215

Part IV The Contexts for Our Relationships: Personal Effectiveness in Action

# Gender Communication “Just Among Friends”

Case Study

When "Friend" Became a Verb

"To friend" or "not to friend"—that is the question. . . . Whether or

not you're on Facebook, you now know that the word friend (long

known as a simple noun) has now become a verb, as in "to friend someone." That's the premise behind the gigantic social networking site Facebook—friends finding and "friending" friends.

Do you have Facebook or online friends whom you've never met in person? How did you become friends if you've never met? Did you "meet" them on Facebook through friends of friends or by searching for people in your local area or who share your interests? Did you find them through the now outdated, outmoded MySpace or some other social media outlet? Are you friends with your Twitter followers or are those people just followers, not friends? What about more restrictive social net­works, such as Linkedln—are relationships in those networks somehow different than ones established through wider-reaching social media? What if someone sends you a friend request and you don't want to be friends back—any guilt involved in ignoring their request? Do you create levels of intimacy within your social networks, meaning that certain information you will only "share" with certain friends, not your entire online network?

More questions: Are your online friends just as meaningful and "real" to you as friends you keep up with through other means, such as face-to-face conversations, text messaging, or phone conversations? (Or the rapidly disappearing, old-fashioned written letter? Who writes letters anymore?) How is your communication different with online friends versus the people you hang around with at school or work?

Now throw sex and gender into the mix: Do you have more same-sex or opposite-sex online friends? Does that mixture of people mirror your face-to-face (continued)

216

Case Study [continued)

circles of friends? Docs it mailer? Do von communicate differently to your male versus female friends online? Face to face? These questions are exhausting.

Because the nature of friendship, how friendships get established and maintained, and the role of communication within friendship have changed as our society (and the world) has changed due to the explosion of technology, it's important from time to time to take a moment, breathe, and ponder your friendships. Think back to the playground when you were in elementary school, how you developed friendships with neighborhood kids or through activities like summer sports, or kids you met at camp. Consider how many of those people are in your Facebook i friends circle today Think about whether you prefer the way friendships can develop now, as the world opens itself to us via technology, or if you miss the quaint ways you used to find a buddy when you were a kid. The goal is for this chapter

 to give you pause and encourage you to think about many of these questions, as we explore one of the most meaningful, important connections we can make with people in our lives.

In this chapter we explore friendship, in general, because friendships are among our most important, life-sustaining relationships. Specifically, we examine communication that leads to increased personal effectiveness in the contexts of same-sex and cross-sex friendship. As we've said throughout the text, members of both sexes can expand their repertoire of communication behaviors to become more effective in gender communication. A widened range of behaviors, an orientation to the receiver (the friend), and enhanced personal effectiveness can all lead to greater satisfaction, fewer conflicts, and deeper, longer-lasting friendships.

## A SINGLE SOUL IN TWO BODIES

Aristotle defined a friend as "a single soul who resides in two bodies." More modern definitions are a bit less poetic. Ellen Goodman and Patricia O'Brien (2000), who are friends and coauthors of a book on women's friendships entitled I Know fust What You Mean, ask: "What's a friend? If the Eskimos have twenty-six different words for snow, Americans have only one word commonly used to describe everyone from acquaintances to intimates. It is a word we have to qualify with adjectives: school friends, work friends, old friends, casual friends, good friends" (p. 18). Friendships are a unique class of relationships. Author Jan Yager (1999) coined the term "friend- shifts," referring to the ways friendships change as people go from one life stage to another (p. 4). Yager suggests "friendship is crucial for school-age children or for singles who are between romantic relationships. However, friends count for even the happiest couples: friendship affirms and validates in a more distinctive way than even the most positive romantic or blood tie. It is now known that friendship is vital throughout life" (p. 6).

217

### Learning to Be Friends

For many adults, cross-sex friendships are very rewarding, but our early patterns as boys and girls do not encourage the formation of cross-sex friendships; we have to learn how to develop friendships later in life with members of the opposite sex. Sex segregation in friendship shows up around three years of age in children (Crawford & Unger, 2004; Maccoby, 1998). While interesting theories abound about genetics, "hardwiring," and psychosocial development related to this pattern, it's clear that society extends its influ­ence in teaching children how to be friends.

Gender scholar Suzanne Romaine (1999) suggests that we only have to look to schools for the roots of sex segregation. While neighborhood kids may play together, when these same kids are at school they are categorized first by age, then by sex. Chil­dren have to line up to go from the classroom to the restroom, cafeteria, auditorium, and so forth, and they frequently form separate lines for boys and girls. Granted, the sex separation for toilet use has a basis in reality, in that most schools separate facilities for females and males. But Romaine explains that this too marks school as a different context for children because in a typical home, toilets aren't sex segregated. Further sex segregation occurs on playgrounds when students engage in team sports. School athletic activities (particularly in high school) are, almost exclusively, sex segregated. In addi­tion, children who say that they play in mixed-sex groups in their neighborhoods ignore opposite-sex playmates at school, out of a concern about being teased (Thorne, 1994). These simple traditions within schools help set up a dichotomizing, segregating pattern that affects one's choice of friends, one's understanding of people of the opposite sex, and one's behavior with same- and cross-sex friends.

Research shows that, beginning about age seven, boys form extended friend­ship networks with other boys while girls tend to cluster into exclusive same-sex friendship dyads (Rawlins, 2001). In those dyads, girls acquire the social skills of communicating their feelings and being nurturing. In contrast, boys learn to follow rules and get along with groups of people. To varying degrees, these tendencies remain into adulthood. One explanation that may seem simple, but that has received considerable research attention, relates to similarity: We tend to gravitate toward and develop friendships with people we perceive to be similar to

ourselves, more so than to those we perceive to be different

from us (Fehr, 2008; Foster, 2005; Gifford-Smith & Brownell,

2003; Pinel, Long, Landau, Alexander, & Pyszczynksi, 2006;

Rushton & Bons, 2005). Biological sex is one form of basic

similarity.

Social scientist John Reisman (1990) examined communi­cation in friendship through the formative years, with partic­ular attention to self-disclosure. In Chapter 5, self-disclosure was defined as voluntarily providing information to others that they wouldn't learn if you didn't tell them. As opposed to earlier years, when children disclose almost exclusively with members of their same sex, Reisman found that male adolescents disclose about the same amount of information with friends of either sex, but female adolescents exhibit less self-disclosure with boys than with other girls. This behavior

218

changes again, as people leave their teen years. Young female adults generate similar levels of disclosure with both males and females, while males express higher levels of self-disclosure with members of the opposite sex than their same sex. The latter finding is consistent with a good deal of research demonstrating that women receive other people's disclosures more often than men (Aries, 2006; Perry, Turner, & Sterk, 1992).

