

## Same- and Cross-Sex Friendships and the Psychology of Homosociality<sup>1</sup>

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*The present study investigated the homosocial preferences and the functions, formation, and maintenance characteristics of same- and cross-sex friendships for a sample of 90 young adults, ages 20 to 28 years. Single women and married participants of both sexes evidenced a definite preference for same-sex friendships. The expectations associated with same-sex friendship functioning were found to be similar for both sexes. Cross-sex friendships were reported by both women and men as providing less help and loyalty than same-sex relationships. Otherwise, cross-sex friendship functioning was described by men as closely resembling same-sex friendships, but women reported cross-sex relations as providing less acceptance, less intimacy, and more companionship than same-sex ones. Friendship formation and maintenance for same- and cross-sex friendships were also found to differ significantly. The results are discussed in terms of Lipman-Blumen's [In M. Blaxall & B. Reagan (Eds.), Women and the workplace. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976, pp. 15-32] theory of homosociality.*

The homosocial norm refers to the seeking, enjoyment, and/or preference for the company of the same sex that prevails societally. From a sociological perspective, this norm is viewed as a factor in the institutionalization of a sex-linked system of power and resource distribution. Both occupational sex segregation and the low status of women in predominantly

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male professions have been attributed, in part, to a cultural norm of homosociality (e.g., Reagan & Blaxall, 1976; Epstein, 1971; Lipman-Blumen, 1976). However, this study examines another consequence of the homosocial norm: its effect at an interpersonal level on the functioning and development of same- and cross-sex friendships.

Homosociality and its impact on social institutions and interpersonal relations have been explained by Lipman-Blumen (1976) using an analysis of the distribution of resources. According to her homosocial theory of sex roles, two factors contribute to the development of the homosocial norm: (a) the encouragement of homosocial behavior from early childhood on, particularly in males; and (b) the societal valuation of males over females. Both factors operate to stratify women and men in such a way that men have almost exclusive access to the range of resources available within society, whereas women are stratified into lower-status roles and occupations and control few resources. Stratification, in turn, perpetuates the homosocial norm. Because men control economic, political, educational, occupational, legal, and social resources, they have more to offer each other in same-sex relationships than women can offer to men or to each other. Consequently, men are likely to be more homosocial than women, that is, attracted to, stimulated by, and interested in other men. Since the only need that men cannot fulfill for each other is paternity, they typically will initiate cross-sex relationships for sexual purposes primarily (Lipman-Blumen, 1976).

While a power/resource analysis such as Lipman-Blumen's is a useful way of explaining homosociality, an examination of the functioning of same- and cross-sex friendship at an interpersonal level could also provide some insight into the psychology of homosocial behavior. For instance, differing socialization patterns for women and men might operate independently from differential access to resources to perpetuate homosociality. Due to the encouragement of same-sex interactions among children, same-sex friendships may come to constitute a prototype for friendship by middle childhood or adolescence which is used to evaluate cross-sex interactions. If so, sex differences in same-sex friendship norms may be related to areas of conflict, dissatisfaction, or misunderstanding in cross-sex friendships. For example, women's expectancies for intimacy may be a source of dissatisfaction for them in cross-sex interactions, if these expectancies are not shared by men. Thus, an understanding of same-sex friendships could be useful in explaining the dynamics of cross-sex relationships.

Several consistent sex differences in young adults' friendships have been identified by previous research, but their relationship to the homosocial norm and their impact on cross-sex friendship functioning have not been explored fully. For example, in comparison with women, men

expect less reciprocity (Weiss & Lowenthal, 1977) and have less intimate friendships (Bell, 1981, Caldwell & Peplau, 1982, Fischer & Narus, 1981; Hacker, 1981). In addition, both women and men have been found to have more same-sex friendships than cross-sex ones (Booth & Hess, 1974), to prefer same-sex close friendships over cross-sex relationships (Larwood & Wood, 1977), and to regard same-sex friendships as close to "ideal" (Marks & Giordano, Note 1).

Marital status, as well as sex, may affect friendship. For instance, cross-sex friendships may be met with more social disapproval for married individuals than for single ones (Hess, 1972). Furthermore, since spousal relationships among the middle class are expected to serve as primary "best" friendships for both sexes (Komarovsky, 1967; Lopata, 1971), married individuals may be less motivated than single people to establish close friendships outside their marriage.

Thus, sex differences in friendship expectations and marital status both may be related to homosocial preferences and standards for heterosocial relations.

