

# The Effect of Gender Role Orientation on Same- and Cross-Sex Friendship Formation

Heidi M. Reeder<sup>1</sup>

---

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of gender role orientation on factors related to same- and cross-sex friendship formation. Participants ( $N = 278$ ) completed a version of the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Each participant listed their closest friends, the sex of each friend, and the closeness level of each relationship. They also indicated whether they prefer same- or cross-sex friendship. The results suggest that gender role orientation affects inclination for cross-sex friendship, particularly the relative frequency of cross-sex friendship. Feminine men had a significantly higher proportion of cross-sex friendships than did masculine men, and masculine women had a significantly higher proportion of cross-sex friendships than did feminine women. A significant number of participants indicated that they did not prefer one sex or the other for friendship. Gender role orientation had no impact on levels of closeness in either same- or cross-sex friendship.

---

**KEY WORDS:** gender role; friendship; sex.

Cross-sex friendship has become an increasingly interesting subject to researchers and laypersons alike. Researchers have attempted to clarify, among other topics, the challenges of these relationships (e.g., Monsour, Harris, & Kurzweil, 1994), what kinds of attractions exist (e.g., Reeder, 2000), and how closeness in friendship is defined (e.g., Parks & Floyd, 1996). Of course, remaining questions exist. For example, what kind of person frequently develops cross-sex friendships? Do some people prefer cross-sex friendships to same-sex friendships, and if so, what qualities do such people possess? This study was designed to investigate whether gender role orientation<sup>2</sup> is related to same- and cross-sex friendship formation.

Although gender role orientation has received little attention in the friendship literature, much is known about the relation between biological sex and friendship patterns. Over the last 30 years, researchers

have examined this relation by investigating such questions as whether men or women have greater satisfaction and enjoyment in friendship (e.g., Bank, 1995; Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987; Elkins & Peterson, 1993; Reisman, 1990), whether men or women self-disclose more in friendship (e.g., Aukett, Ritchie, & Mill, 1988; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Reis, 1988; Reis, Senchak, & Solomon, 1985), and whether men or women have a greater preference for same- or cross-sex friendship (e.g., Rose, 1985). All of these questions address a fundamental issue of whether or not biological sex affects how a person forms and experiences friendship. The results of some of these studies have been contradictory and inconclusive. Perhaps these inconsistencies are due, in part, to variations within the male and female groups, such as gender role orientation. Indeed, it has been argued that gender role orientation is often more explanatory than biological sex in understanding people's behavior (Reeder, 1996a; Wright, 1988).

The purpose of this research is to assess the impact of gender role orientation on issues related to the formation of same- and cross-sex friendship, specifically in terms of preference, frequency, and closeness of such friendships. First, what is known thus far about the relationship between sex, gender, and

---

<sup>1</sup>To whom correspondence should be addressed at Department of Communication, Boise State University, 1910 University Drive, Boise, Idaho 83725; e-mail: hreeder@boisestate.edu.

<sup>2</sup>Throughout the text, "gender role orientation" and "gender" will be used to refer to the degree to which a person exhibits traditionally masculine or feminine social traits, and the term "sex" will refer to whether a person is biologically male or female.

friendship formation will be discussed. This discussion will be followed by a description of the methods for the current study. Finally, the results and some concluding remarks on the relationship between sex, gender role orientation, and friendship formation will be provided.

### **FRIENDSHIP PREFERENCE**

Previous researchers have addressed whether one's sex is related to preference for male or female friends. Many studies have shown that children prefer same-sex friendship to cross-sex friendship (e.g., Gottman, 1986; Maccoby, 1988; Smith & Inder, 1990), but whether this pattern holds in adulthood is unclear. Larwood and Wood (1977) reported that adult men and women do continue to prefer same-sex friendship. Rose (1985) called this the "homosocial norm" and argued that the same-sex pattern in childhood creates a friendship prototype that persists into adulthood. However, Rose's data only partially supported her hypothesis. She found that 40% of the women and 66% of the men in her study actually preferred cross-sex friendship.

Perhaps preference for same- or cross-sex friendship can be gleaned from the degree of satisfaction or enjoyment in those relationships. When it comes to comparing the sexes on enjoyment, it seems clear that women enjoy their same-sex friendships more than men do (e.g., Bank, 1995; Bank & Hansford, 2000). This may be related to the lower level of intimacy in men's friendships (to be discussed later). But when it comes to comparing enjoyment in same-sex friendship and enjoyment in cross-sex friendship, the pattern becomes a little less clear. Buhrke and Fuqua (1987) and Reisman (1990) reported that women were more satisfied in same-sex friendship than cross-sex friendship. However, Elkins and Peterson (1993) reported that women were equally satisfied with both, whereas, men were more satisfied in cross-sex friendship than in same-sex friendships. It is a little difficult, given these findings, to determine whether and how sex impacts friendship preference. It seems likely that other factors, besides sex, may be involved.

