

Same-sex and cross-sex friendships



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" Friends. How many of us have them? Friends. Ones that we can depend on." This question about friendships was asked in the 1984 song " Friends" by Whodini. Humans have the need for social interaction and one of the ways that human beings fill this need is by forming friendships. From an early age, we form bonds with our peers. Initially these bonds start as surface friendships in childhood and as people grow older, the friendships they have take on a more profound meaning. Many different kinds of friendships can be found depicted in the media. From television shows like " Friends", " Girlfriends", and " Seinfeld" to movies that depict the ups and downs of friendships.

People typically have more same-sex than cross-sex friendships (Booth & Hess 1974; Ross, 1985). In this paper, I will discuss the differences and similarities of female-female and male-male friendships and use examples from two movies to show how the values and characteristics of these friendships differ and are alike. I will also be discussing cross-sex friendships (CSFs). There hasn't been as much research or theory on cross-sex friendships because for a long time, theorists and researchers viewed cross-sex friendships as potential romantic relationships (Bleske-Recheck & Buss, 2001). This view has changed and there is now emerging research and study of difficulties and advantage of having and maintaining cross-sex friendships. I will also be discussing a movie that demonstrates the positive and negative features of cross-sex friendships.

Male-Male Friendships

Although there has been a rising popularity of depicting " bromances" (a term used to describe close male friendships) in the media, Traustadottir found that " research has found that males have significantly fewer friends than women, especially close friendships or best friends." (2008 p. 1) There are three main barriers that have been attributed to the lack of close friendships in men; competition between men, traditional masculine stereotypes about " real men", and fear of homosexuality (Fasteau, 1991; McGill, 1985; Miller, 1983).

The movie *The Wood*, is about three male friends from Inglewood, California who have grown apart and reunite back in their hometown during one of their weddings. The movie shows present-day and also flashback scenes to their childhood to show how their friendship developed. One of the flashback scenes gives an example of the three barriers attributed to lack of closeness. The three main characters; Mike, Roland, and Slim in a pizza parlor discussing how their luck with the women is going during their junior year of high school. All three are talking about their frustration at still being virgins as sophomores (traditional masculine stereotypes), they begin to argue about who will lose their virginity first (fear of homosexuality) and decide to make it a competition by making a " pot". Every week, they add a dollar to the pot and whoever loses their virginity first will receive the money (competition).

Male friendships tend to emphasize activities and companionship and expressions of closeness felt between friends comes in the form of friendly teasing. Although male friendships are formed and maintained in ways that differ from female friendships, there are still some similarities that can be

seen. Male friendships provide a release of stress and reduce depression in the same manner that women friendships do.

Female-Female Friendships

The differences in female friendships and male friendships is not in what is strived for in their close relationships i. e. intimacy, empathy, and trust; but in the means in which their friendship goals are accomplished. Women are naturally more apt to show emotions and this translates into the friendships they form as well.

Traustadottir (2009) examination of female friendships found:

Women typically describe their friendships in terms of closeness and emotional

attachment. What characterizes friendships between women is the willingness to

share important feelings, thoughts, experiences, and support. Women devote a good

deal of time and intensity of involvement to friends. (p. 1)

Women are more open with affection and more likely to sincerely complimenting each other. While men use communication to accomplish things, communication is seen as a way to build and maintain intimacy and closeness in female friendships. This is why women are more likely to discuss personal thoughts, feelings, and problems with their friends (Greif 2009). In a survey done by Greif (2009) 71% of women stated that being understood

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(communication, sharing, caring, not being judged, and receiving feedback) to describe what friendship means. Only 51% of men surveyed answered the same. Demonstrating friendships with concrete acts (example. helping move, giving loan) was a choice that men responded to in the survey was not shown on the women's responses.

In the movie, *Waiting To Exhale*, it depicts four female friends providing support and advice to each other through their dealing with men, families, and careers. This movie shows how female relationships are built on communication and emotional intimacy.

Cross-Sex Friendships

Because male and female same-sex friendships have different characteristics, it has been speculated that men and women cannot become and maintain strictly platonic friendships. Although much more difficult, successful cross-sex relationships are possible. There are at least four unique challenges facing individuals in cross-sex relationships: defining the relationship, managing sexual attraction, establishing equality, and managing interference of others (O'Meara, 1989).

The movie *Brown Sugar* is the story of two friends Dre and Sidney that met as children and have maintained their cross-sex friendship throughout their adulthood. In the movie, Dre starts dating a woman and they become engaged. This sparks questions and thoughts about Sidney and Dre's own friendship and if there was any romantic feelings between them. One scene in the movie after Dre has become engaged, shows Sidney prepping and beautifying herself when Dre calls to say he's coming to visit. As she looks at <https://assignbuster.com/same-sex-and-cross-sex-friendships/>

herself in the mirror and fixes her hair and make-up, she pauses and asks herself " What am I doing? It's just him." This scene shows how managing sexual attraction and clearly defining the relationship are concerns that come up even in long-term cross-sex friendships.

Although difficult, there are benefits from cross-sex friendships that cannot be seen in same-sex friendships. Those benefits include, an increase of the understanding about beliefs and values of the other sex (Canary, Emmers-Sommers, & Faulkner, 1997), verifying out attractiveness to the other sex (Rubin, 1985), protection, short-term sexual opportunities, self-expression, and intimacy (Bleske-Rechek and Buss 2000).

Conclusion

Developing and maintaining friendships is key in developing interpersonal skills. Although some friendships may be more easy to maintain than others, there are benefits to all types friendships and they are attainable if the parties involved value the relationship enough to put in the hard work and effort.

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