

YOU'VE GOT TO HAVE FRIENDS

[Gay/straight friendship] makes the straight person, I think, more of a whole person. Straight people can so easily, because they comprise 80–90 percent of the population, just erase the gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender people out of their lives, it's not easy, but they could do it—I'm not breaking my own arm patting myself on the back, it's just that for a straight person to accept, it forces you to become more open and if you become more open, you become, to me, a more human person.

—Bob, a sixty-four-year-old straight white man

FRANK AND REBECCA

Frank and Rebecca's friendship began inauspiciously when they were quite young. Frank explained:

When we were four years old, my sister was taking piano lessons [in the home of] one of our neighbors. We lived in a town of probably 300 people . . . at the time. So we were all neighbors, but it was the other side of town, and we'd gone over there for my sister's piano lessons. I, of course, got bored and went outside to play. It was wintertime; there were mud puddles, so I was out playing in mud puddles, and I suddenly got a swift kick in the ass and went head first into the mud puddle. When I turned around, that's when I met her. I said, "You got me all wet," and she said, "Uh-huh. Wanna come over and play on my slide?" And I said, "Uh-huh."

Since they lived in a small town, Frank and Rebecca were in all of the same classes in elementary school and spent afternoons and summer days together catching lizards and playing in creek beds. Rebecca seemed to need an alliance with Frank. She was the only child who was not white in her small town (she is half-Japanese) and endured a difficult home life. Time spent with Frank was an escape. While the children built a strong friendship, it also was a bond of intense competition. Frank and Rebecca tried to outdo each other in earning

grades and academic accomplishments as children. Teachers separated them in junior high because they were so competitive with each other.

In high school, the friends ran in different social circles. Rebecca partly attributes their relative distance in high school to the fact that Frank disliked her boyfriend. Rebecca and Frank remember the details of his coming out as gay to her very differently. Rebecca noted that she was not surprised to learn the news, but Frank has an entirely different memory of the conversation. Frank remembers that Rebecca was very angry with him when she found out he was gay and that she was not the first person he had told. Rebecca noted that she and Frank often remember details from their past differently. Both recalled a night when they discussed whether or not they should have sex and try to be in a relationship together—this was before Frank had come out as gay. As children, they had pretended to have weddings, and many of the adults in their small town had assumed they would marry at some point because of their strong bond. They decided that having sex would be too weird to deal with afterward and decided against it. Frank acknowledges that his friendship with Rebecca confirmed for him that he is gay:

My friendship with Rebecca has pretty much convinced me of my sexual orientation because of the fact that, you know, by typical standards, she's a freakin' babe, she's so hot, and I've never had the hots for her, and that more than anything has helped to convince me that, oh, yeah, I really am gay.

Frank and Rebecca are now in their mid-thirties and live several hundred miles away from each other but talk on the phone once a week. Rebecca is married, and her husband and Frank get along very well; this encouraged the longtime friends to commit to seeing each other more regularly. Recently, Frank traveled with Rebecca and her husband on a ski trip to Tahoe, and they were planning a mountain biking trip in the winter. Rebecca and Frank still talk to each other when they are making big life decisions; Frank stated that he would not have bought his house without Rebecca's encouragement, and Rebecca said that when she needs to talk to someone about important issues, Frank is the person she calls.

FRIENDSHIP FULFILLS many roles in our lives. Friendship satisfies a desire for affiliation with those who are like us in some ways but unlike us in others. Not only do friends provide feelings of belonging; they also enhance our sense of self. A friendship bond brings meaning to an individual's life and increases feelings of happiness (Bersheid et al. 1989; Fehr 1996; Larson and Bradney 1988), but often its significance is overshadowed by the intensity of familial or romantic relationships, which come with higher cultural expectations and obligations (Felmlee and Sprecher 2000; Rubin 1985). Friendship provides emo-

tional benefits but can also lead to emotional pain, rejection, and annoyance (Duck and Wood 1995). Cited as bringing both joy and conflict to our lives (Argyle 1987; Duck and Wright 1993; Rose and Serafica 1986), friendship is one of the most significant, yet socially ignored, relationships.

Intersectional friendships face novel challenges compared with traditional within-group bonds. These dyadic friendships resist homosexual ghettoization, in which gay men and lesbians become socially segregated in their own communities in reaction to societal heterosexism and homophobia. Friendships between gay men and straight women and between lesbians and straight men enter uncharted relational territory by successfully (and voluntarily) uniting in the face of both homosexual segregation and the belief that friendships between men and women will always result in romance.¹ Thus, intersectional friendships can provide an alternative model for male–female interaction. In so doing, the intersectional dyads create a unique friendship form that may allow expressions of atypical gender behavior and yet also abide by traditional gendered norms in terms of the activities performed in the dyads. In this chapter, I provide a foundation for the rest of the book by examining the prior research, both empirical and theoretical, that helps us to better understand intersectional friendships. The chapter provides an overview of the roles that friendships play in our everyday lives, starting with how we build friendships and common characteristics of friendships, according to the existing body of research. I also address the qualities of various friendship compositions. I start by discussing what we currently know about intersectional friendships between gay men and straight women and between lesbians and straight men, then move on to address friendships between and among gay men and straight women, as well as same- and cross-sex friendships for gay men, lesbians, and heterosexuals. The chapter concludes by highlighting the various theoretical perspectives that inform this study.