During childhood and adolescence, we tend to be drawn to same-sex more than cross-sex friends, but this tendency shifts as we age and mature. It's interesting to explore the unique properties of each type of friendship, as well as the communication that sustains them. We begin that exploration by considering same-sex friends.

## COMMUNICATION IN SAME-SEX FRIENDSHIPS: FROM BUTCH

## AND SUNDANCE TO THELMA AND LOUISE

To many people's thinking, same-sex friendships require less work to maintain than cross-sex friendships. Same-sex friendships do not, for the most part, experience the same tensions as cross-sex friendships, such as romance versus friendship, sexual­ity, jealousy, emotional intensity, and how others perceive the relationship. Another assumption about same-sex friendships is that friends are equals; power dynamics that may play a role in cross-sex friendships are absent or less of a factor. In one study of power and friendship quality, both women and men rated equal-power friendships as more emotionally close, satisfying, enjoyable, disclosing, and rewarding than unequal- power friendships (Veniegas & Peplau, 1997).

### Male-Male Friendship: Functions and Characteristics

Friendships between men have evolved, just like many other types of relationships. Although once a subject of popular culture's ridicule, like beer commercials making fun of "male bonding," men's friendships have been studied in terms of their significance, the communication or shared experiences that launch such connections, and what's necessary to sustain them (Bentall, 2004; Nardi, 1992; Rawlins, 2009; Way, 2011). Author of Buddy System: Understanding Men's Friendships Geoffrey Greif (2008) talks of men's friendships this way: "It is important to men's survival that they figure out friendships and improve them if they are unfulfilling. Men do not live as long as women. Friend­ships, where help is given and received, can be one way of helping men communicate their needs better. If men can improve the number and quality of their friendships, they may live longer and healthier lives" (p. 18).

WHY MEN FORM FRIENDSHIPS For male readers, why do you form friendships with other men? If you follow the typical pattern, you form them so that you have something to do and someone to do it with. For many men, male friends are important but replaceable; men tend to have more numerous but less intimate same-sex friendships than women (Greif, 2008). Research has shown that while men and women typically have similar numbers of friends and spend similar amounts of time with friends, men's friendships with other men tend to serve different purposes than women's friendships with other women (Bentall, 2004).

219

First, men often form friendships through groups because it satisfies a need to belong to something or to other people. These group friendships may form through participation on teams, memberships in clubs and fraternities, involvement with work or study groups, and so forth. Boys' friendships tend to emerge from larger networks in which they learn to follow rules and get along with all kinds of people, even people they don't like (Bate & Bowker, 1997). These organized friendships center on group activities and give men a sense of belonging (Strikwerda & May, 1992). For centuries, men have used group belongingness as a source of power and connection. Historically male-dominated religious ceremonies, initiation rituals inherent in such organizations as fraternities and civic groups, and male-only discussions (like might occur as locker- room conversations, for example) have an air of secrecy about them, and a code of correct behavior that controls access to these groups and marks women as outsiders (Spain, 1992).

Another motivation many men have for forming friend- Your friends love you anyway. ships with other men is to further their own achievement; —Dave Barry,

this sounds manipulative and self-serving, but think about it columnist/author

further. Psychologist Suzanna Rose (1985) suggests that since

men control much of the power and rewards in American society, men value friend­ships with other men more than with women because they can attain more social and economic rewards from other men. In the business world, if a man cannot help you get ahead, the possibility of a friendship may decrease—not disappear necessarily, but decrease.

In some instances, male friendships form out of conflict. While we tend to think of conflict as separating people, it can also be quite cathartic and can clear the air toward greater understanding and feelings of closeness. Conflict experienced by people on the same side—be it in war situations, sporting events, or interpersonal disagreements—can generate significant closeness as well.

"DOING" VERSUS "TALKING" In the preceding paragraph, we mentioned "doing" rather than "talking" as a characteristic of men's friendships. In fact, the activity-orientation of men's friendships is one of its primary characteristics. Many men's friendships begin with, are sustained by, and sometimes dissolve over doing things together and sharing (or enduring) experiences (Brehm, 2001; Rawlins, 2001). Through shared experiences and activities, men develop feelings of closeness and express their commonality with male friends. Think of the war stories or fishing tales that your father, uncle, or grandfather tells. Men do talk with their friends, and they may value talk as much as women friends do, but the content of that talk may differ from women's, in that it tends to focus around the activities that men share, not their feelings about those activities or one another (Greif, 2008; Martin, 1997). As author and psychologist Helen Fisher (2009) explains,

"Men often regard intimacy as working or playing side-by-side. Sure, they might discuss a bad week at work, even troubles in their love lives. But rarely do they share their secret dreams and darkest fears. (When they do, they often use 'joke speak,' camouflaging their feelings with humor.)" (p. 138).

Researchers Bruess and Pearson (1997) extended the analysis of "doing" versus "talking" by conducting a study of friendship rituals. Rituals are repeated events such as a "guys' night out," which one group in the study described as a night of barbecu­ing steaks, smoking cigars, and watching boxing on television. For men, rituals tend

220



to be important because they create a familiar, structured pattern to a friendship that reduces uncertainty and in some situations, facilitates a friendship without the need for a great deal of conversation. As it turns out, this may not be a disadvantage. Another study found that people were likely to choose, and be satisfied with, individuals who have similar levels of communication skills. Low-skill pairs were just as satisfied as high-skill pairs; the key was that the levels of communication skills matched (Burleson & Samter, 1996).

As you are no doubt aware, women generally base their friendships less on shared activities than on conversation and an exchange of thoughts and feelings (Brehm, 2001). We will say more about female-female friendships in a subsequent section, but you should be aware of the contrast here. For male readers, think about your own friendships with other men; for female readers, think about friendships between men you know. Were most of these male friendships initiated through an activity, such as a sport, drinking beer, hunting, playing video games, or the like? Do male friends spend most of their friendship time engaged in these kinds of activities? Do friendships sometimes end because the friends lose interest in the activity that bonded them together?

INTIMACY IN MALE-MALE FRIENDSHIP Feelings of closeness are important in any friendship, and the expression of closeness between men has changed (Rawlins, 1992; 2009). In Chapter 5, we defined intimacy as bonding, closeness, and emotional connection, based on sharing personal, private information and experiences over time. We offered Jeffrey Fine's (2001) version of intimacy, as "in-to-me-see" (p. 225). Intimacy is something most people long for in their relationships (Beck, 2006, 2007; Sander­son, Keiter, Miles, & Yopyk, 2007). But is intimacy actually the goal in male-male friendship?