### **FREQUENCY OF FRIENDSHIP FORMATION**

Preference for male or female friends may or may not equate with how many same- or cross-sex friends a person actually has. Cross-sex friendship seems to encounter many social and structural barriers that serve

to inhibit friendship formation (Monsour, 2002). For example, objection by a romantic partner (Rubin, 1985) or gossip by peers (Adams, 1985) may curtail the number of cross-sex friendships a person initiates and develops. Or perhaps, there are simply fewer opportunities to meet people of the other sex for friendship (O'Meara, 1994). Although these sorts of patterns have presumably contributed to making cross-sex friendship less common than same-sex friendship, the raw number of cross-sex friendships seems to have risen over the last 30 years.

The data on frequency of cross-sex friendship formation shows a large increase between the 1970s and the 1980s and beyond. In the 1970s, cross-sex friendships were apparently rare. According to a study by Booth and Hess (1974), men and women had an average of less than one close cross-sex friend, and most had no close cross-sex friends. Similarly, Levinson (1978) reported that almost none of the men in his study of high achieving men had ever experienced a nonsexual cross-sex friendship.

The data look very different in the 1980s and 1990s. Bell (1981) found that women had an average of 2.8 close cross-sex friends, and men had an average of 2.5 close cross-sex friends. Rubin (1985) stated that approximately 40% of the men and 30% of the women in her study reported close cross-sex friendships, and Kuttler, La Greca, and Prinstein (1999) found that among 10th and 12th graders, 47% had a close cross-sex friend. When Buhrke and Fuqua (1987) asked participants to list their supportive relationships, women listed, on average, 3.45 cross-sex friends and men listed, on average, 3.75 cross-sex friends. All of the participants in this study reported at least one supportive cross-sex friend. Parker and deVries (1993) asked participants to rate their entire close friend network. These reports yielded an average of 2.26 cross-sex friends for men, and an average of 2.69 cross-sex friends for women.

Much research has compared the number of same- and cross-sex friendships women have to the number of same- and cross-sex friends men have, yet other variables besides sex appear to have an impact on friendship formation. Such variables may include age, marital status, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, and/or personality factors. For example, researchers have noted low levels of cross-sex friendship formation among children (Gottman, 1986; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Maccoby, 1988), a rise of cross-sex friendship occurrence in adolescence (Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981), and a decline of such relationships in older adulthood (Adams,

1985; Booth & Hess, 1974). Cross-sex friendships appear to be more common among singles than among couples and among middle-class people than among working class people (Rubin, 1985). Bell (1981) found that men and women who were classified as “nonconventional” had more close cross-sex friends than did those classified as “conventional.”

Another factor that may affect frequency of cross-sex friendship formation is gender role orientation. A few studies have included this variable, focusing primarily on androgyny. Jones, Bloys, and Wood (1990) used the Bem Sex Role Inventory, and found that androgynous participants (either man or woman) had significantly more male friends. They found no relationship between gender role orientation and number of close female friends or total number of close friends. Monsour (1988) hypothesized that androgynous men and women, relative to traditionally gender-typed men and women, would have more cross-sex friends because they have more personality traits of the other sex. His data partly supported his hypothesis. Androgynous men, but not androgynous women, had significantly more cross-sex friends than traditionally gender-typed men and women.

## FRIENDSHIP CLOSENESS

Much research has been conducted on the relationship between sex and friendship closeness. When participants are asked to indicate the level of “closeness” or “intimacy” in their friendships, the results are predictable—women’s friendships tend to be closer than men’s friendships (Bank & Hansford, 2000; Bell, 1981; Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Fischer & Narus, 1981; Hacker, 1981). Further, men tend to gain more closeness from their cross-sex friends than from their same-sex friends (Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987). Because both men and women tend to feel closer to their female friends than to their male friends, Wheeler, Reis, and Nezelek (1983) concluded that women, on the whole, are better than men at providing intimacy. In fact, they found that for both men and women, spending more time with female friends than with male friends actually decreased loneliness among college students (Wheeler et al., 1983).

If self-disclosure is used as the measure of closeness or intimacy, the same trend continues. It has been reported that men are more likely to discuss personal issues and problems with a female friend than with a male friend (Aukett et al., 1988; Goodstein & Russell, 1977). Reis (1988) found that both sexes are more

likely to disclose to women than to men, but that men do not self-disclose more to women than women do to men. Indeed, Dindia and Allen (1992) concluded from their meta-analysis of the self-disclosure literature that women self-disclose more to both same- and cross-sex conversational partners than do men. However, the findings of a few studies dissent from this overall pattern. Hacker (1981) reported that the men in his study confided in other men as much as they did in women. Reis et al. (1985) reported that when best same-sex friends were asked to engage in a “meaningful conversation,” men and women did not differ in their level of intimate communication. Leaper, Carson, Baker, Holliday, and Myers (1995) found that men actually made more self-disclosing statements to both same- and cross-sex friends than did women when asked to discuss family relationships.