THE ROLES OF FRIENDSHIP IN OUR LIVES

People desire connection to others. According to Baumeister's and Leary's (1995) discussion of the belongingness hypothesis, humans have a desire to form and maintain a minimum quantity of positive, significant relationships. The desire to belong consists of frequent and emotionally pleasant interactions, combined with the stability of such relationships over time (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Friendships are significant bonds that provide many benefits. Friends meet material, cognitive, and social-emotional needs, such as provid-

ing love and esteem (Solano 1986), and create a bond where individuals may self-disclose and share activities (Adams, Blieszner, and de Vries 2000). Another benefit of friendship is the pleasure of companionship: people say they are happier when they are with friends than when they are alone or with family members (Larson and Bradney 1988). Friendship ties may benefit individuals' overall health (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Myers 2000). Positive friendship ties are associated with lower mortality rates and a relatively long life (Rasulo, Christensen, and Tomassini 2005; Sabin 1993), as well as higher self-esteem and better overall mental health (Ueno 2005; Wright 1999).

Friendships are formed in a variety of manners and contexts. One element that influences friendship formation is similarity. We tend to form friendships with people who are similar to us with regard to demographic characteristics, social status, attitudes, and other factors, such as common interests and common educational levels (Brehm 1985; Verbrugge 1977; Weinstock 2000). In long-term friendships, a sense of shared history provides similarity, connection, and love (Shea, Thompson, and Blieszner 1988). Similarity alone is insufficient for the development of a significant friendship; another factor that promotes friendship formation is physical and geographical proximity, where people have regular exposure to each other (Fehr 2000; Hendrick 2003) as well as positive contact; the more positive interactions people have, the more they will like each other (Homans 1961). The principle of proximity explains how we form close bonds with those individuals who are roommates and neighbors. With changing technology, however, the issue of proximity has shifted so that people are now able to be in nearly constant communication with others, even when they are not in the same geographical location (McKenna, Green, and Gleason 2002; Morahan-Martin and Schumacher 2003). People stay in touch via email, text messaging, cell phones, and online videoconferencing and are likely to continue to do so as technology develops. As such, we expect that intimate friendships can thrive by putting effort into maintaining closeness and sense of involvement (Rubin 1985), despite a lack of physical or even geographical proximity.

Workplaces blend two of the necessary ingredients for friendship formation: proximity and similarity. Thus, it is not surprising that many friendships are formed on the job. According to Fine (1986: 190), in professional occupational settings, "the content of work affects friendships that are likely to develop, in part because of the people that an occupation attracts, and in part because of the nature of the work."² Workplace friendships typically reinforce

class similarity, as individuals are more likely to interact with those who share a workplace status than with those at different levels of professional achievement (Cohen 1992), although one study found that cross-orientation friendships commonly occurred in the workplace (Rumens 2008). Whether friendships are formed in the workplace or in childhood, they mold and reflect aspects of individuals' identities in relation to each other.

Bridging Friendships

While the tendency is toward friendship formation on the basis of similarity—also known as homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001)—a number of recent studies have focused on friendship between people across different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic categories. One study showed that between 1985 and 2004, those reporting someone of another race being a “confidant” rose from 9 percent to 15 percent (McPherson, Brashears, and Smith-Lovin 2006). Yet others found that interracial friendships remained the exception rather than the norm (Kao and Joyner 2004). Best friendships most frequently occur between people from the same racial and ethnic group; these individuals are more likely to participate in shared activities, which lead to greater emotional intimacy (Kao and Joyner 2004). Moreover, interracial friendships are less likely to be reciprocal than intra-racial friendships, meaning that they are less likely to be emotionally intimate (Vaquera and Kao 2008). Studies point to miscommunications, a perceived lack of self-disclosure, and a perceived lack of responsiveness across racial or ethnic group to negatively affect the development of intimacy in friendships (Shelton, Trail, West, and Bergsieker 2010; Trail, Shelton, and West 2009).

Some studies have theorized that adolescents' misconceptions about other races partly explain why interracial friendships are less common than same-race friendships (Fujino 1997; Kao and Joyner 2004). Even when racial barriers were broken in friendships, research showed they faced greater challenges than same-race friendships (Kao and Joyner 2004). Despite the challenges, interracial friendships provide valuable connections and have a strong effect on positive attitudes toward interracial marriage, an indicator that interracial friendship promotes greater racial equality (Johnson and Jacobson 2005) and may help lessen anxiety about intergroup interactions (Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, and Tropp 2008). A traditionally marginalized social status may affect the patterns of friendship formation. For instance, the social networks of sexual-minority adults reflect larger societal patterns of friendship in terms of race.

One study found that white lesbians and gay men report having more same-race friends than other-race friends, with lesbians of color reporting more cross-race friends than any other group (Galupo 2007b).

Friendships that bridge socioeconomic status also can have a positive social influence. Ties that cross social boundaries can reduce inequality by providing access to information, mentoring, and other forms of social capital, according to one study (de Souza Briggs 2007). Yet researchers also find that class status may be reproduced throughout the life cycle. Vaquera's and Kao's (2008) study of reciprocity in adolescent friendships found that children from more advantaged socioeconomic levels make friends more easily because they are perceived as being more socially desirable, a pattern that likely continues throughout the life course. Moreover, according to these findings, children with greater socioeconomic class advantage were more likely to have reciprocal, emotionally intimate friendships (Vaquera and Kao 2008). More generally, individuals are most likely to form friendships with people who share a common socioeconomic status because they value similar social exchanges and are more likely to interact with each other as peers (Jackson 1977).

