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Cross-Sex Friendships in the Workplace
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Abstract

This study investigated potential barriers to cross-sex friendships in the workplace by comparing results of perceived challenges to both cross-sex and same-sex friendships in a within-subjects design. O’Meara’s (1989) four proposed challenges to cross-sex friendships have not been directly applied to the workplace setting. In addition, literature has found that cross-sex friendships have barriers beyond the barriers faced by same-sex friendships (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Monsour, Harris, Kurzweil, & Beard, 1994), which led to this study’s comparison of challenges to cross-sex and same-sex friendships in the workplace. This study surveyed 64 full-time employees on (1) their perceived opportunity for and prevalence of workplace friendships and (2) their perceived challenges to workplace friendships. Findings revealed that employees were more likely to report opportunities for and prevalence of same-sex friendships than cross-sex friendships in the workplace. Furthermore, employees perceived their cross-sex friendships as having stronger challenges than their same-sex friendships according to the following: the emotional bond challenge, the audience challenge, the sexual challenge, and the equality challenge. Based on these findings, organizations should be aware that employees do not only perceive more opportunities for and prevalence of same-sex friendships than cross-sex friendships, but they are also perceiving more challenges to their cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships.
Chapter I

Review of the Literature

Employees who are able to form and maintain friendships in the workplace may have advantages relating to personal and professional growth over employees who are not involved with such relationships (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Morrison, 2009). However, there is little research exploring the possible disadvantages workplace friendships may entail when those friendships are cross-sex. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to identify potential challenges to forming and maintaining cross-sex friendships in the workplace. The study will also explore participants’ perceptions of their opportunity for and prevalence of cross-sex friends in the workplace. The term “cross-sex friendships” has been previously used by other researchers (e.g., Monsour, Harris, Kurzweil, & Beard, 1994), to refer to friendships with the opposite-sex, and a growing literature has examined some possible challenges faced by cross-sex friendships in general (Felmlee, Sweet, & Sinclair, 2012; Monsour et al., 1994; O’Meara, 1989). These challenges may be present in the work setting as well. Cross-sex challenges may be one of the barriers faced by women in the workforce as they enter predominantly male positions and organizations, a phenomenon known as the glass partition (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Herman & Ellen, 2005).
Workplace Friendships

Research has consistently shown a positive relationship between friendship experiences and happiness across cultures. Organizations can serve as environments for friendships to be initiated (Demir, Özen, & Doğan, 2012). “Workplace friendships involve mutual commitment, trust and shared values or interests between people at work, in ways that go beyond mere acquaintanceship but that exclude romance” (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002, p. 217). Employees who form and maintain friendships in the workplace can receive benefits over personnel who do not partake in such relationships. In addition, same-sex friendships may have their own job-related advantages.

Dotan (2007) proposed a theoretical framework for why friendships are formed at work. The theory offered six main reasons to why such relationships are initiated: work safety/trust, missing roles, sanity check, work-values/life-interests similarity, proximity, and instrumentality. Work safety/trust includes forming a friendship based on the feeling of safety an employee feels with another employee in regards to work-related issues/experiences. Missing roles is forming a friendship because the friend resembles an important person outside of the workplace. Sanity check can be a reason for the formation of a work friendship because employees can gain a sense of confirmation for their way of thinking. Work-values/life-interests similarity involves forming a workplace friendship based off similar work-values and interests. Proximity is forming a friendship because of frequent interaction. Lastly, instrumentality is a reason for the formation of a workplace friendship because employees may wish to satisfy instrumental factors such as career advancement or a promotion.
According to Elsesser and Peplau (2006), the most common theme for the formation of a workplace friendship was employees sharing a similar interest or goal. These similarities were job-related, such as working on the same project, and non-work-related, such as liking a current event or sport. Other themes that commonly appeared for the initiation of friendships in the workplace were the physical proximity of employees and an established formal work relationship (e.g., boss/subordinate, mentor/mentee, or interviewer/interviewee).

Organizations may support formal or informal mentor relationships, but personnel who do not participate in such relationships can receive similar benefits from forming and maintaining friendships with other employees. Kram and Isabella (1985) emphasized the importance of peer relationships in the workplace, and found two main categories of functions that can benefit employees who partake in such relationships. The first category included career-enhancing functions such as the peers participating in information sharing, career strategizing, and job-related feedback. The second category comprised the psychosocial functions. For example, peer relationships can be used for confirmation, emotional support, personal feedback, and friendship. Moreover, friendships in the workplace entail reciprocity between the friends, which are not an attribute of other relationships in the workplace, such as a mentor and protégé relationship. Employees participating in workplace friendships play both roles as they give and receive information, goals, and support (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

Interviews conducted by Elsesser and Peplau (2006) revealed additional advantages workplace friendships can bring to the workplace. Respondents reported workplace friends provided assistance on work activities and made the work setting more
pleasurable. Moreover, interviewees claimed they were more comfortable asking for and receiving advice, information, and assistance from friends rather than other employees who were not friends (e.g., co-workers, supervisors).

The literature on workplace friendships has mainly focused on the perceived benefits of such relationships, and little focus has been placed on possible gender differences in workplace friendships and the perceived gender specific benefits. One study that concentrated on this idea was an Internet-based questionnaire, which focused on friendships in the workplace and organizational outcomes perceived by both men and women separately (Morrison, 2009). Both the opportunities for friendships and the number of friendships currently held were gathered in order to better understand employee workplace friendships. The results revealed gender differences on organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, workload sharing, and intention to leave. Men who reported having more work friends also reported higher job satisfaction, but the prevalence of workplace friends was not correlated with job satisfaction for women. Workload sharing for men was also significantly positively correlated with friendship prevalence and opportunities, but the same did not hold true for women. Women’s intention to leave was found to be significantly negatively correlated with the prevalence of and opportunity for workplace friends, but men’s intention to leave was not correlated with either prevalence of or opportunity for workplace friends. On the other hand, there was no gender difference for the outcomes of organizational commitment and cohesion (social support and cooperation), which was significantly correlated with the friendship variables for both men and women.
Research has supported the perceived benefits of workplace friendships for employees, but Bridge and Baxter (1992) also found potential challenges or problems faced by blended (that is, employees who are friends inside and outside the workplace) relationships. One challenge was labeled the objectivity strain, which is favoritism being displayed to the friend even though organizations tend to encourage objective decision-making. Another problem that blended friendships may endure is the inequality strain. The equality status embedded in friendships can make it difficult for friends to manage certain situations or conditions if one friend has a higher position than the other.