Gender scholars Strikwerda and May (1992) suggest that "men in America are clearly stymied in pursuing intimacy with other males because of fears involving their sexuality, especially culturally inbred homophobia. The taboo against males touching, except in firm public handshake, continues these teenage prohibitions" (p. 118). Many of

221

the men in our classes admit that they have difficulty with intimacy, especially when it is operationalized in the form of hugging or otherwise expressing or verbalizing affection for a male friend or family member. Psychologists Bank and Hansford (2000) ascribe the source of this difficulty to male homophobia and emotional constraint. In this perspective, men pose a constant and relentless threat to each other, so that throughout men's lives, they fear being exposed or unmasked as feminine. These fears produce a very narrow bandwidth of acceptable behavior for men in their friendships, and it takes a conscious decision to move beyond this constraint. In their research regarding affection in nonro­mantic relationships, Floyd and Morman (1997) found that in situations or relationships in which one's motive for affection might be misunderstood, such as male friendships, the parties are more reluctant to express affection because they run the risk of being rejected, teased or made fun of, and seen as odd.

Regarding male intimacy (or the lack thereof), you might be thinking, "But what about the experience of sitting at a bar, drinking a beer, and just 'BS-ing'? At the end of the evening, you shake hands and head out. Isn't that closeness?" Granted, those can be close, good times, but do these experiences actually create intimacy in a friend­ship? One study found that men believed their friendships with other men to be just as intimate as other forms of friendships. These men felt just as close, supported, and satisfied in their male friendships as women did in their female friendships (Botschner, 1996).

Communication researchers Wood and Inman (1993) explored some characteristics traditionally associated with intimacy in relationships, such as conversations of a deeply personal nature and displays of emotion. What they determined is that these traits may better describe female friendship than male; pronouncements of what "counts" as intimacy in a relationship may be indicative of a feminine bias. In their research, male subjects regarded practical help, mutual assistance, and companionship as marks of caring and closeness. In a subsequent study, Inman (1996) discovered that men char­acterize their friendships with other men as being steeped in "continuity, perceived support and dependability, shared understandings, and perceived compatibility" and as being based on "self-revelation and self-discovery, having fun together, intermingled lives, and assumed significance" (p. 100). Men may base their friendships on unspoken assumptions, rather than actual conversations about the relationship. Thus we may conclude, regarding male-male intimacy in friendship, that men often gain intimacy by sharing activities and experiences, rather than through the more traditional displays of intimacy described in relationship and self-help literature (Floyd & Parks, 1995; Greif, 2008; Yager, 1999).

SELF-DISCLOSURE IN MALE-MALE FRIENDSHIP In addition to differences in the way same-sex friends achieve intimacy, differences also exist in the amount and type of self-disclosure exchanged between same-sex friends. Researchers generally conclude that men are less self-disclosing than women (Baxter, Dum, & Sahlstein, 2001; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006). In terms of the three possibilities for relationships (male-male, female-female, and female-male), male-male friendships have been found to contain the least amount of disclosure (Derlega, Winstead, Wong, & Hunter, 1985).

What might be some reasons for these trends regarding disclosure within male friendships? One theory for men's lesser disclosure relates to topics men tend to discuss.

222

You may think this sounds like a stereotype, but many people recognize it as reality: Men tend to talk more about what, meaning what they do in their jobs, what happened, and so on, while women tend to talk more about who, who they work with, who's doing what, and how the whos are feeling.

Some research suggests that preference, not ability, is responsible for the dif­fering tendencies for same-sex friendship disclosure. Reisman's (1990) male college students described their same-sex friendships as being as high in disclosure as female subjects described theirs. In addition, he found that male subjects believed they have the capability of disclosing as much as women. Perhaps men prefer not to disclose as much with their male friends as they do with their female friends, dating partners, or spouses.

Some men equate disclosure with vulnerability—the belief that if a man discloses his thoughts and feelings to women or to other men, he has put himself in a powerless position. Since powerlessness is undesirable, actions linked to powerlessness are to be avoided, even at the cost of closeness in friendship (Rawlins, 2001).

It's quite possible that online male-male friendships operate differently than face-to- face friendships, in terms of self-disclosure, risk, and intimacy. Research has shown that certain features of computer-mediated communication (such as anonymity, decreased likelihood of future interaction, less emphasis on physical appearance, and diminished shyness and nervousness) enhance the frequency and depth of self-disclosure and accel­erate the rate at which many relationships develop (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Ward & Tracey, 2004). Perhaps male friends feel less vulnerable disclosing their more intimate thoughts, feelings, and fears in an online format than in face-to-face settings, where they might run the risk of ridicule by individuals or groups of male friends.

So, we are left with two conflicting lines of thought regarding intimacy and disclo­sure. On the one hand, some sources indicate that male-male friendships are deficient owing to a lack of intimacy that can be derived only through personal disclosure. On the other hand, some people argue that the type of closeness men achieve through shared activities and experiences is just as legitimate and beneficial as any other type of close­ness. Perhaps we could suggest a combination of perspectives. Intimacy in male-male friendships requires common activities and experiences, but it may be enhanced by disclosure of personal information and displays of emotion.

### Female-Female Friendship: Functions and Characteristics

Many women can attest to the fact that since the earliest days they can remember as girls, same-sex friendships have been sustaining, highly significant forces in their lives. However, until only recently, little research specific to female friendship was avail­able. In fact, sociologist Lionel Tiger (1969) argued that women were not genetically programmed to bond with one another! Gender scholar Fern Johnson (1996) suggests that female-female friendship has been an underresearched area because of stereotypes that women are too competitive, catty, and jealous to have meaningful friendships. More academic and popular attention has been paid to female friendships over the last decade (Bane, Cornish, Erspamer, & Kampman, 2010; Bleske-Rechek & Lighthall, 2010; Castaneda & Burns-Glover, 2008; Galupo, 2007; Goodman & O'Brien, 2000; Greif & Sharpe, 2010; Rose, 2007)

223

Net Notes

The Friendship Page, located at [www.frienctship.com.au](http://www.frienctship.com.au), is a website based out of Australia that is "devoted to exploring the topic of friendship in a positive and friendly manner." The site contains such information as quotes from specialists and site visitors, poetry, tributes, interactive advice, and a chat room. If you think you'd like to expand your circle of friends—at least your circle of cyberfriends—check out this site.