When taken together, socioeconomic status and race affect rates of friendship across categories such that bridging friendships are more likely to occur when neighborhoods are integrated, when one's neighborhood of residence is in an urban area with a high degree of racial heterogeneity, and when one engages in a high frequency of socializing with co-workers (de Souza Briggs 2007). Studies of bridging friendships have provided evidence that affectionate ties across categories of difference, while less common than friendships between those from similar backgrounds, were beneficial in facilitating greater understanding across the racial (Johnson and Jacobson 2005), class (de Souza Briggs 2007), sex (Werking 1997), and sexual orientation categories (Tillmann-Healy 2001).

THE FRIEND RELATIONSHIP BY SEX AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

When people think of friendships, they generally envision male buddies or best female friends—in other words, a same-sex pairing that fits our dominant cultural image (Rubin 1985; Werking 1997). This normative assumption stems, at least in part, from patterns of gender socialization and norms of compulsory heterosexuality, which Rich (1980) describes as the dominant cultural expectation that women will be innately sexually attracted to men and that men will be

attracted to women. From early childhood, people are sex-segregated in play and activities, a practice that influences the friendship bonds they form with other children (Myers and Raymond 2010; Thorne 1986). Throughout the life cycle, men and women primarily maintain friendships with members of their own sex, even as boundaries between sexes have relaxed (Werking 1997). Other research shows that the majority of friendships are between people of similar sexual orientation (Galupo 2007b; Nardi 1999).

Same-Sex, Same-Orientation Friendships of Gay Men and Lesbians

Some argue that friendships generally play a more important role for gay men and lesbians than they do for straight people, especially those friendships between gay men and between lesbian women. Friendships may be especially important at midlife and beyond for lesbians and gay men (Grossman, D'Augelli, and Hershberger 2000; Quam and Whitford 1992); typically, friends provide more support for gay and lesbian individuals in need of caregiving compared with straight individuals (Dorfman, Walters, Burke, Hardin, Karanik, Raphael, and Silverstein 1995). Moreover, prior research finds that friendships are often the main source of support, affirmation, and love in the lives of gay men and lesbians (Stanley 1996), while straight individuals are assumed to have greater access to social support through normative family life (Nardi 1992).

A common theme in the literature about gay male and lesbian friendships is the chosen family connections that they embody (Nardi 1992; Weinstock 2000; Weston 1991); this may be particularly true for current cohorts of midlife and older lesbians and gay men who came of age in a more repressive social context (Weinstock 2000). The greater importance of friendship for gay men and lesbians in the current generation of older gay and lesbian adults, as compared with straight people, emerged from a greater need to form a supportive community of individuals to provide support and care in the wake of the heterosexism of larger society (Nardi 1999; Weston 1991).

The majority of gay men and lesbians form friendships based on similarity of sex, sexual orientation, and other demographic dimensions such as race, age, and socioeconomic status (Weinstock 2000). Similarities also exist between gay men's and lesbian women's friendship experiences and networks. Nardi and Sherrod (1994) compared gay men's same-sex friendships with lesbians' same-sex friendships and found many similarities in terms of satisfaction with the relationships and the high value placed on them. In their same-sex

friendships, gay men and lesbians were more likely than straight men and women to express gender-atypical behavior in terms of emotional and instrumental behavior (Nardi and Sherrod 1994). Thus, to some extent, some gender norms may be relaxed in same-sex gay men's and lesbians' friendships.

Same-sex, same-orientation friendships for gay men and lesbians not only provide a buffer against heterosexism (Kocet 2001); they also provide a link to gay and lesbian communities. In fact, some gay men identify their particular "gay" community as defined by their friendships (Woolwine 2000). Friendship, according to Nardi (1999: 13), represents "the central organizing element of gay men's lives—the mechanism through which gay neighborhoods get transformed, maintained, and reproduced." Social support is present in gay men's friendships, where friends assist with the coming-out process by providing a feeling of acceptance (Kocet 2001). The importance of friendship becomes especially tangible in later life, as older gay men and lesbians characterize themselves as encircled by friends and describe their friendship bonds in affective ways (e.g., "They are part of my inner landscape") (de Vries and Megathin 2009: 90). Gay men's and lesbian women's friendships are often described as a site of refuge and power building that also serves as a source of affiliation and a context for the reaffirmation of identity (Nardi 1999; Stanley 1996). Lesbian friends may serve as each other's role models in learning how to thrive as lesbians in a heterosexist and sexist society; through friendship, the traditions and norms of lesbian identity are learned and reproduced (Stanley 1996). Especially for lesbians, former partners play a complex yet central role, not only as friends, but also as extended family members and connections to the lesbian community (Weinstock 2004).

The same-sex friendships of gay men and lesbians encounter many benefits and challenges, according to prior research. Same-sex friendships of gay men and lesbians introduce a potential sexual tension that generally is not expected to be present in friendships between straight women or straight men or in gay and lesbian cross-sex friendships (Nardi 1999; Weinstock 2000). Prior research shows that, unlike other types of friendships, gay men's friendships may include a sexual component that serves as a way for both casual and close friendships to be formed (Nardi 1999). Rather than redefining these friendships as a different relational form, sexual friendships between gay men seem to be common, according to prior research (Nardi 1999). Young sexual-minority women may also have "passionate friendships," which include intense emo-

tional, sometimes romantic interactions that may or may not have a sexual component (Diamond 2002).