Performance strain is an additional category of challenges that blended relationships may face in the workplace. The interdependence of friends may result in lower performance, possibly through wasting time talking or otherwise socializing. Another challenge faced by blended friendships in the workplace is the organizational information management strain, which is the tension felt by a friend to follow organizational policies of disclosure and confidentiality even though friendships encourage openness and keeping of confidences.

One aspect of friendships in the workplace is measured using the item “I have a best friend at work” in Gallup’s Q12 survey (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999). Gallup’s Q12 survey is a popular measure that assesses employee perceptions of management practices with 12 questions, which was developed from studying productive individuals and groups in the workplace. In addition, “They measure the core elements needed to attract, focus, and keep the most talented employees” (p. 28). Thus, Buckingham and Coffman (1999) find an aspect of friendships in the workplace an important tool to measuring engaged employees.
Challenges to Cross-Sex Friendships

Challenges may arise for cross-sex friendships because men and women may hold different expectations for their friendships (Felmlee et al., 2012). Felmlee et al. (2012) investigated if women and men differed on their expectations for same-sex and cross-sex friendships. They found that 81.6% of participants reported “yes” when asked if men and women could be friends. However, women were significantly more critical of violations of friendship norms than were men. For example, women were less likely to approve of a friend who cancelled plans or failed to confide a secret. Although women tend to hold higher expectations for their friendships than men, they held those high expectations for both their same-sex and cross-sex friends. The only friendship behavior that differed depending on if the relationship was same-sex or cross-sex was men’s judgments of the situation for using a kiss as a greeting. Even though men and women tend to hold different friendship expectations, these expectations are similar within genders for both their same-sex and cross-sex friendships.

Forming and maintaining cross-sex friendships may be more difficult than same-sex friendships because of potential challenges cross-sex friendships present. O’Meara (1989) proposed four challenges cross-sex friendships may face in addition to challenges same-sex friendships encounter. To clarify, these challenges are assuming cross-sex friends who are both heterosexual. The four challenges are the emotional bond challenge, the sexual challenge, the equality challenge, and the audience challenge. The emotional bond challenge refers to the type of emotional bond that is mutually agreed upon in the relationship (e.g., based upon strictly friend relations or romantic love). The sexual challenge suggests additional tension due to the sexual overtone of a cross-sex
relationship. The equality challenge is the establishment and management of equality with a man and a woman’s relationship. Lastly, the audience challenge refers to the participants’ concern of creating the correct “picture” of their relationship.

Monsour et al. (1994) examined the challenges of proposed cross-sex friendships in a study utilizing 138 student participants. Overall, the respondents reported the emotional bond challenge as the most common form of cross-sex challenge. On the other hand, the audience challenge was reported the most when a challenge was reported for females, and the emotional challenge was reported the most when a challenge was reported for males. When a challenge was reported, males reported the emotional bond challenge 21% of the time, whereas females reported it 20% of the time. The audience challenge was second most reported with males reporting it 11% of the time and females reporting it 22% of the time. The sexual challenge was reported 6% of the time by men and 8% of the time by women, and the equality challenge was reported by 3% of the time by men and 1% of the time by women. The cross-sex challenges proposed by O’Meara (1989) have shown to exist from Monsour et al.’s study. Thus, cross-sex friendships may be harder to maintain than same-sex friendships.

Elsesser and Peplau (2006) found barriers to cross-sex friendships beyond the four challenges proposed by O’Meara (1989). Results showed sexual tension was reported as less of an issue for married participants than single participants for their cross-sex friendships in the workplace. Additional reported concerns of cross-sex friendships were the fear of co-workers outside the relationship misperceiving it as a romantic relationship and the cross-sex friend mistaking friendliness for romance. Similar to the audience challenge, Elsesser and Peplau found employees were concerned with
their cross-sex friend being viewed as a romantic partner; the fear of potential misinterpretation of friendliness by a cross-sex friend may inhibit the formation of cross-sex friendships. Men were more likely to report concerns with gestures being misinterpreted for sexual or romantic interest by women. To summarize, maintaining and forming cross-sex friendships inside and outside the workplace adds additional challenges to a relationship not present for same-sex friendships.