The relationship between intimacy in friendship and gender role orientation has also received some attention. Jones and Dembo (1989) found that, among children, masculine boys had significantly lower levels of intimacy in their friendships than feminine boys or masculine or feminine girls. In their study of adults, Bank and Hansford (2000) also found that men’s masculinity score was negatively related to intimacy in friendship. In addition to masculinity, they found that emotional restraint and homophobia were also negatively associated with intimacy in men’s friendships (Bank & Hansford, 2000). Fischer and Narus (1981) found that femininity in women, but not femininity in men, predicted intimacy in friendship. In their study, androgynous women scored highest in intimacy, especially when rating a same-sex friend (Fischer & Narus, 1981). A few studies have shown that androgynous people self-disclose to their best friend more than masculine or feminine people do (Levine & Lombardo, 1984; Lombardo & Levine, 1981; Stokes, Childs, & Fuehrer, 1981). The overall pattern here may suggest that androgynous and feminine women are highest in intimacy, followed by feminine men, and finally masculine men.

## STUDY RATIONALE

Research on the relation between patterns in friendship and sex appears to reveal some trends, however, it also reveals some inconsistencies. These inconsistencies may indicate that other variables, besides sex, affect same- and cross-sex friendship formation. Biological sex undoubtedly receives significantly more credit than deserved for its role in explaining

human behavior. Canary and Hause (1993) reviewed 15 meta-analyses of sex and communication and discovered that only 1% of the variance could be attributed to sex differences alone. Aries (1996) came to a similar conclusion in her review of literature and stated, "... knowledge about a person's [sex] will give us little ability to accurately predict how a person will behave in many situations" (p. 189).

When it comes to friendship, gender role orientation may be just as important, or more important, than sex. Wright (1988) asserted that although there are differences between men and women in friendship, such differences are often exaggerated and "generally leave the impression of greater within-[sex] uniformity than is actually the case" (p. 367). He claimed that gender role orientation may affect, and even override, sex differences in friendship research. Similarly, Werking (1997) argued that friendships between men and women raise important questions about "the role of gender in the management of friendship" (p. 4). It is important, therefore, to include gender role orientation in any discussion of friendship patterns. The current research focuses specifically on the relationship between gender role orientation and the proportion, preference, and closeness of same- and cross-sex friendships.

RQ1: What is the relationship between gender role orientation and the proportion of same- and cross-sex friendship formation?

RQ2: What is the relationship between gender role orientation and preference for same- and cross-sex friends?

RQ3: What is the relationship between gender role orientation and closeness to same- and cross-sex friends?

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were recruited from university classes to participate in a questionnaire study. A few questionnaires ( $n = 18$ ) were discarded due to incomplete responses. Another two questionnaires were not included because the participant was not heterosexual.<sup>3</sup> The remaining participants ( $N = 279$ ) consisted of 132 men and 147 women. The majority were

<sup>3</sup>It was decided that sexual orientation may be relevant in a study of sex, gender, and friendship, and because only two participants reported being gay, their questionnaires were eliminated from the analysis.

European American (72%) and African American (17%); the balance consisted of small numbers of other ethnicities (e.g., Asian, Hispanic, Basque) (7%) and those who did not specify an ethnicity (4%). The participants primarily identified themselves as middle class (46%) and upper-middle class (33%). Most were single (46%); some described themselves as dating one person (38%), married (9%), and cohabitating (6%). The average age of the participants was 23.8 years.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of several sections. The first section measured traditional gender role orientation using a version of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). The version used by Wheelless and Dierks-Stewart (1981) was selected because it has been shown to increase the reliability and validity of the original instrument.<sup>4</sup> This inventory consists of 10 items that most strongly load on the factor "masculine" (e.g., "competitive") and 10 items that most strongly load on the factor "feminine" (e.g., "compassionate"). Participants indicated on a 7-point scale the degree to which each adjective described them (from *never or almost never true* to *always or almost always true*).<sup>5</sup>

The next part of the questionnaire assessed the following three variables: (1) relative frequency of same- and cross-sex friendship formation; (2) preference for same- or cross-sex friends; and (3) closeness to same- and cross-sex friends. To measure the first variable, participants were asked to list the first

<sup>4</sup>Wheelless and Dierks-Stewart (1981) factor analyzed Bem's original 60 items. Their analysis revealed a two-factor solution, which the authors labeled "masculine" and "feminine." Two other factors also emerged, but these were discarded due to a low number of items on each factor, and a low reliability score. The 10 items of the feminine dimension and the 10 items on the masculine dimension with the highest loadings were selected for their revision of the scale.

