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# Exploring Cross-Sex Friendships as a Means to Understanding Friendships Between Former Romantic Partners

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Exploring Cross-Sex Friendships as a Means to Understanding

Friendships between Former Romantic Partners

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## **Introduction**

This research project examines cross-sex friendships. First, I will describe the research associated with friendship. This body of research discusses maintenance of, motivations for, and intimacy levels in both same-sex and cross-sex friendships. Next, I will examine heterosexual romantic relationships and expectations that characterize this type of relationship. Finally, I will describe existing research on friendships between former romantic partners.

The goal of the research is to look more in depth at a specific kind of cross-sex friendship: friendships between former romantic partners. While most research on friendships between former romantic partners studies the likelihood of the friendship, there is a gap in research investigating the quality of and motivations for the friendship, especially when compared to heterosexual cross-sex friendships. After extensively exploring existing research on cross-sex friendships, I decided to do independent research on cross-sex friendships by surveying heterosexual adults over the age of eighteen. The results from this study have helped me to measure the quality and motivations for cross-sex friendships between partners who have never been romantic, who have had a casual romantic relationship, and who were once in a serious romantic relationship. I have also examined sex differences in motivations for forming friendships with former romantic partners.

## **Friendships**

Friendships are an important part of every individual's life. We form friendships at every stage of life: on the playground as children, at school as young adults, and even in the workplace when we are older. Friendships can be very influential; who we socialize with affects our opinions, beliefs, and behaviors (Moussaid, Kammer, Analytis, & Neth, 2013). Because they are

so important, it is necessary to understand what defines a friendship. According to Communication research, a simple definition of friendship is a voluntary relationship, distinguished by a certain level of intimacy and support (Frey, Beesley, Hurst, Saldana, & Licuana, 2016). A deeper look at friendship reveals that there are specific rules individuals should follow to form and maintain a friendship. Argyle and Henderson (1984) propose four categories of friendship rules: sustaining intimacy, exchanging rewards, regulating conflict between one another, and regulating conflict from third parties (Bryant & Marmo, 2012). These rules are relevant for maintaining and deepening intimacy in all types of friendships.

While there are many type of friendships, the healthiest friendships are marked by a sense of increased empowerment, knowledge, self-worth, trust, and self-disclosure by both parties (Frey et al., 2016). However, most important to forming and maintaining any friendship is intimacy. When asked to define the word friend, people most commonly state that a friend is someone with whom you are intimate (Fehr, 2004). While intimacy levels appropriately remain low at the development of a friendship, low levels of intimacy that occur in a developed friendship signal that the friendship is deteriorating (Fehr, 2004). Therefore, to maintain a close friendship, being intimate with one another is imperative. If intimacy is integral to forming close relationships, how achievable is intimacy in different types of friendships?

### *Same-Sex Friendships*

The most preferred type of friendship is one between two members of the same sex (Baumgarte & Nelson, 2009). The most common motive for forming a same-sex friendship is because they provide partners with “emotional support and acceptance, opportunities for shared activities and social feedback, and an expansion of personal and social identities” (Fuhrman, Flannagan, & Matomoros, 2006, p. 576). As previously mentioned, to maintain a same-sex

friendship, partners engage in intimacy maintenance behaviors. In same-sex friendships, there are four factors that strongly predict intimacy in the relationship: self-disclosure, social support, emotional support, and practical support. Self-disclosure, or revealing thoughts, emotions, and fears with a partner, is the primary way people achieve intimacy in relationships (Fehr, 2004). Social support is also important, and includes behaviors like being there to help a friend in a time of need, accepting the friend for who he or she is, being loyal to the friend, trusting the friend, and being trustworthy in return (Fehr, 2004). Providing a friend with emotional support through affection, expressions of compassion, and nonsexual physical contact can also help to achieve intimacy. Emotional support helps to achieve the feeling that the friendship is shared, and that both partners are putting effort into the relationship and receiving an equal amount of benefits (Frey et al., 2016). Even referring to the friendship as a reciprocal relationship by using phrases like “we” instead of “you and I” can increase the emotional bond in a friendship and make the friends feel more connected to one another (Frey et al., 2016). Finally, practical support also positively correlates to increased intimacy in a same-sex friendship, although it is not as important as the other factors (Fehr, 2004). Practical support includes behaviors like being able to borrow things from a friend and being able to turn to the friend for advice and opinions (Fehr, 2004).