Lenton and Webber (2006) sought to examine the role several factors played in predicting the proportion of cross-sex friends to same-sex friends a person may have. Participants in the study indicated that 42% percent of their current friendships were with the opposite sex. The participants gave an average rating of 3.60 when asked to circle on a scale from 1 (none of my friendships are male-female) to 7 (all of my friendships are male-female) that best represents the number of friendships that are currently male-female. The study first examined the participant’s sex and its ability to predict the number of cross-sex friends the participant reported. The study revealed no relationship between the two variables. Another factor considered was the relationship commitment status of the participant, which was measured using a continuous scale of one’s level of commitment in the relationship. Results showed that non- or low-committed individuals tended to have more cross-sex friends than other levels of committed participants. However, when controlling for the participant’s sex, perceptions of the benefits vs. costs of cross-sex (vs. same-sex) friendships, gender role orientation, and sexism, the relationship changed such that increasing the relationship commitment lead to having more cross-sex friendships.
Results of the study by Lenton and Webber (2006) revealed individuals who perceive that cross-sex friendships possessed benefits beyond those of same-sex friendships were likely to have more cross-sex friends. The perceived benefits vs. costs of cross-sex friendships were a concern for Lenton and Webber because a cost-benefit ratio of cross-sex friendships that was at least as good as, if not better than, a same-sex friendship was enough basis for an individual to maintain or form a cross-sex friend. The Bem Sex Role Inventory was employed in order to assess participants' gender orientation (BSRI; Bem, 1974). Results showed that individuals with higher levels of cross-gender orientations, who tend to identify more with the opposite gender orientation rather than their own, retained more cross-sex friendships. For example, a female who possessed masculine characteristics reported having more cross-sex friends than a female participant who related more to feminine characteristics. Lastly, the authors examined the role of sexism through looking at the participant's hostility toward or derogation of the opposite sex and benevolence, the paternalism/maternalism toward the opposite sex. Neither aspect of sexism played a strong role in predicting who would have more cross-sex friends. Thus, cross-sex friendships made up just under half of all friendships in the sample, and various factors could assist in the prediction of how many of these friendships were cross-sex for individuals. In the next section, one of the potential concerns that may emerge around cross-sex friendships, sexual harassment, is considered.

Perceptions of Sexual Harassment

The courts recognize two forms of sexual harassment. The first form, quid pro quo harassment, involves sexual conduct paired with the granting or denial of advancing the employee. The second form is hostile work environment harassment, and involves a
potentially sexual harassing behavior severe enough to alter conditions of employment, leading to an abusive working environment (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001). The interpretation of the sexual harassment forms can be ambiguous, and gender differences have been reported in what is defined as sexual harassment. Rotundo et al. (2001) found women were likely to label a broader range of behaviors as harassing than men.

Elsesser and Peplau (2006) showed that males were often concerned about their actions being labeled as sexual harassment by females. “In interviews, 75 percent of male participants mentioned that they think about sexual harassment issues when interacting with women at work” (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006, p. 1090). The high concern for sexual harassment may be a major influence as to why cross-sex friendships are not formed at work. The study discussed respondents’ interviews and found males took into consideration their audience when telling stories or jokes. Men did not always feel they could share stories and jokes with women. However, they did feel comfortable sharing them with other male coworkers. In contrast, a small percentage of women felt this way with male employees. Sixty-six percent of women recognized the discomfort of men at work during their conversations with women (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006).

Another concern that may inhibit employees from initiating friendships with coworkers is the concern that a behavior interpreted one way with same-sex employees may be interpreted another way with opposite-sex employees. For example, a compliment on a female’s skirt may be appropriate from another female, but the compliment may be interpreted as sexual harassment if given by a male employee (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). The perceptions of sexual harassment differ depending on
gender, and the perceptions may be inhibiting cross-sex friendships due to the fear of a sexual harassment accusation.

The glass partition. The glass partition refers to the barriers that women may face when working in predominantly male organizations. One barrier explored by Elsesser and Peplau (2006) was the inability for female employees to form cross-sex friendships because of the increased fears of being accused of sexual harassment on the job felt by male coworkers. If women are inhibited from forming friendships with men on the job, they may lose career enhancing and psychosocial functions that can help their career success. In addition, males traditionally encompass the top-level management in organizations (e.g., in 2002, 84% of the corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies were men [Catalyst, 2002, as cited in Elsesser & Peplau, 2006]). Males may have an advantage at forming mentor (or other) relationships with high performing male employees. Elsesser and Peplau's study began to demonstrate the difficulty women might have at advancing in the workplace without forming and maintaining necessary relationships.

One European study conducted by Herman and Ellen (2005) considered the glass partition and its impact on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) occupations. The ICT industry is typically associated with a masculine culture, and women are underrepresented in ICT jobs. Moreover, ICT working conditions can be difficult for an individual to manage alongside a family and domestic life (Vendramin et al., 2003, as cited in Herman & Ellen, 2005). The participants were all women who received training to better understand their experiences entering this particular career and to obtain information on the barriers women may face with this line of work. A higher
proportion of women than men are employed at the technician level, which provides limited opportunities to move up to managerial roles (Ellen & Herman, 2005, as cited in Herman & Ellen, 2005). Interviews revealed that women were likely to enter ICT careers later in life, or might leave the career and return. A majority of the participants did not have clear ambitions after the participants were asked to draw a career path, and the results indicated that only 10% of the women had a clear vision of their future progression. A common theme in the interviews was that the participants’ decisions regarding career progression revolved around the impact of their families on career development. Thus, the glass partition includes barriers such as cross-sex friendships not forming and issues regarding work-life balance (Herman & Ellen, 2005).

Literature provides support for the benefits of friendships in the workplace (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Morrison, 2009). These friendships can be formed with the help of organizations by simple proximity of coworkers or building a relationship based on similar interests (Dotan, 2007; Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). However, limited research has investigated the possible challenges cross-sex friendships can face in the workplace over and above same-sex friendships. The challenges faced by cross-sex friendships in general may have an influence on how cross-sex friendships are formed and maintained at the workplace. Thus, this study will serve to investigate these potential challenges and the impact they have on forming and maintaining cross-sex friendships in the workplace.
Chapter II

Rationale and Hypotheses

Employees sharing similar interests or goals commonly form friendships in the workplace (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). Organizations can also play a role in the formation of friendships because of the physical proximity of employees and formally assigned work relationships (Dotan, 2007; Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). Organizations should be interested in the formation of friendships because research has demonstrated that such relationships are beneficial to both the employee and the organization (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Morrison, 2009).