<sup>5</sup>As a validity check, a  $t$  test was used to see if men scored higher on masculinity and women on femininity on this scale. The average masculine score for men was 4.99, whereas for women it was 4.78. This was a significant difference,  $t = 2.16$ ,  $p < .05$ . The average feminine score for women was 5.57, whereas for men it was 5.18. This was a significant difference,  $t = -4.65$ ,  $p < .001$ . Both men and women were more often classified as "feminine" (40% of men and 63% of women were classified as "feminine") than either "masculine" (28% of men and 14% of women) or "androgynous" (32% of men and 23% of women). However, a chi-squared test revealed that significantly more men than women were classified as masculine,  $\chi^2 = 4.4$ ,  $p < .05$ , and significantly more women than men were classified as feminine,  $\chi^2 = 10.44$ ,  $p < .01$ .

names of their closest friends (excluding family members or dating/marital partners) and to indicate the sex of each friend. Because previous research indicates that men and women have, on average, six or seven close friends (Bell, 1981; Parker & deVries, 1993), participants were given eight spaces to list their closest friends. This number was thought to be sufficient for closest friends, without obligating participants to fill up all the spaces with less close friends and acquaintances. Each participant's same- to cross-sex friendship ratio was calculated. To assess the perceived closeness to each friend, participants were asked to "Indicate the level of closeness you feel for each friend you list." Closeness was then defined as "the degree to which you really like the person, enjoy spending time with the person, enjoy listening to the person, and believe the person is important in your life." Participants responded on a 7-point likert-type scale; 7 indicated the highest level of closeness. Next, participants indicated whether they preferred friendships with men or women or "can't decide/no preference." Finally, demographic data, such as sex, age, ethnicity, and sexual preference, were assessed. Participants were told that they were participating in a voluntary study that assessed the relation between personal characteristics, and the types of relationships in a person's life.

### Analysis

Each participant received a masculinity score, a femininity score, and an androgyny score. The masculinity score was determined by averaging the participants' responses to the 10 masculine items, and the femininity score was determined by averaging the participants' responses to the 10 feminine items. The androgyny score was determined with Bem's formula (Femininity score - Masculinity score  $\times$  2.322; Bem, 1974). If participants' androgynous scores were less than -1.00, the participants were classified as masculine. If their androgyny scores were greater than 1.00, they were classified as feminine. If their androgyny scores were between -1.00 and 1.00, they were classified as androgynous (an androgyny score of exactly 0 means that the participants were very high on both masculine and feminine traits). It is also possible to get an "undifferentiated" score with Bem's inventory (individuals with low levels of both masculinity and femininity), but this was not assessed in the current study because "undifferentiated" has been used infrequently as a variable, and it is undertheorized in the literature (Bem, 1984).

Two types of tests were used to answer the research questions: *t* tests were used to compare two groups (e.g., masculine gender role participants and feminine gender role participants) in reference to a dependent variable (e.g., closeness to cross-sex friends); chi-square tests were used to test the relationship between two nominal variables (e.g., the relationship between sex and preference for male or female friend).

## RESULTS

### Proportion of Same- and Cross-Sex Friendship Formation

Traditional gender role orientation made a significant difference in the proportion of same- and cross-sex friendship formation. Feminine people, whether men or women, had a significantly higher percentage of female friends (60%) than did masculine people (40%),  $t = -3.98$ ,  $p < .001$ , or androgynous people (48%),  $t = 3.05$ ,  $p < .01$ . Androgynous people and masculine people did not differ in their percentage of female friends. Masculine people, whether male or female, had a significantly higher percentage of male friends (60%) than did feminine people (40%),  $t = 3.94$ ,  $p < .001$ . Masculine people did not have significantly more male friends than androgynous people, who had approximately 50% male friends and 50% female friends. Androgynous people had a significantly higher proportion of male friends (50%) than did feminine people (40%),  $t = -3.05$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Gender role orientation also appeared to impact friendship formation when the sexes were evaluated separately. Feminine men had 40% female friends, and masculine men had 30% female friends. This means that feminine men had significantly more cross-sex friendships than did masculine men,  $t = 2.174$ ,  $p < .05$ . Masculine women had 32% male friends, and feminine women had 29% male friends. This showed that masculine women had significantly more cross-sex friends than did feminine women,  $t = 2.03$ ,  $p < .05$ .

Overall, there was a higher percentage of same-sex friendships relative to cross-sex friendships. Men had significantly more male friends (65%) than female friends (35%),  $t = -14.36$ ,  $p < .001$ , and women had significantly more female friends (70%) than male friends (30%),  $t = 14.34$ ,  $p < .001$ . Men identified significantly more cross-sex friends than did women,  $t = 6.25$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### Preference for Male or Female Friends

Taking the participants as a whole, most people reported that they did not prefer one sex over the other for friendship ( $n = 143$ , 51%). This was followed by a preference for men ( $n = 79$ , 28%), and finally a preference for women ( $n = 57$ , 20%). The strong identification with “no preference” is an interesting result that will be reviewed in the Discussion section.

Most masculine participants had no preference ( $n = 25$ , 43%), followed by a preference for men ( $n = 22$ , 38%), and finally a preference for women ( $n = 11$ , 19%). Although there is a clear trend for masculine people (whether man or woman) to prefer friendships with men, this difference is not significant. The lack of significance may be due to the overall low numbers of masculine people ( $n = 58$ , 44%) and the high percentage who had no preference.

