

Team publishes research on friendship

July 7 2015, by Sheri Ledbetter

In the most inclusive study to date on friendship, Chapman University research looks at gender, age, and sexual orientation differences in the number of friends people rely on for support, to what extent they choose friends of the same gender, and overall life satisfaction. In a survey of more than 25,000 participants from all walks of life, this study examines at how U.S. adults rely on friends for expressive, instrumental and companionate support. Specifically, how many same-gender and cross-gender friends people have who they can talk to about their sex life, who they can call/text if they were in trouble late at night, and who they could expect to do something with to celebrate their birthdays.

"The role of friendship for [gay men](#), lesbians, and especially [bisexual men](#) and women (collectively known as GLB) has been understudied," said David Frederick, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychology at Chapman University. "To our knowledge, this is the first national study to provide comprehensive comparisons of the same-gender and cross-gender friendship networks of GLB [men](#) and women. What we learned is the similarities in friendship patterns observed by gender and [sexual orientation](#) may reflect growing gender egalitarianism and increased social acceptance of GLB individuals throughout the U.S."

The goal of the study was to investigate whether sexual orientation was related to friendship patterns such as number of friends, as well as how friendship relates to the well-being of GLB groups. The study showed that GLB men and women have similar number of friends as heterosexual men and women.

The study also looked at the likelihood of gender homophily - the notion that people affiliate with others who are similar to themselves and, in particular, of the same gender—a well-established phenomenon in heterosexual relationships because cross-gender [friendships](#) can add the complicating factor of possible romantic or sexual tension, or the jealousy of one's partner. Homophily by gender was common in most groups - the only groups that did not report more same-gender friends were gay men and bisexual men. Heterosexual men had more male friends than gay men. Young gay men, however, had more female friends than young heterosexual men in terms of the number of female friends they can talk about their sex life with and who they can count on to celebrate their birthday with. This may be partly due to the fact that women are less likely to have prejudice towards gay men.

The study also examined whether the quality and/or quantity of close friendships are more strongly linked to overall life satisfaction for GLB groups than for heterosexuals. Findings showed that friendship satisfaction and job satisfaction were the two strongest predictors of life satisfaction, as opposed to the number of friends. This was true for all groups. The strongest overall associations between friendship satisfaction and [life satisfaction](#) were for lesbian women, bisexual men and bisexual women.

"Our study supports the idea that friendships satisfy many important needs in our lives," said Dr. Frederick. "The need to bond with someone like us in some ways and unlike us in others, having someone to call on for comfort in times of turmoil, and someone with whom we can share memorable experiences. The study found, however, that older people tend to have fewer friends as they get older, suggesting the importance of encouraging ways for older men and women to make [friends](#)."

Methodology

The 25,185 participants who completed the survey consisted of 11,924 [heterosexual men](#), 387 bisexual men, 343 gay men, 220 lesbian women, 511 bisexual women, and 11,800 heterosexual [women](#). The average age for the sample was 42.

More information: The paper appears in the journal, Public Library of Science ONE (*PLoS ONE*). The manuscript is freely available here: [journals.plos.org/plosone/arti ... journal.pone.0128900](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0128900)

Provided by Chapman University

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