Workplace friendships can serve career-enhancing functions and psychosocial functions, which provide opportunities for the employees to share information in order to advance their careers (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Additional benefits reported for workplace friendships include assisting with work activities and making the work setting more pleasurable (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). Benefits to workplace friendships have also been examined across sexes. Sex differences appear for organizational outcomes such as higher job satisfaction and more sharing of workloads for males, and lower intentions to leave for females (Morrison, 2009). Even though literature has supported the positive outcomes associated with workplace friendships, little research has included the consequences of cross-sex friendships.
Cross-sex friendships may create additional relationship challenges beyond those present in same-sex friendships, and therefore may be harder to maintain. First, men and women tend to hold different expectations for their friendships (Felmlee et al., 2012). In addition, other employees reported misperceiving cross-sex friends as a romantic partner and a cross-sex friend being misled by friendliness as concerns for taking part in a cross-sex friendship (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). O’Meara (1989) proposed four challenges that may be faced by cross-sex friendships: the emotional bond challenge, the audience challenge, the sexual challenge, and the equality challenge.

The preceding literature begins to address potential consequences to cross-sex friendships in the workplace. The present study is interested in exploring four hypotheses in relation to O’Meara’s (1989) proposed four challenges. The application of the challenges to a student sample began to expose what challenges are affecting cross-sex friendships. Monsour et al. (1994) found the order of most to least commonly reported challenges as follows: the emotional bond challenge, the audience challenge, the sexual challenge, and the equality challenge. Because the emotional bond challenge was the most common challenge reported outside of the workplace for cross-sex friendships relative to same-sex friendships, it is expected that it will also be present in the workplace.

Elsesser and Peplau (2006) began to unravel the challenges and obstacles cross-sex friendships may face in the workplace context. The sample used in their study was diverse because of the variety of organizations used and the organizations' locations within the country. However, the sample size was relatively small (n = 41). An additional limitation to the study was that no quantitative data were reported regarding the
differences in perceived magnitude of obstacles when referring to cross-sex friendships and same-sex friendships. A within-subjects comparison of cross-sex and same-sex friendships will allow us to make inferences on how much more of an obstacle the challenges are for one type of friendship verse the other.

Hypothesis 1: The emotional bond challenge will be more commonly reported as an issue in the workplace with cross-sex friends than same-sex friends.

The audience challenge was the second most reported challenge outside of the workplace, and employees partaking in cross-sex friendships may view this as more of a challenge than their same-sex friendships. The audience challenge should be reported frequently in a workplace based on Elsesser and Peplau’s (2006) findings that employees worried about their cross-sex friendships being viewed as romantic relationships. Organizations may possess policies restricting romantic relationships, and thus, creating more of a concern for employees to ensure coworkers see their relationships as strictly friendships.

Hypothesis 2: The audience challenge will be reported more often as an issue within the workplace for cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships.

Similarly, the sexual challenge, the third most commonly reported challenge, may be viewed as a potential issue to cross-sex friendships in the workplace. The present study is focusing on heterosexual individuals, where same-sex friendships may not deal with the sexual challenge as often as cross-sex friendships because the sexual tension may not be as common with same-sex friendships in the workplace. Finally, although the least reported challenge for cross-sex friendships outside the workplace was the equality challenge, this challenge may be heightened within the workplace context because
position/power levels are clearly defined in an organization. Thus, I present the final two hypotheses to cross-sex friendship challenges in the workplace.

Hypothesis 3: The sexual challenge will be reported more often as an issue within the workplace for cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships.

Hypothesis 4: The equality challenge will be reported more often as an issue within the workplace for cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships.

In addition to exploring the four challenges, the study will also address possible gender differences with perceptions of sexual harassment and cross-sex friendships. As Elsesser and Peplau (2006) found, males were more often concerned about their actions being labeled as sexual harassment by females than females were concerned about their actions being labeled as such by males. Therefore, I propose the last hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5: Perceptions of sexual harassment for cross-sex friendships will be reported more of an obstacle to the relationship for males than females.

To conclude, the Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendship Scale was utilized in order to obtain data on the opportunity for and prevalence of both cross-sex and same-sex friendships in the workplace for use in exploratory analyses.
Chapter III

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The survey took less than 30 minutes, and the participants received 50 cents for completing the survey. Payment for completion required participants to finish the study in its entirety and to pass all relevant quality checks. MTurk has over 500,000 registered workers that are primarily from the United States and India, and of the United States users, 78% have at least a bachelor’s degree (Barger, Behrend, Sharek, & Sinar, 2011). The text of the MTurk interface, as it was presented to participants, is included as Appendix A.

Participants had to have a full-time employment status with an organization employing at least 50 workers to participate in the study. In addition, the participants needed to be living in the United States. An employee who is only working part-time versus an employee who is working full-time may find forming and maintaining friendships in the workplace not as important, and other cross-sex friendship research has used this inclusion criterion (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). Participants were employed with an organization of at least 50 people because 50 people should give a worker a chance to form and maintain friendships at work. The 50-person cut-off has also been used in past research on cross-sex friendships in the workplace (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). In addition, a 95% HIT approval rate and a minimum of 50 HITs approved was required in order to
obtain higher-quality data. Two individuals did not pass relevant inclusion criteria, so they were removed from the study and not compensated. Two additional participants were then recruited for participation in the study.

A within-subjects design was utilized to examine the extent to which the challenges identified in the literature may be differentially reported for cross-sex as opposed to same-sex friendships for the same individuals. Furthermore, a priori power analysis indicated that a minimum of 64 subjects were needed to have .80 power to detect a medium effect with an alpha of .05 for testing mean differences in a within-subjects design (Cohen, 1992). The sample consisted of 64 participants, and the age of the participants ranged from 22 to 63 ($M = 33.94, SD = 9.13$). The positions held by the participants encompassed a wide range such as administrative assistant, manager, and graphic artist. Frequencies for demographic variables are reported in Table 1.