Intersectional Friendships

We know little about intersectional friendships—the friendships between gay men and straight women and between lesbians and straight men. The majority of existing scholarship about intersectional friendships—those that cross sex and sexual orientation categories—consists of personal accounts and theoretical analyses (e.g., de la Cruz and Dolby 2007; Hopke and Rafaty 1999; Maddison 2000; Moon 1995; Nestle and Preston 1995; Rafaty and Hopke 2001; Thompson 2004). One possible explanation for the lack of empirical work on this topic is that, despite the attention the media pays to friendships between gay men and straight women—such as *Will and Grace*, *My Best Friend's Wedding*, or even use of the term “fag hag”—scholars perceive these friendships to be uncommon. Although some studies claim that 50 percent of gay men reported having at least one close straight female friend (Rubin 1985), most research finds that gay men's and lesbians' closest social networks are composed of other gay men and lesbian women (Nardi 1999; Weinstock 1998). For example, Nardi (1999) discussed relationships between gay men and straight women in a larger examination of gay men's friendships and concluded that, although some very significant friendships exist between these individuals, the perceived commonality of gay man–straight woman reflects stereotype rather than reality.

It is interesting to imagine these friendships as uncommon, considering that most gay men and lesbian women have little choice but to interact with straight people because heterosexuality is the social norm and statistically, heterosexual people make up the majority of the population. In reality, their extensive, unavoidable interactions with straight co-workers, family members, classmates, neighbors, and community members lead gay men and lesbian women sometimes to forge significant, mutual bonds with straight individuals (Muraco 2006; Rumens 2008). Out of these connections intersectional friendships are born.

Given their connections to broader (heterosexual) society and greater social power, we may wonder what motivates straight people to form close relationships with gay men and lesbians. One motivation may be the benefits provided by intersectional friendships. For example, in one study straight women expressed feelings of enhanced attractiveness and self-esteem as a result of atten-

tion from their gay male friends (Bartlett, Patterson, VanderLaan, and Vasey 2009). Other possible motivations exist for straight individuals to form close friendships with gay men or lesbians, including the relaxing of gender norms and sexual expectations. Moreover, some research has concluded that straight women seek out the friendship of gay men to gain positive, validating male attention (Bartlett et al. 2009) that is free from sexual overtones (Grigoriou 2004). Others noted that friendships between gay men and straight women allow both parties to reject gender and sexuality norms if they choose to (Maddison 2000; Shepperd, Coyle, and Hegarty 2010), thus allowing individuals to express less traditional gendered behavior and identities. Tillmann-Healy (2001) provides an ethnographic study of the friendship connection between gay men and straight women and discusses how challenging her own heterosexist attitudes and immersing herself in a gay male context queered her perspective and thus allowed her greater freedom to enact more fluid identities.

Grigoriou (2004) reported that intersectional friendships help gay men to feel more “normal,” given the privilege and normative social context of heterosexuality. Accordingly, some gay men view straight women as serving as bridges between the gay and straight worlds (Grigoriou 2004). Gay men also stressed that their friendships with straight women provide a level of trust that they do not have in friendships with other gay men, due to the lack of competition and possibility for sexual contact in their relationships with straight female friends (Grigoriou 2004). Research also shows that intersectional friendships between gay men and straight women have political implications, where the friendships give gay men and straight women a space in which they can resist heterosexist and patriarchal power structures by rejecting gender and sexuality norms (Shepperd et al. 2010), even as they may not directly identify their friendships as political acts (Maddison 2000; Rumens 2008; Thompson 2004; Ward 2000).

An examination of workplace friendships between gay men and straight women by Rumens (2008) found that, in gendered work hierarchies, gay men are more comfortable confiding in straight women than in other men, which often leads to the development of close friendships. Both gay men and straight women in the study identified trust and closeness as being a specific quality they experience in their intersectional friendship (Rumens 2008). This is not to suggest that all intersectional interaction is supportive. Some gay men noted that within the workplace, they experienced homophobic comments from straight women, while some straight women took issue with sexist attitudes of

gay men (Rumens 2008). Moreover, Shepperd, Coyle, and Hegarty (2010) found that intersectional friends managed heterosexist norms in providing accounts of the friendships so that great emphasis was placed on constructing the friendship as non-sexual.

Friendships between lesbians and straight men may be the bond that has been most neglected in social research. I found only one case study that addressed a friendship between a lesbian woman and straight man as its focus. In part, the lack of research on the topic may stem from lesbian culture's focus on the romantic, committed partnership as the common organizing structure of relational life, particularly during midlife (Weinstock 2000). Another possibility is that lesbian women choose not to engage in bonds with people who represent heterosexist and sexist normative society, which is aligned with some forms of lesbian separatism that was most prominent in second-wave feminist thought (e.g., Frye 1983). Consistent with Weinstock's (2000) review of literature, the majority of research that examines lesbian friendship focuses on the roles of lesbian and straight women friends in supporting lesbians' psychosocial adjustment and well-being.