Feminine participants followed a similar trend. Most feminine people did not have a preference ( $n = 74$ , 51%), followed by a preference for men ( $n = 37$ , 26%), and a preference for women ( $n = 34$ , 23%). Significantly more feminine people did not have a preference for male or female friends,  $\chi^2 = 20.5$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Androgynous participants followed a trend similar to the masculine and feminine participants. Most didn't have a preference ( $n = 44$ , 58%), followed by a preference for men ( $n = 20$ , 26%), and a preference for women ( $n = 12$ , 16%).

When the sexes were evaluated separately, without consideration of gender role orientation, most women had no preference ( $n = 72$ , 49%), followed by those who preferred men ( $n = 38$ , 26%), and those who preferred women ( $n = 37$ , 25%) as friends. A chi-square test showed that significantly more women had “no preference,”  $\chi^2 = 16.2$ ,  $p < .01$ , than a preference for male or female friends. Most men had no preference ( $n = 71$ , 54%), followed by a preference for men ( $n = 41$ , 31%), and finally a preference for women ( $n = 20$ , 15%) friends. “No preference” was significantly more common among men than was a clear preference for male or female friends,  $\chi^2 = 30$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### Closeness to Male and Female Friends

There was no significant difference among masculine, feminine, and androgynous persons on their reported closeness to male and female friends. In other words, gender role orientation did not im-

pact levels of closeness in either same- or cross-sex friendship.

Sex somewhat impacted closeness levels in friendship. Sex *did not* matter when men's closeness to same- and cross-sex friends was compared to women's closeness to same- and cross-sex friends. On a 7-point scale, where 7 indicated the greatest level of closeness, men scored 5.14 in their closeness with male friends, and women scored a 5.08 in their closeness with male friends. These levels were not significantly different. Men scored a 5.37 in their closeness with female friends, and women scored a 5.41 in their closeness with female friends. These closeness levels were not significantly different.

However, sex did make a difference when closeness to male and female friends were compared. Statistically, men reported greater closeness to their female friends (5.37) than to their male friends (5.14),  $t = 11.5$ ,  $p < .01$ . Women reported greater closeness to female friends (5.41) than to male friends (5.08),  $t = 3.37$ ,  $p < .01$ . It is interesting that both sexes reported greater closeness to women, at least statistically, but tend to have “no preference” when it comes to choosing a man or woman for friendship.

### Preference $\times$ Proportion of Same- and Cross-Sex Friends

The final test indicated that there was a relationship between preference for friendship with a particular sex and actual occurrence of friendship with that sex. Although this may not be surprising, it does indicate that preference makes a difference and that levels of cross-sex friendship formation cannot be attributed to social and structural issues alone. Men who preferred women for friendship ( $n = 20$ ) reported, on average, that 40% of their friends were women. Men who preferred men for friendship ( $n = 41$ ) reported, on average, that 15% of their friends were women. A  $t$  test showed this to be a significant difference,  $t = 3.8$ ,  $p < .01$ . It is important to remember, however, that the majority of men said that they have no preference ( $n = 71$ ).

Women who preferred men for friendship ( $n = 38$ ) had, on average, 38% male friends, whereas women who preferred women for friendship ( $n = 37$ ) had, on average, 24% male friends. This is a significant difference ( $t = 3.26$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Once again, the greater number of women had no preference ( $n = 72$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Gender role orientation appears to impact some elements of friendship patterns. In particular, gender role orientation plays a part in how frequently a person forms cross-sex friendships relative to same-sex friendships. Feminine people in this study (both men and women) formed significantly more friendships with women than did masculine or androgynous people. Masculine people (both men and women) formed significantly more friendships with men than did feminine or androgynous people. Put another way, feminine men and masculine women developed significantly more cross-sex friendships than did masculine men and feminine women, who developed more friendships with their own sex.

There are several potential explanations for this finding. One possibility is that feminine men and masculine women are more drawn to cross-sex friendship due to the types of rewards they receive from such relationships. For example, previous studies have shown that, for men, cross-sex friendships are more nurturing, caring (Sapadin, 1988), emotional, and personal (Werking, 1997) than their same-sex friendships, which tend to be relatively competitive (Rubin, 1985). Swain (1992) suggested that some men feel freer to express emotion in a cross-sex friendship than in a same-sex friendship and that friendships with women provide a low-risk opportunity for men to explore their feminine side. Because men's friendships tend to emphasize masculinity and machismo (Werking, 1997), it makes sense that feminine men might feel more comfortable than masculine men do in cross-sex friendships. Similarly, perhaps more masculine women than feminine women would create cross-sex friendships due to the relatively "masculine interaction style" (Rubin, 1985) that these cross-sex friendships offer. For example, because women may feel more free to express their competitive side with male friends than with female friends (Swain, 1992), it might make sense that more masculine women than feminine women would be interested in this type of relationship.