**Measures**

**Workplace friendships.** Nielsen, Jex, and Adams (2000) developed the Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendship Scale to measure both the Opportunity and Prevalence for workplace friends. The Opportunity and Prevalence subscales have six items each that are measured on a 5-point scale. The measures are both scored by averaging responses within each scale. The internal consistency reliability estimate is $\alpha = .84$ for the Opportunity measure and $\alpha = .89$ for the Prevalence measure. Both the Friendship Opportunity ($r = .76, p < .01$) and the Friendship Prevalence ($r = .68, p < .01$) scales had strong positive relationships with six items measuring friendship opportunities from Hackman and Lawler's (1971) JDI, which provides some evidence of construct validity. The Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendship scale has previously been applied
### Frequencies of Key Demographic Variables for Participants

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</tbody>
</table>
to workplace friendships in general, but the scale was slightly altered to ask participants about their cross-sex and same-sex friendships in the workplace. The scale used the original items to refer to same-sex friendships in Part 1 and then cross-sex friendships in Part 2. Furthermore, the scale provided information on perceived occasions of making these two types of friends in the workplace and the actual occurrence of these friendships in the workplace. These data present additional evidence of challenges inhibiting cross-sex friendships from forming and sustaining in the workplace. Internal consistency estimates of reliability were computed for Friendships Opportunity and Friendships Prevalence in Part 1 of Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendships Scale, which signified same-sex friends. Similarly, internal consistency reliability was computed for Friendships Opportunity and Friendships Prevalence in Part 2 of Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendships Scale, which signified opposite-sex friends. The internal consistency estimate of reliability for this study yielded high alphas for the two dimensions in part 1 and part 2. Coefficient alpha was .91 for the Friendship Opportunity of same-sex friends, .87 for the Friendship Prevalence of same-sex friends, .91 for the Friendship Opportunity of opposite-sex friends, and .89 for the Prevalence Opportunity of opposite-sex friends. The scale items are included as Appendix B.

Challenges to friendships in the workplace. Questions regarding challenges to friendships in the workplace were developed for the present study in order to address the four challenges to cross-sex friendships: emotional, sexual, audience, and equality. Previous research had not explicitly established items related to the challenges that can be applied to a workplace cross-sex and same-sex sample. The four challenges were
measured using one question each, and the questions examined how often respondents report the challenges with cross-sex friends and same-sex friends.

When responding to the questions, participants were asked to first think of their cross-sex friendships and secondly their same-sex friendships in the workplace. For example, the audience challenge was examined using the following question, “In your relationships with your cross-sex (same-sex) friends, is ensuring other coworkers understand your relationship is strictly a friendship a challenge that has generally emerged?” In addition to using this item in the study, three further items were developed to refer to the challenges specifically in the workplace. Respondents answered on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 9 (To a great extent). The anchors from 1-9 were chosen in order to be consistent with the Cross-Sex Friendships with Peers scale (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). This rating scale was used to measure the magnitude of participant perceptions of obstacles to forming and maintaining cross-sex friendships at work. Items are included as Appendix C. The internal consistency estimate of reliability yielded high alphas for the two parts of the scale in this study. Coefficient alpha was .93 for the items pertaining to challenges for same-sex friends, and the coefficient alpha was .95 for the items pertaining to challenges for opposite-sex friends.

**Cross-sex friendships with peers.** Elsesser and Peplau (2006) developed a 10-item survey to assess the obstacles or barriers the workplace creates when initiating an opposite sex friendship. Moreover, two of the items focusing on issues of sexual harassment were used to address Hypothesis 5. The authors utilized the scale twice. The first administration instructed the participants to evaluate the barriers to initiating friendships with a peer, and the second was to evaluate the barriers to initiating
friendships between subordinates and superiors. Response options on the scale range from 1 (No obstacle at all) to 9 (An insurmountable obstacle). The rating scale lend a collection of the magnitude related to perceptions of initiating friendships in the workplace with peers. For example, participants were asked to rate the item, “Worry that coworkers, boss or subordinates would perceive the friendship as a romantic or sexual relationship.”

Only the “peer” version of this survey was utilized in this study to obtain the general attitudes toward initiating cross-sex friendships with peers. This perspective was not provided with "Questions Regarding Challenges to Friendships in the Workplace," which addressed attitudes toward maintaining cross-sex friendships. The internal consistency estimate of reliability produced a high coefficient alpha of .92 for this study. Items are included as Appendix D.

**Demographic items.** MTurk offers access to users with diverse work experience backgrounds, ages, races, and countries of residence. As such, the demographic information collected included age, race, gender, position of employment, and sexual orientation. All of these items required a mandatory response except for the sexual orientation and age questions, which were optional. In addition, the race and gender items had a “prefer not to respond” answer choice. The demographic items are included in Appendix E. Demographic variables served as covariates in assessing challenges and forming and maintaining cross-sex friendships in the workplace, if they were shown to be significantly related to the study variables.

**Quality check items.** Three “quality check” items were included in the study. The first item read, “Please select ‘3’ for this item,” and it was included after the Two-
Dimensional Workplace Friendship Scale. The second “quality check” item stated, “Please check ‘Packers’ from the list of NFL football teams below,” and was included in the demographics section of the study. The third “quality check item read, “About how large is the organization in which you are currently employed,” and was included in the demographics section as well. These items are in included as Appendix F.

Procedure

Approval for the study was granted by Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board and the approval letter is included in Appendix G. The sample was collected using MTurk. Participants completed the study measures through SurveyMonkey.com. SurveyMonkey is a popular survey website used by businesses, academic institutions, and organizations. The website treats a researcher’s surveys as private and keeps their data secure. A within-subjects design was used in order to compare participants’ cross-sex and same-sex friendships in the workplace. The participants were first screened of the inclusion criteria to ensure eligibility for the study. The inclusion criteria items are listed in Appendix H. Therefore, participants needed to respond to three questions for the inclusion criteria before proceeding to the questions relating to the study. The inclusion criteria items were presented separately on single pages. If the answer was either “no” for the first two items on Appendix H or “yes” for the third item, the participant was not allowed to continue and was routed to a disqualified page. On the other hand, a participant who passed the inclusion criteria was directed to the study.