The single study about lesbian and straight male friends was an autobiographical account of this pair's friendship. The authors characterized their bond as "cerebral," with issues such as differing sexual orientations, politics, and the potential for sexual attraction having arisen as challenges to the friendship (Conner and Cohan 1996). Another study of lesbian family life by Goldberg and Allen (2007) hinted at the presence of male friends, particularly when discussing rearing male children. Of those lesbian women who identified male friends who they hoped would play a significant role in their children's lives, the most commonly named men were gay, husbands of straight female friends, or the sperm donors (Goldberg and Allen 2007). One additional study, Levitt's and Hiestand's (2004) article about lesbian gender identities, included a paragraph about friendships between lesbian women and straight men and characterized them as full of camaraderie and respect. The article also addressed how straight men sometimes talked about sexual topics with a lesbian friend, who became uncomfortable when she perceived the male friend as objectifying women and therefore forgetting she was a woman (Levitt and Hiestand 2004: 616). So little research exists on straight man–lesbian woman friendships that any suggestion of motivations are speculative, but straight men may seek out such friendships to have close interactions in which they do not feel normative gender pressure to enact masculinity.

Lesbian Woman–Gay Man Friendships

While lesbian women and gay men have in common a sexual-minority status and the oppression that comes with it, empirical studies of friendships between individuals from these groups are scarce. More common are reports that address one particular friendship dyad. Anderson (1998) provides a theological reflection on a friendship between a black gay man and a black lesbian, focusing on how their similar races and different religious orientations and sexes influenced their spiritual practices. Other studies identify gay men and lesbians as having individuals from the other respective group as part of their network of friends but do not explore the dynamics and processes within particular friendship pairings (see Goldberg and Allen 2007; Weston 1991).

Historically, lesbian women and gay men have allied to provide care and support, particularly during the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Barker, Herdt, and de Vries 2006; Schneider 1992) and more recently in forging political ties in the struggle for the legalization of same-sex marriage. The work that emerges from these areas of study has not focused on the particular dimensions of friendship between lesbians and gay men.

Same-Sex, Cross-Sexuality Friendships for Gay Men and Lesbians

As a demographic group, sexual-minority adults (in this case, gay men and lesbians) are more likely than straight adults to report having cross-orientation friendships and to having more same-sex friends than cross-sex friends (Galupo 2007b). Although cross-sexuality friendships—those between gay and straight men or between lesbian and straight women—are believed to be less common than other friendship types, they often prove to constitute significant bonds (Fee 1996; Tillmann-Healy 2001). Cross-sexuality friendships do not fit neatly into common understandings of friend relationships; rather, they challenge norms about gendered behavior.

The straight and gay male friendship dyad is one that may contest hegemonic definitions of masculinity. Nardi (1999) suggests that friendship between gay and straight men offers an alternative to heterosexist institutions and traditional forms of interaction. Fee (1996) used the term “coming over” to describe straight men’s active willingness to challenge internalized homophobia by engaging in a friendship with a gay man. Coming over often allows a bond that is more emotionally intimate than other male friendships (Fee 1996).

Some cross-sexuality male friendships, however, create contexts in which aspects of homophobia may be reproduced. Price's (1999) study of gay-straight male friendships, for example, exposed a double standard; the straight man in the dyad was comfortable in the friendship so long as his gay friend did not discuss his same-sex partnership or dating life, while the straight man freely discussed his relationships with women.

Much of the past research about friendships between lesbians and straight women has been descriptive. One study noted that friendships between lesbian and straight women are most successful when the members of the dyad overcome the characterization of being fundamentally different from each other (O'Boyle and Thomas 1996). Galupo and St. John (2001) found that friendships between lesbian and straight adolescent women provided many benefits for both parties, which included increasing trust through the disclosure and acceptance of a sexual-minority identity, rejecting of stereotypes, and growing sensitivity to sexual diversity. Levitt's and Hiestand's (2004) article also discussed how butch lesbians' friendships with straight women were not uncommon, but that there was great potential for misunderstanding, primarily because straight women did not understand butch gender well enough to maintain comfortable boundaries. More recent empirical studies have found that sexual orientation was secondary to other dimensions that formed close friendships between lesbians and straight women (Galupo 2007a).

Weinstock and Bond (2002) provided one of the few empirical studies that focused on the friendship bonds between lesbians and straight women. Their research identified several positive aspects of these friendships: they broke down stereotypes and prejudice; provided support for a lesbian identity; and were free from sexual tension. In addition to these benefits, the friendships between lesbians and straight women provided opportunities to learn from each other (Weinstock and Bond 2002). The study also uncovered negative themes in these friendships that included limitations of understanding, clash of perspectives, stressors related to others' reactions to the friendship, and anxiety about sexuality (Weinstock and Bond 2002).

One area that has been researched more deeply is how friendship contact with gay men and lesbians affects straight people's homophobic and heterosexist attitudes. Straight women typically have more contact with gay men and lesbians than do straight men (Herek 1994). Those straight women and straight men that have interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbian women tend to have less homophobic attitudes than their counterparts and accordingly have

more positive attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than do other straight men (Herek 2000; Herek and Capitanio 1996). Moreover, other research shows the context in which individuals have interacted with gay men also affects their attitudes toward gay men as a subcultural group (Castro-Convers, Gray, Ladany, and Metzler 2005). In particular, straight people who identify themselves as having very positive attitudes toward gay men also report having early awareness or direct and positive contact with gay men in their daily lives (Castro-Convers et al. 2005).