The goal of the present study was to discovery whether or not there are sex differences in friendship expectations which could help to explain homosociality. Therefore, one objective was to assess the extent of young adults' homosocial preferences. It was hypothesized that young adults would demonstrate a strong preference for same-sex relationships and that this preference would be even more pronounced for married adults than for single ones. A second objective was to explore similarities and differences in women's and men's perceptions of close same- and cross-sex friendships with respect to (a) friendship functioning, (b) the establishment of close friendships, and (c) the maintenance of these relationships.

## METHOD

### Subjects

Subjects for the study were University of Pittsburgh undergraduate juniors and seniors and college graduates from the Pittsburgh area who volunteered to participate in a study on friendship. Thirty subjects were single undergraduate students, 18 to 22 years of age ( $M = 22.2$ ); 30 were single college graduates, ages 22 to 28 years ( $M = 25.2$ ); and 30 were married, nonparent college graduates ranging in age from 22 to 28 years ( $M = 25.1$ ). Females and males were represented equally in each group. All respondents were white and from middle-class backgrounds.

## Procedure

Participants were interviewed individually. Each was asked to complete a form identifying their close same- and cross-sex friends. Respondents were asked two open-ended questions concerning the functions of those friendships: What do you and your close same-sex friends do for and with one another? and What do you and your close cross-sex friends do for and with one another? Participants were also asked to describe how they established and maintained both types of friendships. The questions were part of a lengthier Friendship Questionnaire developed and administered by Rose (Note 2). The interviewer specified that friendships with spouses or lovers were to be excluded from their answers concerning friendship functioning. Audiocassette recordings were made of subjects' responses; these recordings were then transcribed.

## Coding Categories

Using Livesley and Bromley's (1973) procedure, subject's responses to each question were regarded as a series of "statements." The percentage of agreement between two raters for differentiation of subjects' responses into statements for 30 protocols was 99%.

Each statement was then classified according to a coding system developed by Rose (Note 2). The coding categories for responses to the Function questions were Acceptance, Help, Loyalty, Availability, Recognition, Intimacy, Companionship, and None. Nine categories were used to classify responses to the Formation and Maintenance questions: Proximity, Acceptance, Effort, Time, Communication, Common Interests, Affection, Sexual Attraction, and No Strategy. Definitions and examples of each category are presented in Table I. The reliability of the coding of statements between two independent judges was 88%.

Due to the variability in length of subjects' responses to questions (ranging from 1 to 26 statements), proportion scores were selected as the unit of analysis rather than frequency scores. Proportion scores prevented verbose subjects' responses from being weighted more heavily in the analyses. The number of statements classified in each category was calculated as a proportion of each participant's total number of responses to that question. These mean percentage scores were used as the dependent measure.

## RESULTS

The proportion scores were analyzed using a repeated-measure analysis of variance conducted separately on the score for each function, formation,

Table 1. Friendship Function, Formation, and Maintenance Coding Categories

Coding category	Definition	Example
A. Function		
1. Acceptance	Provision of approval, understanding, or love	Close friends are tolerant of your views and mistakes.
2. Help	Offers of advice, assistance, or encouragement	They help when you're having a problem.
3. Loyalty	Pledge of self to the friendship, demonstrated through one's loyalty and commitment	They stick up for you.
4. Availability	Reference to the friend's availability	They are always around.
5. Recognition	Affirmation of one's self, personality, values, or abilities	Close friends build up your ego.
6. Intimacy	Provision of opportunities to disclose one's most personal feelings	You can tell them your strengths and weaknesses.
7. Companionship	Act as a companion, accompany, entertain, stimulate	Close friends include you in activities.
8. None	The friendships were described as not fulfilling any function.	Men aren't good at anything I consider important in a close friendship.
B. Formation and maintenance		
1. Proximity	Physical proximity	You have to be neighbors or work together.
2. Acceptance	Demonstration of concern or approval	She has to show concern and tolerance for me.
3. Effort	Evidence or willingness to make sacrifices for the friend	You have to be willing to make the friendship a priority in your life.
4. Time	Frequency or length of contact	I have to know a man for 1 or 2 years before I can become close friends with him.
5. Communication	Sharing of ideas and feelings	By letting them know what's on your mind.
6. Common interests	Participation in common activities	Close male friends have to have an interest in sports.
7. Affection	Initiation of affection or interaction	I try to be affectionate.
8. Sexual attraction	Past or potential sexual interest	With women, old lovers become friends.
9. No formation or maintenance	Unwillingness or lack of interest in forming or maintaining a friendship	I never try to form a friendship with a woman.

and maintenance category. The independent variables were life stage (single undergraduate, single graduate, or married graduate) and sex of participant (female or male); the repeated measure was type of friendship (same or cross sex).