Prior to participating in the research study, participants viewed an informed consent form (see Appendix I). The informed consent provided information on the reason for the study and the potential consequences and benefits of participating. Participants
had the opportunity to abandon the questionnaire at any time without any consequences, though participants who did not complete the study and enter their MTurk worker ID with the demographic information were not able to be paid. In addition, participants’ responses were anonymous in order to protect identities from being linked to responses. The measures were presented to the participants in the following order: Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendship Scale, Questions Regarding Challenges to Friendships in the Workplace, Cross-Sex Friendships with Peers scale, and Demographics survey.
Chapter IV

Results

Paired-samples $t$-tests were conducted to evaluate the first four hypotheses, which considered participants' beliefs on barriers to forming cross-sex and same-sex friendships in the workplace. Hypothesis 1 proposed that participants would more often report the emotional bond challenge as a barrier with their cross-sex friends than their same-sex friends. The results indicated that the mean score for cross-sex friends ($M = 3.16, SD = 2.46$) was significantly greater for the emotional bond challenge than same-sex friends ($M = 2.53, SD = 2.02$), $t(63) = 2.76, p = .008, d = .34$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 stated that participants would be more likely to report the audience challenge as a barrier with their cross-sex friends than their same-sex friends. The results revealed that the mean score for cross-sex friends ($M = 3.56, SD = 2.65$) was significantly greater for the audience challenge than same-sex friends ($M = 2.72, SD = 2.37$), $t(63) = 3.59, p = .001, d = .45$. Hypothesis 2 was supported as well.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that participants would more often report the sexual challenge as a barrier with their cross-sex friends than their same-sex friends. The results indicated that the mean score for cross-sex friends ($M = 3.31, SD = 2.56$) was significantly greater for the sexual challenge than same-sex friends ($M = 2.41, SD = 2.39$), $t(63) = 3.03, p = .002, d = .41$. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.
Hypothesis 4 stated that participants would be more likely to report the equality challenge as a barrier with their cross-sex friends than their same-sex friends. The results revealed that the mean score for cross-sex friends ($M = 3.42, SD = 2.61$) was significantly greater for the equality challenge than same-sex friends ($M = 2.92, SD = 2.34$), $t(63) = 2.70, p = .009, d = .34$. As with hypotheses 1-3, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Two independent samples $t$-tests were utilized to assess Hypothesis 5, which proposed that males would more often report perceptions of sexual harassment as an issue for cross-sex friendships than females. The analysis for the item, “Worry that friendliness will be misinterpreted as sexual harassment,” indicated that the mean scores for males ($M = 4.06, SD = 2.51$) and females ($M = 3.58, SD = 2.74$) were not significantly different $t(62) = .73, p = .47, d = .18$. The analysis for the other item used for perceptions of sexual harassment yielded comparable results. “Fear of sexual harassment makes it more difficult for men to initiate friendships with women” revealed that the mean scores for males ($M = 4.06, SD = 2.34$) and females ($M = 3.35, SD = 2.12$) were not significantly different $t(62) = 1.26, p = .21, d = .32$. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was not supported, though this is likely a function in part of the lower power for the test of between-subjects effects.

Further exploratory analysis was conducted using items from the Cross-Sex Friendships with Peers Scale. The mean scores ranged from 4.63 to 3.11 on the 9-point Likert-scale where a higher score indicates a greater obstacle. The items with the two highest mean scores were items “Men and women have different interaction styles or different ways of talking to each other” ($M = 4.63, SD = 2.24$) and “Fear of jealousy from romantic partner/husband/wife/ prevents cross-sex friendships” ($M = 4.50, SD = 2.44$).
The items with the two lowest mean scores were items “Men and women can’t be friends without some sexual tension” ($M = 3.11, SD = 2.15$) and “Worry what other coworkers will think” ($M = 3.61, SD = 2.25$). Table 2 lists all items and the means and standard deviations.

The Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendships Scale was also utilized for exploratory purposes. The scale contains two dimensions: Friendship Opportunity and Friendship Prevalence and was scored on a 5 point Likert-scale. Paired-samples $t$-tests were utilized in order to compare each participant’s scores on the dimensions for both references to their same-sex and cross-sex friendships. The results indicated that the mean score for cross-sex friends ($M = 4.12, SD = .67$) was significantly lower for the Friendship Opportunity dimension than same-sex friends ($M = 4.30, SD = .66$), $t(63) = 3.34, p = .001$. The standardized effect size index, $d$, was .42. In addition, the results revealed that the mean score for cross-sex friends ($M = 3.29, SD = .98$) was significantly lower for the Friendship Prevalence dimension than same-sex friends ($M = 3.70, SD = .87$), $t(63) = 3.59, p = .001$, $d = .45$. The analysis revealed that participants were more likely to report higher scores of opportunity and prevalence for same-sex friendships in the workplace than cross-sex friendships. Descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and reliabilities are presented for dimensions in Table 3.