THE VALUE OF WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIPS Just as men's friendships have changed throughout history, women's friendships have also evolved. Given the social restric­tions on male-female interactions in earlier centuries, coupled with the fact that women historically inhabited a world primarily made up of other women and children, close friendships between women became an accepted form of social interaction, albeit one generally discounted by men (O'Connor, 1992). The women's

movement ascribed more status to friendships between women

and emphasized their value and significance in women's lives

(Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1988). Research suggests that women

are, in general, more likely than men to form very close same-

sex friendships and to value those friendships highly (Rose,

2007; Wright, 1998).

Women also appear to develop friendships that function

on multiple levels, as opposed to male friendships that tend to operate around one activ­ity, issue, or function (Barth & Kinder, 1988). Gender development theorist Carol Gilligan (1982) characterizes female friendships as developing an intertwined series of obliga­tions and responsibilities, which draws the participants into a friendship that bonds at multiple levels. Women focus on the individuals involved in the friendship and the pattern of interconnectedness between them. This pattern encourages mutual support, emotional sharing, and increased acceptance (Rawlins, 1992, 2009). Earlier, we briefly discussed the role of rituals in men's friendships. Bruess and Pearson (1997) found that women's friendship rituals were markedly different from men's, in that women's rituals involved conversation, emotional expression, and shared support, while men's rituals revolved around shared activities.

INTIMACY IN FEMALE-FEMALE FRIENDSHIP At present, two schools of thought exist on intimacy in women's friendships versus men's. One body of information claims that women's friendships are generally more intimate and close than men's (Brehm, 2001; Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1988; Sherrod, 1989; Wright, 1982). Friendship researcher William Rawlins (1993) suggests that women have a greater intimacy competence than men, which stems from women's tendency to embrace the intimacy challenge and to learn how to communicate closeness with female friends quickly.

Authors of Girlfriends: Invisible Bonds, Enduring Ties, Carmen Renee Berry and Tamara Traeder (1995) contrast women's friendships with men and women's friendships with women. Women's conversations with male friends tend to focus more on ideas or

224

“My Gay"

A research assistant for this book prompted a discussion in this chapter of the topic of hetero­sexual women and gay male friends because she believes it's a unique and wonderful relationship that many people experience, especially people of college age. She and her fianc6 were talking about doing some activity together when he remarked, "Oh that's right—you can't because you're having a night out with your gay." The student explained that she often called her best friend, an openly gay man, "her gay" or "my gay" as a form of affectionate shorthand, and that her gay male friend didn't take offense; in fact, he viewed it as a term of endearment. Granted, some people might take offense, mainly to possessive pronouns like "her" or "my" that could connote ownership or dominance, whereas others might be affronted by use of the noun gay to stand for a whole person, almost as a substitute name or nickname.

No matter your view of the language in the example, we want to briefly discuss this unique form of friendship, because we do see evidence of heterosexual women who prize their relation­ships with self-identified gay men. What attracts straight women and gay men into friendship, many times with stronger bonds than same-sex friendships? The research on similarity we mentioned earlier in this chapter offers one explanation, in that straight women and gay men are both attracted to men as sexual partners, so having that kind of commonality can create a bond. Another possible explanation or contributing factor is the fact that gay men and straight men have their biological sex in common, no matter the differences in their sexual orientations, thus gay men may be perceived as being able to offer insight into straight men. Some people suggest that such common interests as fashion, design, and the arts may contribute to the prevalence of the straight female-gay male friendship, but this explanation evokes unfortunate gay male stereotypes.

Research has begun to explore this form of relationship in more depth (Gaiba, 2008; Tillmann-Healy, 2001). One study conducted by a group of Canadian scholars examined women's body self-esteem, confidence, and attention received from friends (Bartlett, Patterson, Vander- Laan, & Vasey, 2009). In specific, these researchers explored the stereotype that suggests that straight women who hang out with gay men tend to be physically unattractive and lacking in attention from straight men, thus they form friendships with gay men who don't reject them or make them feel bad about themselves. In their study, the stereotype had some basis in reality: Heterosexual women in the study reported enhanced self-esteem and confidence in terms of their own attractiveness when they spent time with and received attention from their gay male friends. Perhaps to avoid feeling a loss of self-esteem or rejection by straight men, some heterosexual women are drawn to gay men because they perceive that they won't judge them on their looks, but will instead form connections with them because of their other, more important qualities. Maybe these women feel freer to be who they are in the company of gay male friends, without fear of judgment or indifference.

We invite you to discuss this with groups of your friends or classmates, perhaps in a class discussion. Do you find that many women who self-identify as heterosexual have close friends who are gay men? From your perspective and experience, do heterosexual men have close lesbian friends with equal frequency as heterosexual women have close gay male friends? If you'd like to read more about this topic, we refer you to Lisa Tillmann-Healy's (2001) book, Between Gay and Straight: Understanding Friendship across Sexual Orientation, as well as Robert Hopcke and Laura Raferty's (1999) work, A Couple of Friends: The Remarkable Friendship between Straight Women and Gay Men.

225

problem solving than on shared feelings; if they want advice, suggestions, or a "fix-it" approach, women are likely to receive that from male friends. However, women most often seek out other women for a listening, sympathetic ear or for empathy in regard for what they're going through or feeling. This doesn't mean that women friends don't dis­cuss ideas or help each other problem solve, but female-female friendships may develop stronger bonds of intimacy because a greater range of responses can be obtained; shared feelings, not just information, can lead to a greater closeness between women friends. Another element that makes women's friendships with other women different than their friendships with men is men's tendencies to withhold personal information. Even though evidence previously reviewed in this book shows that men are more likely to self-disclose to women than to other men, men tend to disclose less, in general, and to keep things "close to the vest." This tendency can pose a challenge to intimacy between friends (as well as in romantic relationships).

However, another school of thought contends that the differences in intimacy levels in male-male versus female-female friendships is not so great as previous research suggests, in fact there are minimal differences (Duck & Wright, 1993). Scholar Paul Wright (1998, 2006) reexamined earlier findings and concluded that men's and women's friendships are more similar than different. Specifically, Wright argues that the "women talk, men do" characterizations of friendship is an overgeneralization. On closer inspection of studies that discerned a tendency for women's intimate friendships to develop through communication whereas men's develop through shared activities, Wright found that female subjects also reported shared activities as a mainstay of their friendships with other women. Male subjects reported that they did, in fact, view talk as a central characteristic of their friendships with other men. Wright concludes that "the body of work on the talk-activity issue, as a whole, leaves me convinced that both women and men friends talk a lot and do a lot. Probably they most often talk while doing. However, when reflecting on their friendships, as in responses to interview questions and self-report items, women more often talk about talking and men more often talk about doing" (p. 50).