When examining same-sex friendships, it is important to note that sex differences exist. In other words, female friendships vary slightly from male friendships. Women tend to achieve intimacy solely through self-disclosure, while men achieve intimacy through both self-disclosure and participating in activities together (Fehr, 2004). Mutuality levels in same-sex friendships also differ based on sex. Relational mutuality is defined as the ability to have empathy for one another, be open and authentic with each other, and find value in each other’s similarities and

differences. Men experience less mutuality in their friendships than women do (Frey et al., 2016). Still, levels of mutuality mainly depend on an individual's capability or desire to be open and vulnerable; therefore, some exclusively male friendships can achieve more mutuality than some exclusively female friendships if men are especially willing to be vulnerable with each other (Frey et al., 2016). Another sex difference is the type of conversation that dominates the friendship. In general, women's friendships are more focused on talking; however, what they talk about also differs from the usual topics of conversation of men. Most common conversation topics of women include relationship issues, feelings and emotions, and personal problems. Meanwhile, men talk more about sports, work, and cars (Fehr, 2004). Furthermore, there are differences in not just what they communicate, but how they communicate. Women talk face-to-face, but men are more prone to talk side-by-side (Fehr, 2004).

### *Cross-Sex Friendships*

A second type of friendship is a cross-sex friendship, in which a man or woman is friends with someone of the opposite sex. While there has not been much research on this type of friendship until recent years, cross-sex friendships are becoming more common. "Cross-sex friendships are becoming more prevalent and are particularly laden with ambiguity, as the potential for romance or sex may cause uncertainty" (Malachowski & Dillow, 2011, p. 357). Because of the uncertainty often associated with cross-sex friendships, many people think of them as "weak" or of a lesser quality. However, research indicates that these negative connotations associated with cross-sex friendships are often untrue. More than 35% of men and 24% of women report that a friend of the opposite sex is their closest friend (Messman et al., 2000). Still, cross-sex friendships are very different from any other type of relationship and deserve to be examined. "The platonic nature and sex composition of these friendships

differentiate them from other relationship types such as same-sex friendships and opposite-sex romantic relationships” (Messman et al., 2000, p. 68).

### *Motivation for forming cross-sex friendships*

The increased prevalence of cross-sex friendships has influenced researchers to examine why people choose to form friendships with the opposite sex. Just like same-sex friendships, cross-sex friendships provide partners with emotional and social support and allow individuals to learn more about themselves and others (Fuhrman et al., 2006). However, there are some differences in motivations for forming a cross-sex friendship that do not exist in heterosexual same-sex friendships. Sometimes, the friendship is initiated when one or both partners report a degree of romantic or sexual interest (Fuhrman et al., 2006). Cross-sex friendships also can provide an “insider perspective to the opposite sex and affirmation that one is attractive” (Holmstrom, 2009, p. 224). Men report that they are motivated to form cross sex friendships because they allow them to behave in a more “feminine manner” and express their emotions more than they would in a same-sex friendship. Women are sometimes motivated to form cross-sex friendships because it allows them to be more competitive (Holmstrom, 2009). Both males and females are more likely to expect more desirable physical trait qualities in cross-sex friendships than in same-sex friendships (Fuhrman et al., 2006). Males and females also are more accepting of higher levels of relational uncertainty and topic avoidance in cross-sex friendships than they are in same-sex friendships and romantic relationships (Fuhrman et al., 2006).

Although cross-sex friendships are very different from any other type of relationships, in general, cross-sex friendships are more similar to same-sex friendships than they are to romantic relationships (Fuhrman et al., 2006). Like partners in same-sex friendships, partners in cross-sex friendships usually provide emotional support, act as companions, and purposefully behave in

non-romantic, non-sexual ways to distinguish the relationship from a romantic one. (Fuhrman et al., 2006). Unlike same-sex friendships, partners in cross-sex friendships usually have to work harder to set boundaries that prevent the display of sexual or romantic behaviors to clarify platonic goals of the friendship (Fuhrman et al., 2006). Often, partners will go out of their way to ignore sexual tension and romantic feelings to keep the relationship platonic. This is mainly because they feel emotional uncertainty and are unsure about their partner's feelings, as well as their own (Messman et al., 2000). Other common reasons partners strive to maintain a platonic friendship include wanting to safeguard the relationship because they feel that if the friendship becomes something more than platonic, they may risk losing the friendship; the absence of sexual attraction; fear of network disapproval; and wanting to refrain from any romantic involvement at the time (Messman et al., 2000).

