviors in Year 1 reported the highest levels of control in Year 3, and those who were less controlling in Year 1 reported the lowest levels of control with their best friend in Year 3. A similar pattern emerged for conflict, with adolescents who were more controlling in Year 1 reporting the most conflict with their best friends in Year 3. In both cases, the pattern of findings held regardless of whether adolescents described their experiences with the same or a new best friend (see Furman, 2001, for similar evidence of consistency in adolescents' controlling behavior across friendships). This stability over time in perceived control and conflict for adolescents with the same and new best friends suggests that adolescents may adopt an interpersonal style that generalizes across similar relationship experiences (Caspi and Elder, 1988; Dunn, 1993).

Integrating the findings across all relationship dimensions suggests that the balance of power and control in adolescents' close friendships may reflect a division of control/ power that suits adolescents' individual preferences. Whether perceived control in adolescents' friendships was shared or unequal, we found similar levels of intimacy, perspective-taking, involvement, and friendship stability over a 2-year period. In addition, we found no differences in adolescents' reports of their psychosocial functioning as a function of the balance of perceived control in their friendships. Rather than conceptualizing balanced friendships as optimal and more and less controlling friendships as problematic, these findings highlight the possibility of *normative differences* in adolescents' patterns of perceived control with their best friends. This conclusion is consistent with the notion that girls and boys (once they achieve advanced social cognitive skills) are able to accommodate to their partners' complementary personal qualities in developing their friendships (Piaget, 1932; Selman, 1980; Sullivan, 1953; Youniss, 1980). Because this study focused on one age group (middle adolescence) and only on close friendships, it will be important to test these ideas at other developmental periods and in other types of peer relationships (e.g., see Venigias and Peplau, 1997, for different conclusions with a college-aged sample).

Turning to comparisons of girls and boys, our findings revealed that boys reported higher average levels of perceived friendship control than did girls (Maccoby, 1990, 1998). It is noteworthy, however, that boys and girls were equally represented in all 3 friendship types. That is, girls were as likely as boys to hold a more controlling role *in their close relationships with a same-sex friend*. These results imply that it is important to look at the *context* in which sex-typed behaviors such as social dominance are assessed (e.g., dyads versus peer groups; same- versus

mixed-sex settings) to better understand similarities and differences between girls and boys (Maccoby, 1990, 1998).

We did find some evidence that patterns of perceived control were differentially linked to the qualities of girls' versus boys' close friendships. Typical sex differences in intimacy and perspective-taking (i.e., girls reporting significantly higher levels of friendship intimacy and perspective-taking than boys) were not apparent at Year 3 for adolescents who were more controlling than their best friends in Year 1. The data suggested that over time, holding a more controlling role in the friendship, may hinder girls from developing the typically higher levels of intimacy and perspective-taking that are evident in girls' as compared to boys' close friendships. It is also possible that girls who assume more controlling roles in their friendships are less interested in fostering intimacy and perspective-taking with their best friends.

CONCLUSIONS

This study represents a first step in exploring perceived control in European American adolescents' relationships with their best friends. If future studies use a range of indices of control and power and find corroborating evidence, the next step will be to learn more about the *conditions under which and the processes through which* adolescents' friendships come to be characterized by unequal versus shared power and control. Our findings suggest that control dynamics in the family may partially explain why some adolescents assume more versus less controlling roles in their friendships. Such a pattern is important in light of arguments that family influences play a limited role in explaining child and adolescent psychosocial functioning (e.g., Harris, 1995). It will be valuable in future work to consider the interpersonal qualities of adolescents (e.g., leadership preferences, a dominant interaction style, temperamental qualities) to learn about other potential antecedents of adolescents' patterns of friendship control.

Finally, it is important to consider the consequences of these different patterns of friendship control for adolescents' current and future friendships. Our findings revealed that an unequal distribution of control did *not* have a negative impact on the degree of closeness and companionship or the stability of the friendship, and we found no evidence that adolescents who assumed more or less controlling roles reported more adjustment problems than those in balanced roles. Cairns and Cairns (1994), in their recent longitudinal work on continuity in adolescents' close friendships, have proposed that friendship stability depends more on the degree of compatibility in interests, behaviors, and values between best friends than on the quality of the relationship. Our findings also imply that what may be important in future work is to consider the extent that adolescents and their best friends assume roles that are agreed upon by both members of the dyad and compatible with each person's interests and desires. Exploring these ideas in more depth may provide new insights about the nature and developmental course of girls' and boys' close friendships during adolescence.

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