Again, an assessment of intimacy within a female-female or male-male friend­ship depends on how you operationalize or define intimacy. If you believe, as many communication scholars do, that genuine intimacy must be achieved and sustained primarily through communication—the sharing of ideas, secrets, fears, and emotions— then you will most likely view women's friendships as epitomizing intimacy and men's friendships as important and satisfying, but superficial. However, an expanded definition of intimacy—one that includes experiencing, not just talking—might lead you to a judgment that men's and women's friendships can be equally intimate, but that intimacy may emerge or reveal itself in different ways.

SELF-DISCLOSURE IN FEMALE-FEMALE FRIENDSHIP Goodman and O'Brien (2000) explain, regarding their longtime friendship, "We were friends; we had to talk. It was the single most important—and most obvious—connection. Talk is at the very heart of women's friendships, the core of the way women connect. It's the given, the absolute assumption of friendship" (pp. 34-35).

How important is self-disclosure to same-sex friendships? People of both sexes agree that self-disclosure is the primary source of intimacy in friendships, with shared activity second (Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008; Fehr, 2004, 2008). According to

226

Berry and Traeder (1995), "Frequently a woman lets another woman know that she is her most trusted friend by sharing an aspect of herself that she has kept secret from the rest of the world" (p. 71). Reisman (1990) points out that individu­als of both sexes who rate their friendships low in disclosure also tend to rate them low in closeness and satisfaction. One study of college students examined the relationship between reported levels of self-disclosure and satisfaction with same-sex friendships; findings showed that college women participating in the study reported higher levels of self­disclosure and satisfaction with their same-sex friendships than did men (Jones, 1991).

Research shows, in general, that women are more self-disclosing in their same-sex friendships than men (Clark & Reis, 1988; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Martin, 1997; Rawlins, 2001, 2009; Reis, 1998). However, O'Connor (1992) cautions against using disclosure of personal information and open expression of emotions as defining characteristics of female friendships. The danger, as she describes it, is that if we define women's friend­ships as operating primarily at a feeling level and "exclude any discussion of ideas or involvement with the world, they [women] abdicate any attempt in changing that world" (p. 31). The concern is that relegating women's friendships to the realm of the emotional reinforces stereotypes of women as purely emotional, with little ability to think rationally

or rely on their sense of logic.

Just as we suggested that online male-male friendships may operate differently than face-to-face friendships, in terms of self-disclosure, risk, and intimacy, research has begun to explore this possibility for female-female friendship. Bane, Cornish, Erspamer and Kampman (2010) studied over 300 female bloggers' perceptions of "real-life" same-sex friendships versus online friendships, in terms of self-disclosure, perceptions of intimacy, and relationship satisfaction. Online self-disclosure (revealing information in one's blog, as well as reading others' disclosures via blogs) was correlated with rela­tionship satisfaction, meaning that women who offered and received online friends' disclosures were highly positive about these relationships. However, although these same participants in this study reported having close online friends, they also believed that their "real-life" friendships were more intimate and that face-to-face friendships offered more potential for developing intimacy through shared disclosure than online relationships afforded.

Same-sex friendships for both men and women offer unique problems and possi­bilities. In this section, we have introduced you to the major functions and characteristics in each type of same-sex friendship and explored the role of communication in these relationships. Same-sex friendships are very important to us all, but so are cross-sex friendships. Let's turn our attention to the issues surrounding these sometimes troubling but often fulfilling friendships.

## CROSS-SEX FRIENDSHIP: IS IT POSSIBLE TO BE "JUST FRIENDS"?

For some people, "friends of the opposite sex" is an oxymoron (like "death benefits"). Just a few decades ago, young men and women only socialized together as dates—rarely if ever as friends. Perhaps young women and men are leading a social change related to cross-sex friendships, because friendships between the sexes have become much more prevalent (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005; Rawlins, 2009).

227

Net Notes

Friendship Force International (FFI) is a nonprofit international cultural exchange organization, headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. The organization's mission is "to create an environment in which personal friendships are established across the barriers that separate people." FFI has active chapters in over sixty countries, and its members seek to promote goodwill through homestay exchange programs. For those of you who think you'd might like to travel abroad and have friendly faces of people to stay with, visit the FFI site, located at [www.friendshipforce.org](http://www.friendshipforce.org).

As with other aspects of friendship we've discussed, society continues to change its expectations and notions about the appropriateness of cross-sex friendship. Whereas research from the 1970s suggested that both women and men preferred and actually had more same-sex friendships than cross-sex friendships, the experiences of today's friends are quite different (Booth & Hess, 1974; Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997; Guer­rero & Chavez, 2005; Kalmijn, 2002; Monsour, 2002; Rawlins, 2009; Reeder, 2000; Weger & Emmett, 2009; Werking, 1997a, 1997b). Anecdotal evidence from students suggests that both sexes are seeking friendships with members of the opposite sex. As more and more women continue to enter various walks of life (e.g., business, politics, education), friendships between women and men are increasingly necessary and probable.

As is the case for other topics, the sex-versus-gender distinction is relevant to a discus­sion of cross-sex friendship. Psychologist Heidi Reeder (2003) found that that psychological gender affects the frequency of cross-sex friendship. In her study, feminine men had a signifi­cantly greater number of cross-sex friendships than did masculine men; masculine women had a significantly greater number of cross-sex friendships than did feminine women. Many participants in this study indicated that they did not prefer one sex or the other for friendship.

### What Gets in the Way of Cross-Sex Friendships?

Many of us have experienced the joys that cross-sex friendships can provide, but we also know that these friendships come with their own unique complexities. Let's examine a few issues that typically pose challenges to cross-sex friendships.

THE PURPOSE OF CROSS-SEX FRIENDSHIP One challenge to a successful cross-sex friendship exists in the minds of the friends before they ever meet and decide to become friends. We describe here the differing perceptions of what cross-sex friendship means, or what purpose it serves. Studies over four decades reveal that many heterosexual men, in contrast to heterosexual women, consistently report difficulty developing cross­sex friendships that are free of romantic implications and sexual activity, and that men may actually be motivated to form friendships with women because they believe these relationships will lead to "something else" (Bell, 1981; Halatsis & Christakis, 2009; Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Rose, 1985; Rubin, Peplau, & Hill, 1980). Rawlins (2001) explains:

Typically, males sharply distinguish between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships but view their associations with women rather uniformly.