### *Maintaining Cross-Sex Friendships*

To keep the friendship platonic and discourage the development of romantic feelings or behaviors, researchers have identified six common maintenance strategies used by partners in cross-sex friendships: *positivity*, or engaging in friendly, fun, and pleasant interactions; *openness*, which includes revealing thoughts and feelings about each other and the relationship; *support*, through offering advice and comfort; *avoidance of flirting*; *shared activity*, and *avoidance*, to prevent the partner from having romantic feelings (Weger & Emmett, 2009). The reasons partners have for forming a cross-sex friendship and keeping it platonic affect which maintenance behaviors partners choose to use. When friends are platonic because they want to safeguard the relationship, the use of *positivity* and *support* maintenance strategies are most prevalent. Those who want to safeguard the relationship also frequently practice *shared activity* and *openness* maintenance behaviors (Messman et al., 2000). Researchers also found positive

correlations between *avoidance* maintenance behaviors and fear of network disapproval, the desire to refrain from romantic interactions at the time, and emotional uncertainty (Messman et al., 2000). Friends who were not attracted to one another maintained a platonic relationship by *avoiding flirting* or discouraging overly familiar behavior (Messman et al., 2000). Across all platonic cross-sex friendships, regardless of the reason partners have for remaining platonic, *support* and *positivity* strategies were used (Messman et al., 2000).

However, if romantic intent is involved and one or both partners wants to change the nature of the friendship, maintenance strategies may change. In other words, the desire to take a friendship to something romantic or sexual affects maintenance strategies in cross-sex friendships (Weger & Emmett, 2009). Participants in a research study reported that increasing romantic desire in a cross-sex friendship leads to more use of specific maintenance behaviors like talking about the relationship, initiating phone calls, positivity, avoiding conflict and criticism of one another, and visiting each other at home or in a personal space (Weger & Emmett, 2009). In another study by Guerrero and Chavez (2005), *indirect information seeking*, or asking mutual friends about romantic desires of the partner, was also identified as a maintenance strategy when romantic intent was present in a cross-sex friendship (Weger & Emmett, 2009). Overall, friendships with romantic intent involve “more routine contact and activity, more social and instrumental support, more flirtation, and less talk about outside romance than friends who wished to remain strictly platonic” (Weger & Emmett, 2009, p. 968).

### *Quality of Cross-Sex Friendships*

It is apparent that cross-sex friendships are extremely complex and experience more relational uncertainty than any other relationship (Malachowski & Dillow, 2011). Sexual boundaries and confusing friendship with romance are major challenges of cross-sex friendships

(Malachowski & Dillow, 2011). Friends in cross-sex relationships are prone to having uncertainty about both their and their partners' beliefs, attitudes, or emotions regarding the nature and purpose of their relationship (Weger & Emmet, 2009). Although not always the case, relational uncertainty can prompt individuals to view their partner or the relationship more negatively. Furthermore, as friends become more uncertain about the boundaries for acceptable behavior, about their commitment to the relationship, and about the degree to which their friend has mutual feelings about the relationship, they become less willing to invest the time and energy required to maintain the relationship (Weger & Emmet, 2009). When they aren't confident about their understanding of the relationship, they are less comfortable engaging in behaviors that induce intimacy (Weger & Emmet, 2009). Because intimacy is so frequently correlated with healthy, close relationships, people often assume that cross-sex friendships are not as high in quality as same-sex friendships. However, it is important to note that relational uncertainty is what leads to decreased intimacy. Therefore, cross-sex friendships are capable of being as close as or more intimate than any other type of friendship once relational uncertainty is reduced.

Sometimes, reducing relational uncertainty in cross-sex friendships can lead to being open about having romantic feelings for one another. If romantic feelings are mutual, cross-sex friendships may develop into romantic dating relationships, changing the nature of the friendship and affecting the expectations and behaviors characterizing the relationship (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005).

### **Heterosexual Romantic Relationships**

Romantic dating relationships are characterized by an emotional attachment that involves exclusivity, trust, and commitment (Siebenbruner, 2013). Besides exclusivity, this definition sounds much like the definition of friendship. Indeed, romantic relationships share many

behavioral expectations that platonic friendships have, such as emotional support, intimacy, loyalty, and respect (Fuhrman et al., 2006). Researchers have found that across all types of relationships (same-sex friendships, cross-sex friendships, and romantic relationships), intrinsic characteristics like warmth, kindness, expressiveness, and humor are the most valued qualities (Sprecher & Regan, 2002). This implies that providing social and emotional support are integral to all types of relationships (Sprecher & Regan, 2002). If this type of support can be found in all relationships, why are people motivated to get involved in dating relationships?

Exclusivity is one expectation found in romantic relationships that is not found in friendships (Fuhrman et al., 2006). Because dating relationships are characterized by exclusivity, those looking for romantic relationships generally have higher expectations for potential romantic partners than they do for any type of friendship. “Insofar as social norms dictate that individuals may have many friends at the same time but only one romantic partner, people are less likely to be concerned that one particular friend possesses a constellation of ideal traits” (Sprecher & Regan, 2006, p. 475-476). First, romantic partners expect higher levels of emotional support and emotional connection than they expect in their friendships. For instance, people seek potential romantic partners who strongly display qualities like humor, expressiveness, and warmth (Sprecher & Regan, 2006). Furthermore, partners expect more emotional closeness, social companionship, and relationship positivity in their romantic relationship more than they do in their same-sex friendships and cross-sex friendships. (Fuhrman et al., 2006).