### Homosocial Preferences

Same-sex friendships were clearly preferred by many participants, especially women. Sixty percent of the women and 33% of the men reported being more interested in having a close same-sex friend than a cross-sex one. The preference for same-sex friendships was particularly strong among married participants compared to single ones [ $X^2(3) = 10.33, p < .001$ ], with 47% of married women and 33% of married men reporting that they had no cross-sex friendships other than their spouse. In contrast, all of the undergraduates, all of the single graduate men, and 73% of the single graduate women reported having at least one close cross-sex friendship outside of their romantic love relationships with opposite-sex partners.

### Functions

Analysis of participants' responses to friendship function questions revealed no significant main effects for sex of participants or life stage. As predicted, type of friendship did affect several aspects of friendship functioning. A significant main effect of type of friendship [ $F(1, 84) = 14.31, p < .001$ ] was indicated for the category Help. Help was mentioned more often as characterizing same-sex relationships ( $M = 31.6$ ) than cross-sex ones ( $M = 18.6$ ). Type of friendship  $\times$  sex of participant interactions were found to be significant for the function categories Acceptance, Loyalty, Intimacy, and Companionship. (See Table II.) Contrary to expectation, the functions associated with same-sex friendships did not differ for men and women with the exception of loyalty. Women expected more loyalty in same-sex friendship than men. Otherwise, both sexes reported acceptance, help, intimacy, and companionship to be the functions most often fulfilled by same-sex relationships. In terms of cross-sex friendships, however, men reported receiving more acceptance and intimacy and less companionship than women.

Type of friendship also interacted significantly with life stage for the categories Intimacy [ $F(2, 84) = 4.11, p < .05$ ] and None ( $F(2, 84) = 9.37, p < .001$ ). The undergraduates, single graduates, and married graduate groups cited intimacy as a function of same-sex friendship at about the same rate ( $M = 18.3, 14.4, \text{ and } 18.5$ , respectively). However, when

**Table II.** Function Scores for Type of Friendship  $\times$  Sex of Respondent Interaction

Function	Type of friendship				Interaction	
	Same sex		Cross sex			
	Females	Males	Females	Males	$F(1, 84)$	$p$
Acceptance	16.7	11.0	5.4	15.7	9.23	.005
Loyalty	5.2	1.9	.6	.8	4.85	.05
Help	29.2	34.0	17.3	19.9	<1	NS
Availability	9.1	7.5	3.0	8.2	3.06	NS
Recognition	4.0	5.2	3.1	2.3	<1	NS
Intimacy	18.0	16.1	8.0	22.6	7.12	.01
Companionship	17.8	24.3	39.3	16.9	13.10	.001
None	0.0	0.0	23.3	13.6	1.90	NS

describing cross-sex friendships, single graduates ( $M = 24.8$ ) significantly more often mentioned intimacy as a function than did undergraduate ( $M = 11.1$ ) or married graduates ( $M = 9.8$ ). In terms of the category None, undergraduates and married graduates were more likely to describe cross-sex friendships as not fulfilling any function than were single graduates ( $M = 33.3, 40.0,$  and  $11.7,$  respectively), whereas all participants said that same-sex friendships fulfilled at least one function.

### Formation

No main effects for sex of participant or life stage were indicated by the analyses of participants' scores for friendship formation categories. However, a significant type of friendship main effect was found for seven of the nine formation category analyses. (See Table III). The initiation of same-sex friendship was significantly more often characterized as involving Proximity, Acceptance, Common Interests, and Affection than were

**Table III.** Friendship Formation: Mean Percentage Scores by Category for Type of Friendship Main Effects

Formation category	Type of friendship		$F(1, 84)$	$p$
	Same sex	Cross sex		
Proximity	3.7	1.4	6.25	.05
Acceptance	17.1	3.5	49.64	.001
Effort	5.0	.8	19.01	.05
Time	11.0	16.1	4.00	.05
Communication	25.4	5.0	131.05	.001
Common interests	10.3	4.1	63.90	.001
Affection	27.3	5.2	114.83	.001
Sexual Attraction	0.0	30.4	132.85	.001
No formation	.2	33.5	126.93	.001

cross-sex relationships. On the other hand, Time and Sexual Attraction were significantly more often viewed as ways of forming cross-sex friendships. In addition, compared to descriptions of same-sex relationships, participants were significantly more likely to report that they had No Strategy for forming cross-sex friendships.