228

Cross-sex bonds offer more disclosure, intimacy, and emotional involve­ment, which many males have difficulty interpreting as something other than precursors to romance. Informed by the socially conditioned alternatives of either friendship or romance, they often enact their cross-sex friendships as "not friendship," that is, as possible romances. By contrast, females differ­entiate less markedly between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships, but make distinctions among their male partners. They are able to form close relationships with females and males. And they clearly distinguish between the males they consider friends and those they regard romantically. Accord­ingly, their cross-sex friendships are typically enacted as "not romance," that is, as possible friendships. (p. 102)

You can see the potential for conflict and disappointment here, in that the two friends may have very different visions of what the relationship is and where it is heading. Even if the male friend agrees that the relationship is strictly a friendship and nonromantic, research suggests that he is more likely than the female friend to hold, perhaps in the back of his mind, the hope or expectation that the friendship will lead to romance. While some men are certainly capable of a truly platonic friendship with a woman and some women have romantic inclinations toward men whom they swear are "just friends," the research consistently shows the first pattern we described (Messman, Canary, & Hause, 2000).

AN UNDERCURRENT OF SEXUALITY AND SOCIAL PRESSURE Some research suggests that underlying heterosexual, cross-sex friendships is a pervasive current of attraction and sexuality (Egland, Spitzberg, & Zormeier, 1996; Halatsis & Christakis, 2009; Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005; Monsour, 2006; Sapadin, 1988). Earlier, we explored the challenge of differing views of the purpose of a cross-sex friendship—the tendency for heterosexual men more often than heterosexual women to view friendships with members of the opposite sex as precursors to romantic relationships. In one of the studies that support this finding, female subjects reported that their suspicion of men's sexual motives made them distrustful of male friendship overtures and less willing to establish friendships with men (Rose, 1985). This suspicion may be at least partially justified. Psychologists Bleske and Buss (2000) found that men are much more likely than women to view cross-sex friendships as an opportunity to gain sexual access. In some ways, these findings reflect a remnant attitude of past generations—that relation­ships with women are for one thing, and that one thing is not friendship. Research on sexual practices of cross-sex friends bears this out. In one study of college students, half of the participants admitted that they had sex with at least one platonic friend (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000).

Although American society is becoming more used to and accepting of cross-sex friendships, people in those friendships tire of the badgering they get from family, coworkers, and other friends about the true nature of their friendship, the hints people drop about becoming a "couple." People frequently use the word platonic to describe a friendship they suspect is something else altogether. Rawlins (2001) explains that soci­ety creates static for cross-sex friendships because a "romantic involvement between a man and a woman is much more celebrated than cross-sex friendships in Ameri­can culture" (p. 95). (Think about how many plots of movies and television shows

229

depict male-female friends versus male-female romantic partners.) Another barrier to cross-sex friendship development is the fact that, although this form of friendship is more prevalent now than ever before, we still don't have that many role models or prototypes of cross-sex friendships; the partners in each friendship seem to make up their own rules as they go. As we observe cross-sex friendships and perhaps experi­ence our own such couplings, it's a safe bet that the people who maintain successful cross-sex friendships have worked to create and communicate to others their own definition of success.

Friends often have no sexual attraction or romantic interest when they start hanging out; it can be a real relief to enjoy someone without any sexual tension (i.e., no "benefits") or romantic expectations. (Refer a few pages back to the Hot Button Issue box about the special friendship many straight women enjoy with gay men.) But over time and with repeated input from others, the pressure can increase and erode the friendship, or it can cause the friends to reassess their relationship, perhaps looking for it to "lead to some­thing" (Guerrero & Mongeau, 2008). Some friendships do successfully change definitions and evolve into romantic relationships because many people believe that the seed or root of a successful intimate relationship is friendship (Hendrick & Hendrick, 2000; Mongeau, Serewicz, Henningsen, & Davis, 2006).

But what happens if one friend starts giving into societal pressure or if romantic feelings start to develop on one side of the friendship, but not the other? (Homosexual women and men in friendships with straight men and women sometimes face this chal­lenge too.) Sometimes one friend feels an attraction brewing and may have romantic intent toward a friend, but those feelings go unexpressed and time passes; then the other person in the friendship starts to develop feelings and perhaps attraction, but the other friend doesn't. As the saying goes, timing is everything. These are tough situations to figure out how to handle. Sometimes wonderful friendships come crashing down simply because feelings changed and communication stopped or became tense.

Relationship expert Michael Motley and colleagues have studied the fate of friendships after one friend discloses romantic interest toward the other friend, but the romantic overture isn't reciprocated (sometimes called "unrequited romance"; Motley, Faulkner, & Reeder, 2008, p. 27). Motley, Faulkner, and Reeder (2008) contend that "it is extremely common for people, by age 20 or so, to have experienced one or more episodes of unrequited romantic attraction within a friendship" (p. 46). In multiple studies of this situation, these researchers found that unrequited romantic disclosure was awkward for the friends, at best, and completely disruptive to the friendship, at worst.

This research provides helpful suggestions for friends who might find themselves in this situation, but who want to maintain a friendship and get past the awkward­ness, embarrassment, and potential hurt feelings. Motley and colleagues suggest the following:

1. Friends should continue to pursue their friendship and use clear communication to indicate that maintaining a connection is important to both people.

2. It's wise to reestablish a pattern of contact, meaning do things together that you normally did as friends.

3. Even if it's awkward to talk about, friends should acknowledge that one person felt romantic feelings but the other didn't, and that the resulting imbalance of feelings exists and will take time to become balanced once again.

230

4. Friends shouldn't prolong the embarrassment or have repeated conversations about the situation, but instead drop the matter.

5. Flirting, teasing, or making jokes about what happened aren't helpful and can make the rejected friend feel worse.

6. One of the toughest challenges can be for the rejected friend to accept, and even encourage, her or his friend's romantic interest in other people, but this acceptance is necessary if the friendship is expected to continue (Motley, Reeder, & Faulkner, 2008).

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS Another source of difficulty in cross-sex friendships arises from interpersonal communication patterns that may relate to gen­der. For example, how is conflict managed in a cross-sex friendship? Is it handled any differently than two female or two male friends might handle disagreement in their friendship? Does one friend consistently exert more influence or power over the other? Is one friend more often the discloser and the other the recipient of disclosure? Could that become a problem?

Research shows that many men seek friendships with women as an emotional outlet and so that they will have someone (other than their romantic partners) who will listen to their disclosures, particularly about personal problems, and respond with empathy (Aries, 2006; Burleson, 2003; Dindia, 2002). As we discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, men typically avoid emotional expression and intimacy with other men; thus, they often seek it with women. In contrast, many women feel that they cannot have their emotional needs met only through their relationships (romantic and otherwise) with men, so they seek relationships with other women to fulfill this purpose. Can you see the potential for difficulty here? If men tend to seek emotional support from women, and women tend to seek emotional support from women, that can create a sort of imbal­ance of friendship. This may also pose a challenge to the cross-sex friendship: If the male friend views the friendship as an outlet for meeting his emotional needs, but the female friend sees it as unable to do so for her, the relationship might be headed for problems. The purposes and parameters of the friendship may need to be discussed directly.