For another explanation, consider Rawlins' claim that we prefer to befriend people who like and accept us (Rawlins, 1992). Werking (1997) reported that one of the ways that people feel good about themselves is through acceptance by a cross-sex friend. Perhaps feminine men, who may be judged more harshly by their male peers, can find greater acceptance in cross-sex friendship. Indeed, Wright and Scanlon (1991) found that feminine and androgynous men rated their best cross-sex friend higher on self-affirmation value

than did masculine men. Similarly, perhaps masculine women feel more accepted by their male friends and enjoy being considered "one of the boys" (Reeder, 1996b).

There are two other possibilities to consider. One is that perceived similarities matter in friendship formation. A large body of research suggests that we like to be around others whom we perceive to be similar to ourselves (Fehr, 1996). Perhaps those who are cross-gender-typed form more cross-sex friendships because of perceived similarities. For another perspective, consider Monsour's suggestion that masculine men and feminine women might have more difficulty forming cross-sex friendships because they lack a range of interpersonal competencies found in those who are less tied to traditional gender roles (Monsour, 2002).

Although the results of the present study show a clear trend for a relationship between gender role orientation and the relative frequency of same- and cross-sex friendship formation, they do not show a pattern between gender role orientation and preference for same- or cross-sex friends. Rather, a significant number of participants (whether men, women, masculine, or feminine) reported that they did not prefer one sex over the other for friendship. Perhaps participants were trying to look politically correct by avoiding "discrimination" toward one sex or the other. Or perhaps many contemporary men and women are indeed more interested in finding a friend they like than in finding a friend of a particular sex. Both Werking (1997) and Reeder (1996b) have noted that some people are relatively unconcerned about the sex composition of a friendship. Rather than seeing a "man" or "woman," some people claim they just see a "friend." In the perception of these individuals, it is the person who matters, not the person's sex.

However, among those participants who did report a preference, the preference was related to friendship formation. People who preferred friendships with men had significantly more male friends, and people who preferred friendships with women had significantly more female friends. This reveals that personal preference may affect cross-sex friendship formation in addition to the social and structural variables that have been shown in other studies (Adams, 1985; O'Meara, 1994; Rubin, 1985) to play a role.

On the whole, the results of the present study do not indicate that gender role orientation impacts friendship closeness. Perhaps this result can be attributed, in part, to the way closeness was defined in this study. Parks and Floyd (1996) found 13 varied

meanings for closeness in their study of native definitions. Because closeness can be defined in a number of ways, the specific definition used in a particular study, including this one, may be relevant to the findings. Rather than using the term “intimacy,” which connotes romance and sex to some people (Parks & Floyd, 1996), or “self-disclosure,” which is more likely to be used by women than by men when defining closeness (Parks & Floyd, 1996), in this study closeness was defined in a relatively gender-neutral manner. The results of this study indicate that masculine and feminine people do not differ in their friendship closeness levels when closeness is defined in this way.

However, sex of the friend was a strong predictor of friendship closeness. In the present study, men and women were equally close to male friends, and men and women were equally close to female friends. However, both men and women were closer to their female friends than to their male friends. This latter finding is consistent with the conclusion by Buhrke and Fuqua (1987) and may help explain why the participants’ gender didn’t appear to affect friendship closeness. Perhaps, like sex, it is the gender of the *friend* that matters when it comes to closeness levels in friendship. Perhaps both masculine and feminine people feel closer to their feminine friends, just as both men and women feel closer to their female friends. Of course, this is speculation and would require further investigation.

### Limitations of the Present Study

There are a few limitations to this study. The first limitation, and an interesting finding, is that a high percentage of participants scored feminine on the gender role orientation measure. While significantly more women scored feminine than did men, both men and women more frequently scored feminine than scored masculine or androgynous. This may have made a difference in the analysis of whether masculine men preferred friendships with men over friendships with women. The low number of masculine men, combined with the high number that reported “no preference,” created a small *n* with which to work. That such a high percentage of men and women classified themselves as “feminine” may be worthy of further investigation. Perhaps we are living in a cultural climate in which “feminine” traits such as “understanding,” “warm,” and “helpful” are now equally valued for all people. Perhaps this is particularly true among the participants in this study—Generation Y college students. That the average age of participant in this study was

23.8 years may have had some bearing on the results. As gender roles evolve, variations in age and cohort are likely to influence outcomes in gender research.

It is not clear whether offering participants an option of “no preference” was a strength or weakness of this study. Perhaps if they were forced to make a selection, some interesting differences would have emerged. On the other hand, it is a potentially interesting finding that so many people claimed not to have a preference for male or female friends.

Another limitation is that this study only tested the gender role orientation of the participants and not of their friends. Conclusions could be drawn regarding the friends’ sex, but not the friends’ gender. By including friends’ gender role orientation, new and interesting questions could be answered. For example, it might be interesting to discover whether masculine or feminine people are more likely to prefer friendships with their own gender type, regardless of sex. Similarly, it would be interesting to test whether the gender of a friend makes a significant difference in friendship closeness.