While expectations for internal characteristics of a potential romantic partner are higher, external attributes are also more important in romantic relationships than in friendships. For example, people report that social and economic status, intelligence levels, sense of ambition,

and perceived potential matter more to them when choosing a romantic partner than choosing a friend of the same or opposite sex (Sprecher & Regan, 2006).

### **Friendships Between Former Romantic Partners**

Unfortunately, not all romantic relationships last. Partners have many different reasons for ending a romantic relationship. While there is extensive research on breakups and why they occur, there is not much existing research on what happens to the relationship after the romance is terminated. This section examines one particular phenomenon that may occur post-breakup: friendships between former romantic partners. Overall, most researchers agree that three main factors predict post-romantic friendships: breakup style, the existence of a prior friendship between the partners, and perceived rewards and satisfaction levels of the friendship (Busboom, Collins, Givertz, & Levin, 2002).

#### *Breakup Style*

The first factor that predicts the likelihood of a friendship occurring between former romantic partners is how the romantic relationship was terminated (Busboom et al., 2002). How people disengage, or communicate their intentions to end the relationship, influences the likelihood of friendship. If the breakup conversation is civil and polite, there is a greater chance that the two partners will remain friends. The use of positive tone and de-escalation tactics in a breakup conversation usually indicate a higher chance of friendship between the partners. Positive tone is a self-blame strategy in which the disengager takes full responsibility for the breakup. This strategy helps avoid hurting the partner's feelings and blaming the partner for the failed relationship (Banks et al., 2009). De-escalation strategies reduce the level of commitment or intimacy in a relationship by expressing the advantages that may result in changing (or

ending) the nature of the relationship. De-escalation tactics usually follow a simple formula: express dissatisfactions, explain how breaking up may mend dissatisfactions, and discuss the possibility of some type of relationship in the future. When trying to de-escalate, many disengagers will acknowledge that there is a chance that they will get back together (Banks et al., 2009).

Researchers have also uncovered disengagement tactics that are not effective for maintaining a friendship after the breakup (Banks et al., 2009). When justification and avoidance tactics are used in a breakup, partners are less likely to be friends. Justification tactics include explaining why the disengager feels dissatisfied with the relationship and asserting that he or she will feel happier if the relationship is terminated. Avoidance tactics do not include a physical conversation about terminating the relationship; instead, the disengager avoids contact with the partner (Banks et al., 2009).

Breakup style in heterosexual relationships includes more than how the breakup is communicated; it also includes which partner is doing the breaking up. Research shows that if the guy breaks up with the girl, or the breakup is mutual, there is a higher chance of friendship occurring between the two former romantic partners (Rubin, Peplau, & Hill, 1981). If the woman is the initiator of the breakup, men find it hard to be friends. There has been some speculation on why the sex of the disengager matters in determining a post-romantic friendship between the partners. Researchers have found that men are not as equipped at dealing with their emotions as women are. Generally, women are more sensitive than men to problem areas in a relationship and tend to see the breakup coming sooner than men do, no matter if they are the disengager or not (Rubin et al., 1981). Because women are more socially sensitive, they are more likely to get over their feelings once a relationship ends and are more easily able to redefine the

relationship from “love” to “friendship” (Rubin et al., 1981). Men are hit harder by a breakup and report higher feelings of depression and loneliness and lower feelings of freedom after a relationship is ended (Rubin et al., 1981). Therefore, a man is more likely to be blindsided if a woman breaks up with him and will struggle with the transition from loving to liking, making friendship less likely when the woman is the initiator of the breakup.

There are a couple of explanations for why these sex differences exist. Some believe that deeply rooted aspects of men and women’s personalities make men initiate heterosexual commitments more quickly than women and find it more difficult to get over the loss of a love (Rubin et al., 1981). Some researchers attribute this theory to the Oedipal conflict, which states that men have a greater capacity to engage fully in heterosexual commitment because of their deep love for their mothers when they are young (Rubin et al., 1981). Other researchers refute the influence of Oedipal complex, but still agree that the sex difference in dealing with breakups revolves around personality (Rubin et al., 1981). A second explanation disregards personality altogether and states that it is caused by being ingrained in Western social and economic culture. Women must be more cautious and more practical about their relationships because in the Western world, her status depends more upon her husband’s than her husband’s depends on hers. Romance is a luxury; men have more power and therefore can be more romantic. Because of Western culture, women cannot afford to listen to their emotions and fall in love too quickly, and instead must be analytical about their romantic partner and the relationship (Rubin et al., 1981). Finally, some believe that socialization accounts for the sex difference: “Socialization experiences emphasize that [women] have a considerable degree of power in the emotional domain, whereas such emotional socialization is neglected for men” (Rubin et al., 1981, p. 833). Women have learned to control and manage their own emotions more effectively than men can.