Cross-Sex Heterosexual Friendships

The normative cultural paradigm in the United States idealizes same-sex friendship, which makes straight cross-sex friendships an anomaly. However, friendships between straight men and women are common among young adults and college-age individuals and in white-collar, professional workplace interactions (Rose 1985; Rubin 1985; Wright 1999). Given cultural norms of compulsory heterosexuality, cross-sex friendships often face challenges of sexual and romantic expectations, both internally and externally (O'Meara 1989). Pairings between men and women are usually interpreted as being romantic or having romantic potential—friendships exist within a system of recognized relationships and are understood within that context (Werking 1997).

Prior research shows that cross-sex friendships satisfy unmet needs of same-sex friendships and provide a unique perspective about the other sex (Rubin 1985; Werking 1997). Many cross-sex friendships provide a space where gender norms can be relaxed. For instance, both members of a cross-sex friendship often share interests and activities (Werking 1997). Such friendships permit displays of androgynous behavior, where men report feeling less competitive and women can speak in a less sensitive and more direct manner (Reeder 1996). In addition to challenging norms of gender and compulsory heterosexuality, cross-sex friendships create a context for challenging the assumption that men and women can sustain a relationship only within the bounds of a heterosexual love relationship (Swain 1992; Werking 1997).

While cross-sex friendships provide many benefits, they also face challenges, including a lack of social support, the assumption of sexual involvement, a lack of cultural models, and social inequalities between the members (O'Meara 1989; West, Anderson, and Duck 1996). Straight cross-sex friendships are also expected to be more short-lived than other friendship types (Parker

and de Vries 1993). In many ways, cross-sex friendships may reinforce gender norms. Previous studies found that straight men enjoyed the nurturing support of female friends, and both men and women benefited by gaining insight into the perspectives of the friend of the other sex about the world (Werking 1997). Despite the overall comparison, distinctions between same-sex and cross-sex heterosexual friendships should not be overstated. For example, women are less likely to highlight the differences between same- and cross-sex friendship, reporting similar levels of emotional support and shared activities in both types of friendship (Werking 1997).

Same-Sex Heterosexual Friendship

As the cultural model of friendship, same-sex friends often abide by social norms of gender and sexual orientation (O'Connor 1992).³ Accordingly, the norms and expectations within the context of same-sex friendships for men and women have been identified as different, if only in degrees (Duck and Wright 1993; Felmlee 1999). Straight women's same-sex friendships, for example, are characterized as achieving intimacy through dialogue and providing both nurturing and emotional support (Johnson 1996; Rubin 1985). When compared with men, women report a greater degree of reciprocity in their friendships (Vaquera and Kao 2008). The character of straight women's same-sex friendships has been described as "face to face," suggesting an intimate, sharing bond (Wright 1982), though parents, peers, and the mass media also encourage girls to seek cooperation and emotional support in their relationships (Thorne 1986). Patterns of socialization seep into all social relationships, including friendships. Contemporary gender stereotypes presume that women are more cooperative and men are more instrumental in their same-sex friendships (Eagly, Wood, and Diekmann 2000). Although women are socialized to be cooperative and nurturing, straight women's same-sex friendships also have been negatively characterized as competitive (Werking 1997).

Straight men's same-sex friendships are also reported as containing an element of competition (Werking 1997), which likely stems from socialization and structural factors (Myers and Raymond 2010; Thorne 1986). Some research characterizes straight men's same-sex friendships, however, as "side by side," which reflects an activity rather than an emotional basis for the bond (Inman 1996; Wright 1982). Yet there is also evidence of continuity, perceived support, and intimate self-disclosure in straight men's same-sex friendships (Grief

2009; Inman 1996). Given that both straight men's and straight women's same-sex bonds expose an enactment and negotiation of gender norms, friendships can be characterized as contexts in which gender is performed and reinforced (Werking 1997).

The differences present in heterosexual same-sex men's and women's friendships can be attributed to a variety of factors. Some point to differences in gender socialization for men and women, in which women are expected to be nurturing and men to be competitive (Felmlee 1999; Grief 2009). Others suggest that homophobia allows straight women's same-sex friendships to achieve a greater level of intimacy but keeps straight men from creating close relationships with other men, for fear of being perceived as gay (Connell 1995). This assertion reflects social expectations of the principle of consistency (Ponse 1978), which assumes that gender norms and sexual orientation are mutually constitutive. Conventional gender norms allow women, but not men, to share feelings and provide emotional support for their friends. Disregarding these norms defies the expectation of consistency in gender and sexual orientation and thus threatens straight men's claims to heterosexuality (Connell 1995). Given such factors, we would expect friendships across sex and sexuality categories to look qualitatively different from straight men's and straight women's same-sex friendships.

Much of friendship research has focused on sex and gender differences, yet some researchers have found this distinction to be exaggerated and more reflective of social norms than the activities and behaviors within a friendship (Felmlee 1999; Walker 1994). Others have argued that gender operates in conjunction with other social locations such as class, marital status, and age, and that the entirety of one's social context must be considered to fully understand the implications of any one dimension (Adams and Allen 1998). Several scholars have maintained that more overall similarities than differences are likely to exist in straight men's and women's friendships (Allan 1989; Duck and Wright 1993; Felmlee 1999).

RESEARCH ON FRIENDSHIPS

Social-psychological theories of social relationships are the theoretical foundation of friendship research. My work on friendship encompasses the symbolic interaction perspective of identity development and social interaction to consider how social structure and inequalities shape the social contexts for these

relationships. The symbolic interaction perspective asserts that it is through interaction with others that we create and re-create meaning about our identities, our social worlds, and our interactions (Strauss 1959). Interactions shape our social realities so that all interactions have meaning and give meaning to our social relationships and to us as individuals.