Finally, because only two people in this study reported being homosexual, the impact of sexual orientation was not investigated. It might have been interesting, for example, to discover whether masculine gay men are more likely to form friendships with straight men than are feminine gay men. Future researchers may want to examine how all three variables (sex, gender role, and sexual orientation) work together in friendship processes.

### Suggestions for Future Research

The results of the present study provide evidence that gender role orientation impacts the frequency of cross-sex friendship formation. Many other aspects of cross-sex friendship may also be impacted by gender roles, and these areas are worthy of future research. It might be interesting to investigate, for example, whether gender roles impact the *maintenance* of cross-sex friendship. Some people appear better able to maintain a cross-sex friendship without trying to make it romantic or sexual (Monsour, 2002). Monsour (2002) suggested that traditionally typed men and women might not be as successful at maintaining platonic friendships because they may tend to see the other sex as potential dates, rather than as potential friends.

It may also be interesting to investigate whether gender roles impact the *activities* and *topics of conversation* in a cross-sex friendship. Werking (1997)

suggested that “gender related practices are altered when men and women interact across gender boundaries in a relationship that is not defined as romantic or sexual in nature” (p. 63). What specific patterns might emerge? Would two masculine people in a cross-sex friendship engage in activities and communication styles similar to those found in men’s friendships? Would two feminine people in a cross-sex friendship engage in those behaviors associated with female–female friendship? Or is it the participants’ sex, not their gender, that matters in the behavioral and communication patterns of friendship?

Alternatively, future researchers could look at how patterns in male–female friendship impact our experience of gender. We tend to think that gender causes changes in relational patterns, but it may also be the case that changes in relational patterns contribute to changes in our experience of gender, both at the social and individual level. Markus and Cross (1990) pointed out that theory and, to a lesser extent, evidence suggest that people’s self-concept, identity, and personality are constructed through relationships with others. Coover and Murphy (2000) agreed, and they suggested that “the formation of the self is not an independent event generated by an autonomous actor. Rather, the self emerges through social interaction” (p. 125). Because cross-sex friendship is one such relationship that impacts a person’s self (Monsour, 2002), it is not unreasonable to speculate that such relationships may also impact a person’s gender role orientation.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggest that gender role orientation influences patterns of friendship formation. As our concepts of sex and gender continue to evolve, we must continue to investigate research questions that can help us understand how contemporary men and women relate to one another. Cross-sex relationships of all kinds, including business and social friendships, are increasingly common and ought to be better understood.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, R. G. (1985). People would talk: Normative barriers to cross-sex friendship for elderly women. *The Gerontologist, 25*, 605–611.
- Aries, E. (1996). *Men and women in interaction: Reconsidering the differences*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Aukett, R., Ritchie, J., & Mill, K. (1988). Gender differences in friendship patterns. *Sex Roles, 19*, 57–66.
- Bank, B. J. (1995). Friendships in Australia and the United States: From feminization to a more heroic image. *Gender and Society, 9*, 79–98.
- Bank, B. J., & Hansford, S. L. (2000). Gender and friendship: Why are men’s best same-sex friendships less intimate and supportive? *Personal Relationships, 7*, 63–78.
- Bell, R. R. (1981). Friendships of women and men. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 5*, 402–417.
- Bem, S. L. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology, 42*, 155–162.
- Bem, S. L. (1984). Androgyny and gender schema theory: A conceptual and empirical integration. In T. B. Sonderegger (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation: Psychology and gender* (pp. 179–226). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.
- Booth, A., & Hess, E. (1974). Cross-sex friendship. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 36*, 38–46.
- Buhrke, R., & Fuqua, D. (1987). Sex differences in same- and cross-sex supportive relationships. *Sex Roles, 17*, 339–352.
- Caldwell, M., & Peplau, L. (1982). Sex differences in same-sex friendship. *Sex Roles, 8*, 721–732.
- Canary, D., & Hause, K. S. (1993). Is there any reason to research sex differences in communication? *Communication Quarterly, 41*, 129–144.
- Coover, G. E., & Murphy, S. T. (2000). The communicated self: Exploring the interaction between self and social context. *Human Communication Research, 26*, 125–147.
- Dindia, K., & Allen, M. (1992). Sex differences in self-disclosure: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 112*, 106–124.
- Elkins, L., & Peterson, C. (1993). Gender differences in best friendship. *Sex Roles, 29*, 497–508.
- Fehr, B. (1996). *Friendship processes*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fischer, J. L., & Narus, L. R. (1981). Sex roles and intimacy in same sex and other sex relationships. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 5*, 444–455.
- Goodstein, L. D., & Russell, S. W. (1977). Self-disclosure: A comparative study of reports by self and others. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 24*, 365–369.
- Gottman, J. (1986). The world of coordinated play: Same- and cross-sex friendship in young children. In J. M. Gottman & J. G. Parker (Eds.), *Conversations of friends: Speculations of affective development* (pp. 139–191). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gottman, J., & Mettetal, G. (1986). Speculations of affective development: Friendship and acquaintanceship through adolescence. In J. M. Gottman & J. G. Parker (Eds.), *Conversations of friends: Speculations of affective development* (pp. 192–237). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hacker, H. (1981). Blabbermouths and clams: Sex differences in self-disclosure in same-sex and cross-sex friendship dyads. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 5*, 385–401.
- Jones, D. C., Bloys, N., & Wood, M. (1990). Sex roles and friendship patterns. *Sex Roles, 23*, 133–145.
- Jones, G., & Dembo, M. H. (1989). Age and sex role differences in intimate friendships during childhood and adolescence. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 35*, 445–462.
- Kuttler, A. F., La Greca, A. M., & Prinstein, M. J. (1999). Friendship qualities and social–emotional functioning of adolescents with close, cross-sex friends. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 9*, 339–366.
- Larwood, L., & Wood, M. M. (1977). *Women in management*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Leaper, C., Carson, M., Baker, C., Holliday, H., & Myers, S. (1995). Self-disclosure and listener verbal support in same-gender and cross-gender friends’ conversations. *Sex Roles, 33*, 387–404.
- Levine, L. O., & Lombardo, J. P. (1984). Self-disclosure: Intimate and non-intimate disclosures to parents and best friends as a function of Bem sex role category. *Sex Roles, 11*, 735–744.