As a result, women have greater cognitive control and are less likely to immediately fall deeply into love, more likely to perceive problems, more likely to control feelings of loss, and more easily able to transform loving into liking (Rubin et al., 1981).

### *Prior Friendship*

A second major influence in likelihood of friendship is the status of the couple before they dated. Partners who are friends prior to the start of a romantic relationship are more likely to maintain a relationship after a breakup (Busboom et al., 2002). This may be because they already know and are appreciative of the benefits that exist from being friends with the partner (Schneider & Kenney, 2000). Although the social exchanges within the friendship may differ from what they were before the breakup, the meaning of the friendship remains constant (Fehr, 2004). Additionally, partners who truly consider each other to be their best friend throughout the course of the romantic relationship usually share a compassionate love and have better luck remaining friends. This may be due to the self-sacrificing nature of compassionate love style, or the friendship-like qualities and behaviors that are usually associated with compassionate love (Fehr, Harasymchuk, & Sprecher, 2014). Romantic partners who have a compassionate love for one another have already established a deep friendship, meaning that the partners already follow most of the rules of friendship established by Argyle and Henderson (1984). Passionate lovers usually do not follow all the rules of friendship, thus having to work harder to learn and act on those rules, when transitioning from a relationship to friendship (Shimek & Bello, 2014).

### *Rewards versus Costs*

Finally, the greater the number of perceived rewards the friendship may bring, the more ex-partners are willing to be friends, according to the Social Exchange Theory (Busboom et al.,

2002). The theory states that human interaction is a function of payoffs. Everyone who participates in a relationship expects to receive some type of reward, such as pleasure or happiness. If these rewards meet expectations, the relationship is fulfilling and the quality of the relationship improves. If they do not meet expectations, satisfaction levels drop, sometimes leading to the end of the relationship. Therefore, people constantly measure the benefits and costs of each relationship to ensure they are profitable. If an individual sees that their former romantic partner can provide desirable rewards, he or she will be more motivated to be friends with the partner. For both men and women, the most common reason former romantic partners want to maintain a friendship is for sentimental reasons. Partners share good memories with one another and consider them to be supportive and compassionate and want to continue these good feelings (Mogilski & Welling, 2017). Other common reasons include practicality, such as sharing resources, friends, and kids. Contrary to popular belief, sexual access is one of the least common reasons former romantic partners want to remain friends. Still, men place more importance on sex than women do (Mogilski & Welling, 2017).

Not only do benefits need to exist, but perceived benefits must outweigh costs for former romantic partners to feel motivated to be friends. If former romantic partners foresee challenges or barriers that will present problems in the friendship, they are less likely to pursue a friendship. According to research by Busboom et al. (2002), the two barriers most negatively correlated with possibility of a former romantic friendship are lack of support and a new romantic relationship. Lack of support includes negative sentiments and discouragement about the friendship from friends and family (Busboom et al., 2002). This confirms previous research on social influence, which discusses how strongly friends and family influence our thoughts and behaviors (Moussaid et al., 2013). The initiation of a new romantic relationship also poses a challenge to

the friendship, since ex-partners may feel jealous and uncomfortable of the new relationship (Busboom et al., 2002).

While the likelihood of being friends with a former romantic partner depends on a variety of different factors, post-romantic friendships are possible, and thus can be classified as yet another type of friendship.

### **Research Study**

**RQ1:** Are there sex differences in reasons for having a friendship with a former romantic partner?

**RQ2:** Are there differences in the reasons reported for having a cross-sex friendship when comparing those who have had a previous romantic relationship versus those who have had no romantic relationship?

**RQ3:** Are there differences in the reasons for having a cross-sex friend based on who initiated the break-up?

**RQ4:** Are there variations in friendship quality based on the existence of a previous romantic relationships versus no romantic relationship?

**H1:** The quality of friendship between former romantic partners will vary based on the reasons the partners have for having a cross-sex friend.

### **Methods**

#### *Procedures*

To answer my research questions and hypothesis, I created an electronic survey. The study measured the sex of the respondent, the length of the friendship, if the friendship was with

a previous romantic partner, who initiated the break up, reasons for being friends, and friendship quality. Participants responded to the following prompt:

*Throughout this study, we would like you to be thinking about **one** friend that you have from the opposite sex. If you have a friend of the opposite sex with whom you used to have a romantic relationship, please **think of that person** (if there are more than one, think of the friend with who you currently feel the closest). Please put the initials of the friend here:*

Materials were presented using the online survey software program Qualtrics. The survey was approved by the university's IRB and then distributed to La Salle University students and students in the East Coast (mainly Philadelphia) via Facebook, Text, and Word of Mouth using a network sample. Respondents of the survey had to meet the following three inclusion criteria: (1) they had to be over the age of 18, (2) they had to be heterosexual, and (3) they had to have at least one cross-sex friend.