One interpersonal pattern that warrants discussion isn't research based, but stems from experience, corroborated by numerous students' accounts. A unique form of com­munication emerges primarily between men—a form that tends to backfire when men use it with women. In a gender communication class a few semesters back, this phenom­enon received the label "jocular sparring." Here's how it typically works: A guy will see one of his buddies and greet him by saying, "Man, you look terrible today; where'd you get that shirt, off somebody who died?! And your hair, geez—put a hat on." This harm­less teasing between male friends can be directly translated into "I like you; you're my buddy." It's an unthreatening way for men to communicate liking and affection for one another. We realize that the following statement is generalizing a bit, but women don't typically talk this way with their female friends. If a woman greeted a female friend by saying, "Hey, you look like death warmed over today—what happened?! That outfit looks like it's been through the wringer and your hair looks like the cat's been chewing on it," the female friend would probably feel hurt, get angry, or wonder what in the world had gotten into her friend.

So what happens when a guy teases a female friend, assuming that she'll react the way his male friends do? For example, consider what's likely to happen if a guy greets

231

a female friend by saying, "Not getting enough sleep lately? Your eyes look like you've been on a four-day drunk. And that outfit—did you get dressed in the dark?!" More often than not, the woman will not take the teasing lightly. She might act as though she is tossing off the comments, but in fact the teasing may cause her discomfort because it introduces an element of uncertainty into the relationship.

This doesn't mean that women don't have a sense of humor or that they're fragile creatures who can't take teasing among friends. In fact, after a friendship foundation has been established and with greater understanding of one another's communication styles, women can often take jocular sparring (and dish it right back) in the friendly spirit intended. It's not that women can't or don't engage in teasing with both their male and female friends, but they tend not to prefer it as a form of showing closeness or affection. When women do engage in teasing, they tend to communicate it differently and with a different effect than when men spar this way. Jocular sparring has the potential either to hurt or engender a sense of playfulness and closeness in a relationship; if you desire the positive outcome, it's wise for friends to talk about the use of this kind of communication.

### What Enhances Cross-Sex Friendships?

Each of us needs friends, and one of the benefits of the changes over past decades is the increased potential for satisfying friendships between men and women. While many students are aware of some of the problems we just discussed, they also report a desire for more and better friendships with members of the opposite sex. In this final section of the chapter, let's explore some strategies one might follow to increase the chance that a cross-sex friendship will develop successfully.

CROSS-SEX FRIENDS AS ROMANCE ADVISORS One of the benefits of cross-sex friendship is getting firsthand information and insight into members of the opposite sex. How many of us have asked an opposite-sex friend to explain that sex and their behavior to us? How many of us have compared a date's behavior to that of our opposite-sex friend, and then found the date wanting? Our curiosity about the opposite sex is a natural, fun part of life, but when it turns into perplexity because one relational partner cannot understand the other, then we feel we need help. Who better to turn to than an opposite-sex friend?

It's common for men to ask their female friends to help them understand women or just to seek support, empathy, or sympathy. This applies to the guy who is frustrated over his lack of success in the dating market, to the man who wants female insight into his dating relationships, or to the married man who seeks advice about his relationship with his wife, possibly from one of her friends. At times, women remain a mystery to men, so they often feel that a female friend can help them understand women more so than a male friend can. As some research we reviewed in the male-male friendship section indicates, men may not want to disclose their problems, insecurities, or concerns to other men for fear of appearing weak or vulnerable. Thus men often find female friends to be valuable confidantes. Likewise, women who are puzzled or troubled by some situation involving romantic entanglements with men (or the lack thereof) can find their male friends a source of support, strength, and insight.

Of course, like anything else, this advice-giving, lend-an-ear function of cross-sex friendships has its abuses as well as its benefits. For example, if your sole purpose for

232

having an opposite-sex friend is to seek counsel on your romantic relationships, your friend may quickly tire of that. Cross-sex friendships need special kinds of maintenance. Using someone merely as a source of support, a guidance counselor, a spokesperson for all men or all women, or a captive audience for your relational problems could be considered a selfish, abusive way to conduct a friendship. What if your friend needs your ear sometime? What if your friend becomes unwilling to be there for you, simply because the friendship ended up being too one-sided? These important issues warrant sensitive discussion and negotiation between cross-sex friends. If you don't talk about possible abuses of the friendship—or of any relationship for that matter—you might wind up with one less friend.

FRIENDS WITH BENEFITS (FWBRs) Thus far in this chapter, we've been operating under the assumption that cross-sex friendships are platonic, that is, they don't include sexual activity. Some cross-sex friendships do include sexual tension, as we've discussed. This tension may be positive (making you enjoy the person's company more because the friendship involves an element of flirtation or attraction) or negative (adding a dimen­sion that isn't expected or reciprocated, or that impedes the relationship). Increasingly nowadays, friends become sexual partners with no effect on the friendship or expectation of romantic involvement. Among college-aged people "friends with benefits relation­ships" (FWBRs), sometimes called (in PG-13 language) "f-buddies," are more common now than they were even a few short years ago. One study of college students found that over half reported being in an FWBR, more men than women (Puentes, Knox, & Zus- man, 2008); in other college student surveys, the figure was 60 percent (Bisson & Levine, 2009; McGinty, Knox, & Zusman, 2007). In fact, a movie released in 2011 starring Justin Timberlake and Mila Kunis, aptly titled Friends With Benefits, explored this complicated form of friendship.

Communication scholars Hughes, Morrison, and Asada (2005) define the FWBR as a relationship that emerges from a preexisting friendship but that evolves to include sexual activity. The sexual contact doesn't change the friendship into a romantic relation­ship or imply a commitment; in fact, people in successful FWBRs don't want anything more from their partners than what they have. Hughes et al. (2005) explain that "these types of relationships are distinct in that they combine both the benefits of friendship with the benefits of a sexual relationship, yet avoid the responsibilities and commitment that romantic relationships typically entail" (p. 50).

Although some of us wouldn't dream of having FWBRs because it goes against our moral code, religious beliefs, or simply our preferences for keeping sexual activity only with romantic partners, you probably know people at your college or university who enjoy the occasional (or frequent) "booty call." This phenomenon begs a few questions: Is a physical/sexual relationship a logical extension of the intimacy that two friends can develop? If a strong friendship includes deep sharing at psychological, emotional, and possibly spiritual levels, what about the physical level? If both friends are sexually active (or believe sexual activity outside of marriage or committed partnership is acceptable) and both have sexual desires, is it necessarily wrong or inappropriate to turn to one's friend for mutual sexual gratification? If the "booty call" gets answered, is the relation­ship still a friendship or is it something else? What if sex happens because two friends get drunk or high and their inhibitions lessen—is the friendship now an FWBR or is it just an "oops" situation, a mistake? We ask these questions to get you thinking about

233

cross-sex friendships and what they should or shouldn't include. Same-sex gay and lesbian friends often have the same issues to contend with.