Friendship affects social psychological processes such as identity development, the construction of social networks, and self-esteem support. In the social-psychological approach to social relationships and friendship, patterns of interactions are systematically examined and used to theorize about the individuals within them (Felmlee and Sprecher 2000). Classic social-psychological theories assert that, through our relationships and interactions with others, we learn how to think and feel about ourselves (Wright 1999). In particular, how we are treated by others, whether with regard or contempt, affects our self-perception. Classic sociological theories by Cooley and Mead address the connection between social interaction and self-perception (Cooley 1922; Mead 1934). Cooley's (1922) concept of the looking-glass self maintains that, through our interactions with others, we develop a sense of self based on the imagined reflection of others. Building on Cooley's concept, Mead (1934) theorized that individuals develop a sense of self through their interpretation of others' perceptions of them; these perceptions become integrated into an individual's self-concept.

Of particular significance for the current study are the connections between daily interactions and the effects on self-concept. Exposing a true self and having it positively reinforced by a significant friend is a meaningful way to enhance one's self-concept (Wright 1999). Moreover, an individual who feels that a new friend values her social identity is likely to form an even closer bond with that individual over time (Weisz and Wood 2005). In practice, our seemingly unremarkable daily interactions with friends have a great influence on our lives; understanding the significance of these relationships has implications for all social behavior (Duck 1999). We become socialized via our associations and interactions with other people. In particular, we learn not only social norms about relationships but also to incorporate socially acceptable behavior in our interactions with others. In addition, friendship connections are important in developing and maintaining a self-concept. Through interactions with others, we create our identity, the lens through which we view ourselves in the world (Nardi 1999; Rubin 1985; Swann and Read 1981).

Friendships in Context

Like all social phenomena, friendships occur in a specific social context and thus are shaped by and help to reinforce structural inequalities. In the United States, social structure, stratification by gender, race, class, and sexual orientation (among other categories) is often reproduced in personal relationships (Collins 1990; Johnson 1996; O'Connor 1992). Individuals typically form friendships according to similarity in terms of race, class, and gender (Brehm 1985). Thus, the benefits and resources provided by friendships (e.g., informal employment references, social network connections) typically benefit those of the same social positions and therefore may further reinforce stratification. Yet some studies find the friendship context to be one in which oppression on the basis of gender, sex, and sexual orientation is battled (Fee 1996; Nardi 1999).

Friendship is a voluntary bond between individuals; we choose whether or not to befriend another person (Jerrome 1984; Wiseman 1986). Social-psychological theories focus on the individual, micro-level of interaction and acknowledge that friendship formation is a dynamic process that involves both individual personalities and the situations in which people interact (Jackson 1977). Yet our choices of whom to befriend and how to interact with him or her are affected by the structural, macro-social context in which they are formed (Adams and Allen 1998). Thus, to fully understand friendships, we need to examine these relationships according to the individual dimensions and structural forces that shape them.

Scripting theory is a social-psychological theory that makes context of central importance in interpreting interactions and is a useful tool in studying intersectional friendships. While typically applied to sexual behavior, scripting theory acknowledges that norms of interaction occur within specific social contexts and are guided by scripts that help individuals understand and interpret the interaction. Scripting theory thus provides a schema for interpreting social interaction. According to Gagnon and Simon (1973), whose work focused primarily on sexual scripts, behavior is enacted and interpreted according to external and internal dimensions, which constitute scripts. In the external dimension, individuals' actions are guided by mutually shared norms that allow them to successfully interact with one another. The internal dimensions of scripts are employed when individuals apply their own meanings to interactions according to the external norms of behavior (Gagnon and Simon 1973).

Scripting theory is a useful tool in interpreting not only gender, but also sexuality, norms, and expectations in social encounters.

Theoretical Approach to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities

Social norms and inequalities shape the context of social relationships in myriad ways. In intersectional friendships, power differences between genders or by sexuality shape interactions and experiences. One of the key ways to consider the effects of social inequality is through the lens of feminist theory. Lorber (1994) described feminist theory as the perspective that social categories such as sexual orientation and gender are social constructions that are shaped by interactions with social institutions. These constructions affect the lived experiences of all individuals and reinforce inequalities on the bases not only of sex and gender, but also of sexual orientation, race, and other social categories. Sex and gender inequalities are present in most structural dimensions of our society, including employment and the workplace (Reskin 1984) and family life (De Vault 1991; Hochschild 1983). These contrasting structural opportunities and constraints that men and women face also affect their everyday interactions and social relationships (Allan 1989).

Gendered social structures and processes may be both conserved and resisted within the friendship context (Johnson 1996; O'Connor 1992). Situated in a sexist and heterosexist social context, friends often reinforce ideas about what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior based on sex and sexual orientation (O'Connor 1992). For example, friends might communicate how acceptable one's behaviors, dress styles, or romantic partners are by these social norms of gender. Further, a stigmatized social identity such as being homosexual can shape and complicate the nature of all social interaction; as social actors, gay men and lesbians may feel the need to manage their stigmatized identity in their interactions with friends (Goffman 1963). The tone of interactions between stigmatized and non-stigmatized individuals can vary from being a context in which marginalization is reinforced to an exchange in which an empathetic alliance is formed (Goffman 1963). Friendships can in fact do either.