### *Sample*

Participants were recruited from La Salle University and surrounding Philadelphia regions. Participants included 98 young adults in the United States (24 male, 72 female, 2 chose to not reveal their sex). Of these 98 respondents, 50 respondents reported that their friendships were only platonic (51.0%), 29 respondents reported that they were once in a casual romantic relationship with their cross-sex friend (29.6%), and 19 respondents reported that they were once in a serious romantic relationship with their friend (19.4%). When asked to describe the quality of their current friendship, 38 respondents reported a casual friendship (38.8%), 38 respondents reported a close friendship (38.8%), and 22 respondents reported best friendship (22.4%). Of those who were friends with a former romantic partner, 15 respondents reported initiating the breakup (15.3%), 16 reported that their partner initiated the breakup (16.3%), and 11 reported that the breakup was mutual (11.2%).

### *Instruments*

The survey included questions based on Mogilski and Welling's (2017) table *Reasons for Staying Friends*, friendship quality questions based on the *Intimate Friendship Scale* (Sharabany, 1994), and a series of demographic questions.

The *Reasons for Staying Friends* measure consists of seven components: Reliability/sentimentality (they were a great listener, we had similar personalities); Pragmatism (they had a lot of money, they were a useful social connection); Continued Romantic Attraction (I still had feelings for them, I couldn't stand the thought of another guy/girl being with them); Children and Shared Resources (shared utilities); Diminished Romantic Attraction (I was no longer in love with them); Social Relationship Maintenance (we shared a group of friends, we saw each other frequently); and Sexual Access (They were a possible hook-up buddy).

The *Intimate Friendship Scale* includes eight dimensions: Frankness and Spontaneity (self-disclosure about both positive and negative aspects of oneself and honest feedback); Sensitivity and Knowing (empathy without necessarily talking); Attachment to the Friend (feeling close and missing them when absent); Exclusiveness in the Relationship (presence of unique qualities and preference for this relationship); Giving and Sharing with the Friend (listening and sharing material objects); Imposition (ready to require and accept friend's help); Common Activities (enjoyment of time spent together); and Trust and Loyalty (keeping secrets and defending one another).

## **Results**

The first research question asked about sex differences in reasons for being friends with a former romantic partner. Results from the survey revealed significant differences, with men more likely to indicate reasons for being friends because of *feelings* (sig. = .005), *back together* (sig. = .008), *hook up* (sig. = .041), and *good sex* (sig = .018).

Table 1: Sex differences in reasons for having a cross-sex friend

Reasons		Mean	Sig.
Listen	Male	3.63	0.348
	Female	3.83	
	Total	3.80	
Support	Male	4.04	0.951
	Female	4.06	
	Total	4.05	
Similar	Male	3.78	0.596
	Female	3.64	
	Total	3.67	
Money	Male	1.58	0.246
	Female	1.39	
	Total	1.44	
Connect	Male	2.50	0.41
	Female	2.26	
	Total	2.32	
Fallback	Male	2.13	0.373
	Female	1.89	
	Total	1.95	
Feelings	Male	2.92	0.005
	Female	2.04	
	Total	2.26	
Jealous	Male	2.13	0.237

	Female	1.79	
	Total	1.88	
Back Together	Male	2.5	0.008
	Female	1.78	
	Total	1.96	
Property	Male	1.42	0.195
	Female	1.24	
	Total	1.28	
Finance	Male	1.46	0.165
	Female	1.25	
	Total	1.30	
Friends	Male	2.96	0.106
	Female	3.46	
	Total	3.33	
Mature	Male	2.96	0.093
	Female	2.47	
	Total	2.59	
See	Male	2.54	0.351
	Female	2.83	
	Total	2.76	
Hook Up	Male	2.25	0.041
	Female	1.71	
	Total	1.84	
Good sex	Male	2.17	0.018
	Female	1.56	
	Total	1.71	

The second research question asked about differences in reasons for having a cross-sex friend when partners were once romantically involved versus when they were only ever just friends.

Results indicated several differences in motivation. Scores for *formally romantic* were significantly higher in *feelings* (sig. = .046), *jealous* (sig. = .051), *back together* (sig. = .002) and *good sex* (sig. = .021). Scores for *only friends* were significantly higher in *listen* (sig. = .002), *support* (sig. = .002), *friends* (sig. = .004), and *see* (sig. = .002).