To determine whether any demographic factors needed to be utilized as covariates, tests for mean differences on the eight items from the Questions Regarding Challenges to Friendships in the Workplace scale produced non-significant results for gender and race, but significant differences were found based on sexual orientation for four out of eight analyses of variance conducted. However, the sample sizes were small
Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for Cross-Sex Friendships with Peers Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Men and women have different interests or like to talk about and do different things</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Men and women have different interaction styles or different ways of talking to each other</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>2.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fear of jealousy from romantic partner/husband/wife prevents cross-sex friendships</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Worry that coworkers, boss or subordinates would perceive the friendship as a romantic or sexual relationship</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Men and women can’t be friends without some sexual tension</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Worry that friendliness will be misinterpreted as sexual interest</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>2.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Worry that friendliness will be misinterpreted as sexual harassment</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Men are just more comfortable hanging out with other men, women are just more comfortable with other women</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Fear of sexual harassment charges makes it more difficult for men to initiate friendships with women</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Worry what other coworkers will think</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics, Intercorrelations, and Reliabilities of Scales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Age</td>
<td>33.94</td>
<td>9.13</td>
<td>(--)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Opportunity (Same-Sex)</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>.71**</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Prevalence (Same-Sex)</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.71)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Opportunity (Cross-Sex)</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.79**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Prevalence (Cross-Sex)</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05

** p < .01

*Note: Numbers in parentheses are coefficient α reliabilities.*
enough for non-heterosexual groups (n = 1 for gay, n = 1 for lesbian, n = 4 for bisexual) that controlling for sexual orientation did not seem meaningful.
Chapter V

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to better understand potential barriers to forming and maintaining cross-sex friendships in the workplace. Overall, results from this sample showed that employees believe their cross-sex friendships have significantly more barriers than their same-sex friendships. Four hypotheses were examined in order to determine whether O’Meara’s (1989) proposed four challenges to cross-sex friendships (the emotional bond challenge, the audience challenge, the sexual challenge, and the equality challenge) had an effect on how people think about friendships at work. These four challenges have not been previously examined to compare cross-sex and same-sex friendships in the workplace using a within-subjects design.

The emotional bond challenge was, in fact, reported as more of an issue for cross-sex friendships than for same-sex friendships ($d = .34$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Similarly, the audience challenge was reported to be more of an issue for cross-sex than same-sex friendships ($d = .45$), supporting Hypothesis 2, the sexual challenge was more of an issue for cross-sex than same-sex friendships ($d = .41$), supporting Hypothesis 3, and the equality challenge was more of an issue for cross-sex than same-sex friendships ($d = .34$), supporting Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 predicted the perceptions of sexual harassment for cross-sex friendships would be reported as more of an obstacle to the relationship for males than
females, and was not supported. Although the results were not significant, the effect size for the “Fear of sexual harassment” question was comparable to the effect sizes observed for some of the tests of Hypotheses 1-4 and was in the hypothesized direction, and likely would have been significant had the a priori power analysis focused on the between-subjects portion of the study rather than the within-subjects hypotheses. As such, Hypothesis 5 needs to be tested again with a larger sample.

Further analyses were conducted to examine the first four hypotheses pertaining to O’Meara’s (1989) proposed four challenges considering covariates. The demographic variables gender and race resulted in no significant differences on the eight items from Questions Regarding Challenges to Friendships in the Workplace. Thus, gender and race were not appropriate as covariates. The small sample sizes for three of the four sexual orientation groups make interpreting sexual orientation differences questionable, and as such sexual orientation was also not used as a covariate.

In addition to examining five hypotheses, the study included several exploratory analyses. The Cross-Sex Friendships with Peers Scale was utilized in order to investigate which potential challenges appeared to be more of an obstacle for cross-sex friendships than the other challenges. A higher score represents agreement with the item. The highest mean score was for item 2, “Men and women have different interaction styles or different ways of talking to each other.” The lowest mean score was item 5, “Men and women can’t be friends without some sexual tension.”

Lastly, exploratory analyses were conducted using the Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendships Scale to examine participant opportunities for and prevalence of workplace friendships with both cross-sex and same-sex friends. Results indicated
significant differences wherein participants reported more opportunities for same-sex friends than cross-sex friends and maintaining more same-sex friends than cross-sex friends.

Contributions

The present study expanded on the literature for challenges faced by cross-sex friendships because O’Meara’s (1989) four challenges had not been explicitly examined in the workplace, let alone using a within-subjects design. It is possible that an organization may focus on one perceived barrier instead of all four barriers. The audience challenge \((M = 3.56, SD = 2.65)\) was rated the highest for a perceived barrier, the equality challenge \((M = 3.42, SD = 2.61)\) was rated second highest, the sexual challenge \((M = 3.31, SD = 2.56)\) was rated third highest, and the emotional bond challenge \((M = 3.16, SD = 2.46)\) was rated fourth highest. If this hierarchy is replicable, organizations may be able to target initiatives to encourage building friendships in the work that specifically help to nullify perceived challenges. However, some of these means are very close to one another, so strongly advocating for a functional hierarchy of barriers should be delayed until future research can determine whether the differences observed are meaningful.

Previous research by Monsour et al. (1994) found the following hierarchy for reported challenges: the emotional bond challenge, the audience challenge, the sexual challenge, and the equality challenge. Their study was conducted over twenty years ago, and the relative importance of the challenges may have shifted given how different some of the dialogue around issues of sex, gender, and sexual orientation may be now compared to 1994. As noted, the audience challenge was not reported most often as a perceived barrier for cross-sex friendships in the past. The shift may stem from
organizational policies restricting romantic relationships, which may enhance concerns for employees to ensure their coworkers see relationships as strictly friendships. Like the audience challenge, the emotional bond challenge may no longer be as much of concern for modern cross-sex friendships because organizations help define relationships by putting restrictions on the types of relationships allowed at work. Furthermore, the present study used full-time employees in the United States, whereas Monsour et al. did not utilize the same selection criteria. Monsour et al. recruited their student sample from two western universities with no other selection criteria. Future research should consider the environment in which the relationships are fostered when investigating the potential hierarchy of perceived barriers.