Social structure also shapes the context in which socialization occurs. Of particular importance is socialization into roles and identities according to gender and sexual orientation. Gender is learned, achieved, and reinforced through interactions with others (West and Zimmerman 1987), as is hetero-

sexuality (Martin 2009; Myers and Raymond 2010). Gender socialization occurs according to categories of masculine or feminine, which correspond to a male or female identity. Yet all people, regardless of sex and sexual orientation, experience gender as a continuum, in many configurations, rather than as discrete categories (Butler 1990). A heterosexual orientation is implicit in gender socialization—that is, people learn to embody and perform masculinity and femininity based on the normative heterosexual versions of these categories. Not all individuals experience their gender identity and sexual orientation in normative ways, however. By virtue of a same-sex orientation, for example, gay men and lesbians exhibit a gender identity that is deemed inconsistent with their sex category (Stein 1997). Such individuals defy what Ponse (1978: 23–25) identified as the “principle of consistency,” or the expectation that the elements of sex assignment, gender identity, sex roles (or gender roles), sexual object choice, and sexual identity vary together. Once one element is determined, the rest are presumed to co-occur. Accordingly, an individual whose sex assignment is female is expected to have a feminine gender identity, act in a feminine way, and be sexually attracted (only) to men.

The principle of consistency is based in heterosexism and emerges from the impulse to heterosexualize homosexuality—that is, to use heterosexuality as the model and to fit other sexualities into that social script (Tripp 1975) so that they resemble iterations of heterosexual norms.⁴ As Ponse (1978: 24) explained: “Variations in sexual conduct, such as homosexuality are explained in terms of the assumption that same-sex sexual object choices entail a reversal of gender sex and of sex role. Thus, if a woman chooses another woman as a sex object, she is presumed to be a masculine woman and relationships between women are presumed to mirror heterosexual dyadic roles.” Thus, put simply, the principle of consistency dictates that a woman who has sexual relationships with another woman (the prescribed sexual choice for men) must really be man-like or masculine, and men who have sexual relationships with men are expected to have more feminine gender identities (Connell 1992; Ponse 1978).

In actuality, the gender identities of gay men and lesbians, like those of straight men and women, are quite complex. Connell (1992), for example, acknowledges that because gay men are reared under the same social conditions of hegemonic masculinity as straight men, their gender identities often contain elements of both mainstream masculinity and femininity. Moreover, Stein’s (1997) study of lesbian identities characterizes lesbian gender identity as occurring on a continuum from masculine to feminine—butch to femme. Fol-

lowing from such sociological discussions of sexual identity, in my analyses I acknowledge the many variations in individuals who are considered part of the same social groupings (gay man, lesbian, straight man, straight woman) and note fluidity in identities such as sexual orientation and gender. Throughout this book, I also consider how gender norms and socialization affect the overall tone and function of intersectional friendships, particularly between people differently located in these social structures of gender and sexuality.

Additional Theories: Contact Theory and the “Darker Side”

One of the long-standing questions in sociology remains: does interaction breed greater understanding and tolerance between groups? The most widely cited study on the matter is Allport’s classic contact theory of prejudice, which asserted that “prejudice may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals” (Allport 1954: 281). Prior research has found that straight people who have close contact with gay men and lesbians are more likely to have favorable attitudes about them (Herek and Capitanio 1996). Later work noted that this finding varied by gender and sexual orientation: even when they had close contact, straight men were reported as having more negative attitudes toward gay men than toward lesbians, and their attitudes were more negative than straight women’s toward both gay men and lesbians (Herek 2000, 2002). When compared with straight women, straight men were more likely to have negative attitudes toward gay men, lesbians, and bisexual men and women and were less likely to befriend individuals from these sexual-minority groups (Galupo 2007b; Herek 2002).

People typically focus on the positive dimensions of friendships, yet a darker side to friendship also exists. Friendships end. In one study, for example, 27 percent of the individuals reported that they had experienced the end of a close friendship due to waning affection, declining interactions, and interference by other relationships (Rose and Serafica 1986). While friendship provides positive dimensions to people’s lives, it also can be a source of conflict. For instance, norms for friendship and affiliation can be unclear and contradictory in some instances, which may lead to misunderstandings and disagreements between friends (Felmlee 1999). Because friendships are fraught with ambiguity and occur within the context of people’s complex webs of relationships, it is unknown how friendships wax and wane throughout the course of their duration (Duck and Wood 1995). Of course, some relationships are unpleasant,

irritating, destructive, and painful, though future research is needed to understand these less appealing dimensions of interaction (Felmlee and Sprecher 2000).

The body of research presented here shows us that friendships are significant relationships that provide many benefits, including bolstered self-esteem, joy, and a feeling of connectedness. Friendships can create community for groups who suffer oppression and can be used to buffer negative interactions to promote positive connections. Bridging friendships can reduce the social distance between groups to facilitate understanding and forge alliance, despite difference. Yet friendships exist in a social structure that is shaped by gender, race, class, and sexuality; these social categories provide people with different access to power, resources, and opportunity. In understanding close friendships across differences, we understand the potential of friendship to challenge inequality or reproduce it. The next chapter provides an opportunity to see intersectional friendships in action and illustrates the ways that gender, race, class, and sexuality influence these relationships.