Table 2: Reasons for cross-sex friendship based on relationship type

Reasons		Mean	Sig.
Listen	Formally romantic	3.43	0.002
	Only friends	4.1	
	Total	3.80	
Support	Formally romantic	3.71	0.002
	Only friends	4.31	
	Total	4.04	
Similar	Formally romantic	3.45	0.093
	Only friends	3.85	
	Total	3.67	
Money	Formally romantic	1.36	0.472
	Only friends	1.46	
	Total	1.41	
Connect	Formally romantic	2.10	0.125
	Only friends	2.48	
	Total	2.31	
Fallback	Formally romantic	2.10	0.255
	Only friends	1.83	
	Total	1.95	
Feelings	Formally romantic	2.57	0.046
	Only friends	2.02	
	Total	2.27	
Jealous	Formally romantic	2.12	0.051

	Only friends	1.65	
	Total	1.86	
Back Together	Formally romantic	2.33	0.002
	Only friends	1.63	
	Total	1.95	
Property	Formally romantic	1.20	0.213
	Only friends	1.35	
	Total	1.28	
Finance	Formally romantic	1.24	0.638
	Only friends	1.29	
	Total	1.27	
Friends	Formally romantic	2.93	0.004
	Only friends	3.71	
	Total	3.36	
Mature	Formally romantic	2.86	0.079
	Only friends	2.4	
	Total	2.61	
See	Formally romantic	2.33	0.002
	Only friends	3.15	
	Total	2.79	
Hook Up	Formally romantic	2.07	0.113
	Only friends	1.69	
	Total	1.86	
Good sex	Formally romantic	2.00	0.021
	Only friends	1.48	
	Total	1.71	

The third research question inquired if there were differences in the reasons for having a cross-sex friend based on who initiated the break up. Results indicated positive correlations between

*respondent initiated breakup* and *listen* (sig. = .005), and *respondent initiated breakup* and *support* (sig. = .052). Positive correlations were also found between *partner initiated breakup* and *feelings* (sig. = .029), and *partner initiated breakup* and *jealous* (sig. = .047). There was no significance in motivation when the breakup was mutual.

Table 3: Reasons for cross-sex friendship based on initiator of breakup

Reasons		Mean	Sig.
Listen	Respondent initiated breakup	4.20	0.005
	Partner initiated breakup	3.21	
	Mutual	2.90	
	Total	3.43	
Support	Respondent initiated breakup	4.13	0.052
	Partner initiated breakup	3.71	
	Mutual	3.50	
	Total	3.71	
Similar	Respondent initiated breakup	3.47	0.847
	Partner initiated breakup	3.29	
	Mutual	3.70	
	Total	3.45	
Money	Respondent initiated breakup	1.40	0.695
	Partner initiated breakup	1.36	
	Mutual	1.40	
	Total	1.36	
Connect	Respondent initiated breakup	1.93	0.196
	Partner initiated breakup	2.57	
	Mutual	1.90	
	Total	2.10	
Fallback	Respondent initiated breakup	2.60	0.160
	Partner initiated breakup	1.64	
	Mutual	2.10	
	Total	2.10	

Feelings	Respondent initiated breakup	2.40	0.029
	Partner initiated breakup	2.64	
	Mutual	2.10	
	Total	2.57	
Jealous	Respondent initiated breakup	1.80	0.047
	Partner initiated breakup	2.21	
	Mutual	1.90	
	Total	2.12	
Back Together	Respondent initiated breakup	2.47	0.223
	Partner initiated breakup	2.21	
	Mutual	1.90	
	Total	2.33	
Property	Respondent initiated breakup	1.07	0.245
	Partner initiated breakup	1.21	
	Mutual	1.20	
	Total	1.20	
Finance	Respondent initiated breakup	1.27	0.789
	Partner initiated breakup	1.14	
	Mutual	1.30	
	Total	1.24	
Friends	Respondent initiated breakup	2.67	0.550
	Partner initiated breakup	2.93	
	Mutual	3.00	
	Total	2.93	
Mature	Respondent initiated breakup	2.53	0.194
	Partner initiated breakup	3.36	
	Mutual	2.40	
	Total	2.86	
See	Respondent initiated breakup	2.07	0.562
	Partner initiated breakup	2.43	
	Mutual	2.70	
	Total	2.33	

Hook Up	Respondent initiated breakup	2.27	0.83
	Partner initiated breakup	1.86	
	Mutual	2.10	
	Total	2.07	
Good sex	Respondent initiated breakup	2.13	0.573
	Partner initiated breakup	2.07	
	Mutual	2.00	
	Total	2.00	

The fourth research question measured variations in friendship quality based on the existence of a previous romantic relationship versus no romantic relationship. Scores for friendship quality were highest for *only friends* ( $M = 61.35$ ).