Significant type of friendship X life stage interaction effects were found for the formation categories Effort [ $F(2, 84) = 3.72, p < .05$ ] and Communication [ $F(2, 84) = 3.16, p < .05$ ]. Married graduate participants cited effort more often as a way to initiate same-sex friendships ( $M = 7.6$ ) than cross-sex ones ( $M = 0$ ), while undergraduates and single graduates mentioned it as a formation strategy about as often for same-sex ( $M = 3.5$  and  $3.8$ , respectively) as for cross-sex friendships ( $M = 1.4$  and  $2.6$ , respectively).

In terms of communication, undergraduates ( $M = 27.0$ ) and married graduates ( $M = 28.6$ ) mentioned sharing of ideas and feelings as a way of forming same-sex friendships significantly more often than single graduates ( $M = 20.4$ ). Cross-sex friendships, on the other hand, were seldom described as requiring communication during the formation stage ( $M = 6.9, 5.3,$  and  $2.6$  for undergraduates, single graduates, and married graduates, respectively).

### Maintenance

No main effects for sex or life stage were found for maintenance responses. Significant type of friendship main effects for the categories Acceptance, Effort, Communication, and Common Interests (see Table IV) indicated that same-sex friendship maintenance was characterized

**Table IV.** Friendship Maintenance: Mean Percentage Scores by Category for Type of Friendship Main Effects

Maintenance category	Type of friendship		$F(1, 84)$	$p$
	Same sex	Cross sex		
Proximity	1.5	.9	1	NS
Acceptance	17.9	12.8	6.00	.05
Effort	8.7	4.4	7.85	.01
Time	19.4	14.1	5.46	.05
Communication	20.5	8.8	4.78	.05
Common interests	9.0	.5	44.88	.001
Affection	19.3	23.5	5.26	.05
Sexual Attraction	0.0	3.4	3.00	NS
No maintenance	3.7	31.6	49.43	.001



significantly more often as involving acceptance, effort, communication, and common interests than was cross-sex friendship.

The type of friendship X sex of participant interaction for the maintenance category Time [ $F(1, 84) = 5.87, p < .05$ ] and No Maintenance [ $F(1, 84) = 8.98, p < .005$ ] were significant. When describing cross-sex friends, women ( $M = 8.2$ ) were significantly less likely than men ( $M = 19.9$ ) to cite time as a factor in friendship maintenance, although time was mentioned equally by women ( $M = 19.0$ ) and men ( $M = 19.7$ ) when discussing how same-sex relationships survive. In terms of No Maintenance, while almost all participants had some strategy for maintaining same-sex friendships, women ( $M = 44.5$ ) significantly more often than men ( $M = 18.6$ ) reported having no strategy for maintaining cross-sex relationships.

A significant type of friendship X life stage interaction [ $F(2, 84) = 6.70, p < .005$ ] was also revealed for the category Time. Tukey's comparisons ( $p = .05$ ) indicated that undergraduates and single graduates more often mentioned spending time together as a way of maintaining same-sex friendships than did married graduates ( $M = 16.9, 19.6, \text{ and } 5.7$ , respectively), whereas time was cited at about the same frequency by married graduates ( $M = 20.0$ ), undergraduates ( $M = 24.3$ ), and single graduates ( $M = 13.6$ ) as a way of maintaining cross-sex friendships.

A sex X life stage interaction [ $F(2, 84) = 4.62, p < .05$ ] was indicated for the category Common Interests. Undergraduate male, compared with female, subjects more frequently cited the continuation of common interests as necessary for friendship maintenance ( $M = 7.4$  and  $1.7$ , respectively). Among single and married graduates, however, common interests were mentioned more often by women ( $M = 7.3$  and  $5.7$ , respectively) than by men ( $M = 4.0$  and  $2.6$ , respectively).

## DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that young adults would demonstrate a strong preference for same-sex relationships was only partially supported by these results. Contrary to Lipman-Blumen's (1967) contention that males are more homosocial than females, a homosocial norm of close friendships was more characteristic of women in this sample than of men, with a majority of women and only about half as many men preferring same-sex friendships to cross-sex ones. An examination of the reported friendship functions provides some insight into this unexpected finding. Even though both sexes reported acceptance, loyalty, help, intimacy, and companionship most frequently to be the functions of same-sex friendship, only men reported having the acceptance, intimacy, and companionship functions fulfilled to

the same extent by cross-sex friendships. This suggests that women may be experiencing "social deprivation" in cross-sex relationships, as Bernard (1976) hypothesized. Women's expectations for friendship do not seem to be fulfilled to the same extent by men friends as by women friends.