Researchers continue to explore the nature of FWBRs, how men and women negotiate them, and the communication involved in the maintenance of such friend­ships (Epstein, Calzo, Smiler, & Ward, 2009; Goodboy & Myers, 2008; Paik, 2010). In one of the studies in which 60 percent of college students reported either currently experiencing or having experienced an FWBR, researchers found that women and men differed in their basic conception of the friendship (McGinty, Knox, & Zusman, 2007). Women in the study emphasized the "friends" aspect, viewing the FWBR as more involved and emotional, whereas men viewed the relationship as more casual and emphasized the sexual aspect or "benefits" of the connection. From the women's point of view, the fear or concern is that women in FWBRs who view the relationship in a different light than men will have their feelings hurt or experience conflict when the difference emerges. From the men's point of view, differing perspectives on an FWBR might lead to pressure to change the relationship into something the woman wants or make it a deeper friendship than the man desires.

Hughes et al. (2005) explain that FWBRs can function effectively, provided both friends follow these rules:

1. Friends with benefits must maintain their original friendship, meaning that sexual activity doesn't change the friendship and the participants continue to do things together that they typically did as friends.

2. Emotions don't become involved, or the friendship will be at risk.

3. The friends with benefits relationship is maintained in secret, even if this means that their romantic or sexual partners don't know about it.

4. The relationship may be renegotiated, with either participant opting out at any time.

Is it possible to go back to being just friends after being FWBRs? Earlier in this chapter we reviewed some research on how friends recover after an unrequited romantic attempt—one friend's desire to change the friendship into something more intimate is rejected. Although not specific to FWBRs, the research findings apply. If one person in an FWBR begins to develop romantic feelings and a desire to move the friendship into a romantic realm, but the other person doesn't, negotiating the situation can be awkward. Many times, communication becomes tense or nonexistent and the FWBR simply doesn't continue. Some people find they can "notch back" the FWBR into just a good friendship, but for others, this isn't easy or even imaginable. Navigating this relatively new form of friendship takes effort and clear, open communication if the friends are to view the relationship equitably.

### The Future for Cross-Sex Friendship

Friendship between men and women has changed and will continue to evolve. We wonder where these changes will lead, and so we close this chapter with one thought on the direction and future of friendship between the sexes. Buhrke and Fuqua (1987) concluded the following from their research:

Given that [our research found] women wanted more contact with men, wanted to be closer to men, and wanted more balance in their relationships

234

with men ..., one could conclude that women more highly value their rela­tionships with men and wish to better those relationships. However, women were already more satisfied with the frequency of contact, closeness, and balance in their relationships with women. Thus it seems women want more from their relationships with men and make efforts to improve the quality of those relationships so that they are more similar to their relationships with women, (p. 349)

This is an interesting thought—that women want better relationships with men, but want them to become more like their friendships with other women. Perhaps men would like their cross-sex friendships to become more like their same-sex friendships. We suggest that neither goal is complete. It may not be a good idea to force cross-sex friendships into the mold of the familiar same-sex friendship. Indeed, the terms cross-sex and same-sex friendships tend to dichotomize the two types and exaggerate their differ­ences while minimizing their similarities (Arnold, 1995; Werking, 1994). If we classify relationships into same-sex and cross-sex, we may restrict our understanding of commu­nicative practices and experience. Men and women can develop more effective cross-sex friendships by learning to incorporate the patterns of the opposite sex into their com­munication repertoire and by treating each friendship as a unique entity, not as having come from another planet. The process takes thought, sensitivity, and a willingness to learn and change.

## Conclusion

This chapter began with the suggestion that the nature of and value placed on same- sex and cross-sex friendships are changing. Research supports that suggestion and pro­vides great insight into friendships and the kind of communication that sustains them. We first explored in this chapter how we learn, as children, what friendship means; we examined gender-related friendship pat­terns that begin in childhood and change as we progress into adolescence and adult­hood. Friendship between the sexes is some­thing we learn to do, because structures in society generally do not teach us how to embrace members of the opposite sex as friends.

We then explored the unique functions and characteristics of male-male friendships, as compared with female-female friend­ships. While these relationships are more similar than different, some aspects such as

the purpose of the friendship, the approaches to and need for developing intimacy, and the role of self-disclosure in the relationship do differ.

Finally, we examined cross-sex friend­ship, in terms of factors that impede the development and satisfaction of this kind of friendship, as well as factors that enhance friendship. Specifically, such factors as vary­ing purposes or expectations for the friend­ship, the undercurrent of sexuality, societal pressure, and interpersonal communication patterns—such as who more often discloses versus who more often receives the other's disclosure—may actually impede the success of a cross-friendship. We also offered some suggestions for cross-sex friendship enhance­ment, such as communicating to develop a clear definition of the relationship and being careful not to overuse one's opposite- sex friend as a romantic advisor. Finally, we

235

discussed the murky waters of sexual activ­ity between cross-sex friends, in terms of the effects on a friendship.

Each type of friendship has unique com­munication issues and unique potential, but one thing is clear: Friendships are among our most important relationships in life. We have all probably suffered the consequences of

assuming that friends will always be there for us, that we don't have to exert much energy to keep them. Such assumptions will soon leave us friendless. So, just like other impor­tant relationships—with family, coworkers, or romantic partners—friendships need com­munication, as well as shared experiences, to develop and grow.

## Discussion Starters

1. In your experience, how do most male friend­ships seem to form? What brings the friends together? Are the circumstances different than those that bring female friends together?

2. Some researchers propose that the intimacy men achieve through doing things together is of the same quality as the intimacy achieved by women through conversation. Do you believe men and women are equally capable of form­ing intimate relationships? Intimate same-sex friendships? Intimate cross-sex friendships? How are women and men different in terms of accomplishing intimacy in their relationships? How are they similar?

3. Think about the issue of sexual activity in het­erosexual, cross-sex friendships, meaning the "friends with benefits" arrangement. How is the issue dealt with in most of the cross-sex friendships you know? In your own cross­sex friendships? Is the issue discussed openly, hinted at, or avoided?

4. What do you think are the biggest obstacles to effective cross-sex friendships? What do you think it will take to improve friendships between women and men? Which sex will have to change the most and why? What will the ideal cross-sex friendship look like?

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236

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