- Lombardo, J. P., & Levine, L. O. (1981). Sex role stereotyping and patterns of self-disclosure. *Sex Roles, 7*, 403–411.
- Maccoby, E. (1988). Gender as a social category. *Developmental Psychology, 24*, 755–765.
- Markus, H., & Cross, S. (1990). The interpersonal self. In L. A. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality theory and research* (pp. 576–608). New York: Guilford.
- Monsour, M. (2002). *Women and men as friends: Relationships across the life span in the 21st century*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Monsour, M., Harris, B., & Kurzweil, N. (1994). Challenges confronting cross-sex friendships: “Much ado about nothing?” *Sex Roles, 31*, 55–77.
- O’Meara, D. (1994). Cross-sex friendship opportunity challenge: Uncharted terrain for exploration. *Sex Roles, 21*, 525–543.
- Parker, S., & deVries, B. (1993). Patterns of friendship for women and men in same and cross-sex relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 10*, 617–626.
- Parks, M. R., & Floyd, K. (1996). Meanings for closeness and intimacy in friendship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 13*, 85–107.
- Rawlins, W. (1992). *Friendship matters*. New York: de Gruyter.
- Reeder, H. (1996a). A critical look at gender difference in communication research. *Communication Studies, 47*, 318–330.
- Reeder, H. (1996b). *What Harry and Sally didn’t tell you: The subjective perspective of heterosexual cross-sex friendship*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University.
- Reeder, H. (2000). “I like you . . . as a friend”: The role of attraction in cross-sex friendship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 7*, 329–348.
- Reis, H. T. (1988). Gender effects in social participation: Intimacy, loneliness, and the conduct of social interaction. In R. Gilmour & S. Duck (Eds.), *The emerging field of personal relationships* (pp. 91–105). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Reis, H. T., Senchak, M., & Solomon, B. (1985). Sex differences in the intimacy of social interaction: Further examination of potential explanations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 48*, 1204–1217.
- Reisman, J. (1990). Intimacy in same-sex friendships. *Sex Roles, 23*, 65–82.
- Rose, S. (1985). Same- and cross-sex friendships and the psychology of homosociality. *Sex Roles, 12*, 63–74.
- Rubin, L. (1985). *Just friends*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Sapadin, L. (1988). Friendships and gender: Perspectives of professional men and women. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 5*, 387–403.
- Sharabany, R., Gershoni, R., & Hofman, J. E. (1981). Girlfriend, boyfriend: Age and sex differences in intimate friendships. *Developmental Psychology, 17*, 800–808.
- Smith, A. B., & Inder, P. M. (1990). The relationship of classroom organization to cross-age and cross-sex friendships. *Educational Psychology, 10*, 127–140.
- Stokes, J., Childs, L., & Fuehrer, A. (1981). Gender and sex roles as predictors of self-disclosure. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 28*, 510–514.
- Swain, S. O. (1992). Men’s friendships with women: Intimacy, sexual boundaries, and the informant role. In P. M. Nardi (Ed.), *Men’s friendships* (pp. 153–171). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Werking, K. (1997). *We’re just good friends*. New York: Guilford.
- Wheeler, L., Reis, H. T., & Nezlek, J. (1983). Loneliness, social interaction, and sex roles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45*, 943–953.
- Wheless, V. E., & Dierks-Stewart, K. (1981). The psychometric properties of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory: Questions concerning reliability and validity. *Communication Quarterly, 29*, 173–186.
- Wright, P. H. (1988). Interpreting research on gender differences in friendship: A case for moderation and a plea for caution. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 5*, 367–373.
- Wright, P. H., & Scanlon, M. B. (1991). Gender role orientations and friendship: Some attenuation, but gender differences abound. *Sex Roles, 24*, 551–566.