The fact that no significant sex differences in same-sex friendship functioning were found argues against the theory that the sexes are socialized differently with regard to what is appropriate friendship behavior. Rather it appears that for some reason, men do not act as friends toward women in the same way they do toward men. A power/resource analysis seems to more easily explain this finding. Perhaps the greater valuation of males and the status associated with their companionship mean that women will tolerate less acceptance and intimacy from men friends in return for the increased status they might acquire by having male friends. Men, in turn, can safely offer women less than they might men.

Some support for this interpretation is provided by the results. Women in this sample more often reported their cross-sex friendships as providing more companionship than their same-sex ones. It may be that the companionship function includes a status aspect of friendship functioning that was not elicited by this particular questionnaire. In the present study, participants did not spontaneously mention status as a function of their friendships. However status, defined as the conveyance or prestige or esteem provided by a friend, has been deemed an important function of friendship by other investigators (Candy et al., 1981; Foa, 1971; Weiss & Lowenthal, 1977). Candy et al. (1981), in a study of the friendship function of women between 14 and 60 and over years of age, found that women in their twenties chose their friends more for status reasons than did women in their thirties, forties, and fifties. Thus, it seems reasonable to speculate that women may acquire status by having males as companions, and this may compensate for the lack of intimacy and acceptance in these relationships.

Sex similarities in same-sex friendship formation and maintenance were again the rule, as for functions. Both women and men agreed that proximity, acceptance, effort, communication, common interests, and affection were important means of establishing same-sex friendships. Maintaining same-sex relationships was described similarly by both sexes as requiring acceptance, effort, time, communication, common interests, and affection. However, cross-sex friendship initiation was more frequently described as involving time or sexual attraction, and both cross-sex friendship formation and cross-sex friendship maintenance differed significantly from same sex in terms of participants' high rate of statements concerning their unwillingness, lack of interest, or difficulty in forming and maintaining cross-sex relationships.

Women did not seem to be motivated by sexual attraction to establish cross-sex relationships, whereas men did. Consistent with Lipman-Blumen's (1976) hypothesis that relationships between women and men are initiated due to a sexual interest on the man's part, male participants often stated that their interest in cross-sex friendships was sexually motivated. Women reported their own motives for cross-sex friendships as being platonic but agreed with men that men's motives for establishing opposite-sex friendships were for the most part sexual. Women also frequently stated that their belief that men's motives were sexual made them mistrustful of male friendship overtures and unwilling to establish friendships with men.

As suggested by Hess (1972), being married seemed to inhibit the development of cross-sex friendships. One-third of the married men and almost half of the married women had no best cross-sex friend other than their spouse. In comparison, only one-third of the single graduate women and none of the single graduate men or undergraduates reported not having any best cross-sex friends. This finding indicates that marital status more than age has an impact on cross-sex friendships for young adults, as the married participants were less likely to have cross-sex friends than were their single age mates. Married participants also more often reported intimacy as a function of their same-sex than cross-sex friendships.

In summary, homosocial preferences were found to be prevalent among young adults but not to the extent hypothesized. Being married affected friendship choices significantly; same-sex relationships were regarded as more desirable among married participants. There was some indication that age might be associated with increased homosocial choices, at least for women. Single graduate women preferred same-sex friendships more so than single undergraduate women, though this difference was not significant. Thus, there is some indication that the homosocial norm might become stronger during other life stages, particularly for women. This remains to be investigated, however.

Sex similarities in same-sex close friendship functioning, formation, and maintenance predominated in participants' descriptions of friendship. In addition, men's same- and cross-sex friendship functioning did not differ significantly, perhaps explaining why they were less homosocial in their friendship choices. Women's friendships with men seemed to provide them with fewer acceptance and intimacy functions than same-sex friendships, which may be why women were more homosocial. Cross-sex friendships were also reported by both sexes as being formed and maintained in a different manner from same-sex friendships.

The present data suggest that men, somewhat more so than women, have different standards for cross-sex friendships than for same-sex ones.

At least in part, women's homosocial choices appear to be a response to this double standard. When cross-sex friendships among young adults did occur, they were more likely to be based on complementary reciprocity (e.g., the exchange of acceptance for companionship) rather than "in-kind" reciprocity (e.g., the mutual exchange of acceptance), typical of same-sex friendships. In trying to determine what factors might encourage cross-sex friendships, future research should focus on what characteristics of the individual and environment either lead to the development of a single standard of friendship for men or facilitate women's acceptance of separate standards.

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