Table 4: Friendship quality based on relationship type

Nature of Relationship	Mean	Sig.
Only friends	61.35	0.001
Casual romantic relationship	54.90	
Romantic partners in a serious relationship	51.32	

The study hypothesized that the quality of friendship between former romantic partners will vary based on reasons partners have for having a cross-sex friend. Results from the survey provide support for Hypothesis 1. Friendship quality was related positively to *listen* ( $r = .591$ ) and *support* ( $\text{sig.} = .589$ ).

Table 5: Quality of cross-sex friendship based on motivation

Reasons	Friendship Quality
Listen	0.591**

Support	0.589**
Similar	0.179
Money	0.179
Connect	-0.051
Fallback	0.082
Feelings	0.081
Jealous	0.104
Back Together	0.107
Property	-0.027
Finance	-0.067
Friends	0.026
Mature	-0.203
See	0.277
Hook Up	-0.036
Good sex	0.042
Not love	-0.043
Over	-0.045
No meaning	-0.022

*Discussion*

*Sex differences.* Results showed that sex differences did exist in motivation in forming a friendship with a former romantic partner. Men were more likely to be friends with an ex-romantic partner if they thought they would still be able to hook up with their ex or if they thought the sex in the romantic relationship was good. This confirms research by Mogilski and Welling (2017) that found men to score higher than women on sexual access scores. Interestingly, men were also more motivated than woman to be friends with their former romantic partner if they still had feelings for her or wanted to get back together.

*Motivation.* Research Question 2 and Research Question 3 examined reasons for initiating a cross-sex friendship. Research Question 2 explored reasons for forming a platonic cross-sex friendship versus reasons for forming a friendship with a former romantic partner. Partners who never were romantically involved were more motivated to form the friendship if they believed the partner was a good listener and could offer support. They also were motivated to form the friendship when they already shared a group of friends or were likely to see each other frequently. For friendships between former romantic partners, there were positive correlations between likelihood of friendship and still having feelings for the partner, being jealous about the relationship and possible new romantic interests of the partner, wanting to get back together, and good sex. Research Question 3 determined if reasons for friendship between former romantic partners varied based on who initiated the breakup. If the respondent broke up with the partner, he or she reported being more likely to want to form a friendship because the partner was a good listener or was a good support system. If the respondent did not initiate the breakup, he or she reported being more likely to maintain the friendship because he or she still had feelings for the partner or was jealous. No significant correlations were found for when the breakup was mutual.

*Quality.* Research Question 4 and Hypothesis 1 explored quality of friendship between former romantic partners. Research Question 4 specifically sought to measure differences in the quality of cross-sex friendships when partners were never romantically involved versus when they did have a romantic relationship prior to the friendship. The survey revealed that friendship quality is higher in friendships when there was no prior romantic relationship between the partners. As hypothesized, the quality of friendship between former romantic partners varied based on reasons for forming the friendship. Friendship quality was highest when participants were motivated to form the friendship because they thought their friend was a good listener and when they thought their friend was supportive. Finally, while not a goal of the study, I also found that there was no difference in the quality of friendship based on which sex initiated the breakup.

### *Limitations*

One main limitation of the research was the reliance on a primarily college-aged sample. I promoted my survey to my peers, limiting the target audience of the survey. Older, more mature participants might have more experience with relationships and more time to mourn the end of a romantic relationship and transform it into a friendship. Future research should include a wider age range of participants. A second limitation of this research is that it only measures romantic dating relationships. Friendships between former romantic married couples may be different than friendships between former romantic dating partners. Finally, because of the nature of the survey, participants may be biased when completing the survey. There is a possibility that respondents were not honest with themselves when taking the survey, and therefore, did not answer all questions truthfully. Future researchers should strive to limit participant bias.

### **Conclusion**

The goal of this research project was to explore cross-sex friendships, specifically looking in depth at cross-sex friendships between former romantic partners. I compiled and discussed existing research on same-sex and cross-sex friendships, heterosexual romantic relationships, and friendships between former romantic partners. This research gave me a foundation of knowledge on the topic, but inspired me to look further into motivations for having a cross-sex friend, sex differences in motivations, and quality of cross-sex friendships. Through an online survey disseminated via social media and word of mouth, I was able to learn more about friendships between former romantic partners and compare them to cross-sex friendships in which there was no prior romantic relationship. Interesting findings from the research revealed that there were sex differences in motivation for forming a friendship with a former romantic partner and that friends who were once formally romantic had different motivations for maintaining the friendship than friends who were never romantic. Furthermore, the research revealed that motivations for forming a friendship with a former romantic partner varied depending on which partner terminated the relationship. Friends who had only ever been friends reported the highest quality of friendship. Finally, quality of friendship between former romantic partners was dependent on motivation for forming the friendship. This research adds to existing research on cross-sex friendships and sheds new light on friendships between former romantic partners.

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