The significant results for Hypotheses 1-4 support the existence of the glass partition. The glass partition represents barriers in the workplace that prevent male and female employees from forming cross-sex friendships (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). Even though Elsesser and Peplau (2006) emphasized the obstacles females faced in predominantly male organizations, this study did not find that the participant’s gender made a difference with the perceived barriers he or she faced with his or her workplace friends (though again, the smaller sample size for male-female comparisons may be partially at fault). The gender that is “suffering” because of the barriers to cross-sex friendships may depend on the gender of the people occupying the upper level positions in the company. As more women enter supervisory and executive positions, men may have a harder time forming and maintaining relationships with the people in the upper level positions, putting them at a disadvantage that has traditionally been reserved for women.
The present study also expanded the challenges faced by cross-sex friendships beyond the challenges in Elsesser and Peplau’s (2006) study. All four challenges proposed by O’Meara (1989; emotional bond, audience, sexual, and equality) were found to be stronger perceived barriers for cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships in the workplace. Increasing and identifying the challenges faced by cross-sex friendships will permit organizations the opportunity to eliminate those challenges. Therefore, employees will receive the benefits of friendships in the workplace as a result of the increased chance of forming friendships at work regardless of the other’s sex.

This study revealed that employees not only perceived more challenges for their cross-sex friendships than their same-sex friendships, but they also perceived fewer opportunities for and less prevalence of cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships. These results indicate that organizations may have environments that support more same-sex friendships than cross-sex friendships. However, because the sample was not restricted to a single organization, it may be that the barriers exist at a much broader cultural level. Organizations need to be cognizant of the cultural messages relating to friendship and the appropriateness of different “types” of friendships, and how these may affect employees. Regardless of their source, barriers appear to exist when forming and maintaining cross-sex friendships in the workplace. At the same time, these findings are more relevant to heterosexual individuals, which comprised 90.6% of the sample.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present study is not without limitations. The survey used in the present study did not define workplace friendships, and therefore, participants were able to subjectively decide which friendships to refer to in the study. However, it is possible that participants
have different perceptions of workplace friendships, and these different frameworks may have influenced what friendships the participants decided to include or exclude while answering questions. Future research should include a definition of a friend. For example, Elsesser and Peplau (2006) provided a definition for the participants to use as a reference, “A friend is defined as someone you make an effort to talk to outside of what is required to complete your duties at work. That would not include people with whom you only exchange greetings, but would include those with whom you have short conversations that are not required by your job” (p. 1083). Future research could also ask participants what they believe constitutes a “workplace friendship,” and based on the responses, an alternate definition could be formed.

An additional limitation to the present study is that participants had the option to access the survey again after not passing the inclusion criteria. Because there was no way to prevent participants from (for example) opening the survey in multiple tabs and simply closing one and moving to another if they failed the inclusion questions, participants could theoretically start the survey over again to change their answers if they wished. However, participant data were still subjected to all quality checks and exclusions were made based on quality check failures.

Although the sample was compiled from full-time employees working within the United States, the participants were diverse on their employment and presumably the organizations for which they work, making it probable that the extent to which any given challenge is salient to the participants will have a great deal of variability. The lack of knowledge as to where the challenges to cross-sex friendships originate is a limitation to the study, though the fact that the first four hypotheses were supported would seem to
suggest that despite cross-organizational differences, there are meaningful distinctions that exist at a broad level between cross-sex and same-sex friendships. The results revealed challenges to forming and maintaining cross-sex friendships in the workplace when compared to same-sex friendships. Further examining the present research question at different positions in individual organizations or at different levels within the organizational hierarchy may reveal an extent to which the challenges may be influenced at a more narrow level.

Future research may also acquire qualitative data in order to investigate why participants feel the emotional bond, audience, sexual, and equality challenges affect their cross-sex friendships more than they do their same-sex friendships. Open-ended questions have been used in past literature to better understand relationship barriers (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Monsour et al., 1994; Morrison, 2009). For example, Elsesser and Peplau (2006) conducted interviews that allowed participants to discuss friendship development inside and outside of the workplace. Participants reported that it was easier to meet and make friends at work than outside of work. However, the challenges to forming and maintaining friendships were focused on the work environment. Future research should investigate how other environments may inhibit cross-sex friendships from forming. For example, future research could include perspectives of cross-sex and same-sex friendships inside and outside the workplace, and the environment that encompasses more challenges to forming and maintaining these relationships.

Another important limitation was the lack of power for the tests for mean differences with Hypothesis 5. The sample of 64 participants was not enough to test with the power of .80 present for the other four hypotheses. However, the effect sizes for both
t-tests relevant to Hypothesis 5 were high enough to suggest significant results would be obtained with a larger sample size. The item “Fear of sexual harassment charge makes it more difficult for men to initiate friendships with women” was more likely to be reported as an obstacle for males than females ($d = .32$). In addition, the item “Worry that friendliness will be misinterpreted as sexual harassment,” was more likely to be reported as an obstacle for males than females ($d = .18$). Future research should investigate these perceptions of sexual harassment using appropriate sample sizes.

Small sample sizes for the sexual orientation categories are another limitation to the present study. Sexual orientation did produce significant differences for four of the eight items from *Questions Regarding Challenges to Friendships in the Workplace*, but the small sample sizes make interpreting differences questionable. The sample consisted of 58 heterosexual participants, but only four bisexual participants, one gay participant, and one lesbian participant. Larger sample sizes would be beneficial in order to understand the role sexual orientation may play in perceptions of cross-sex vs. same-sex friendships in the workplace. This future research may indicate that the perceived barriers affect employees differentially based on sexual orientation. However, the six participants that were not heterosexual were included in the analyses for more conservative tests and to meet the 64-subject requirement indicated by the power analysis.

An additional assessment may be included in future research. The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) characterizes respondent sex roles as masculine, feminine, or androgynous (Bem, 1974). The BSRI asks a person to respond to 60 masculine, feminine, and neutral personality characteristics by indicating how well each describes him or herself. The scale ranges from 1 (*Never or almost never true*) to 7 (*Always or almost true*)
always true). Research with the scale has shown that individuals who tend to identify more with the opposite gender orientation rather than their own retain more cross-sex friendships (Lenton & Webber, 2006). Future research may find gender orientation as a useful covariate in order to better understand the relationship between cross-sex friendship challenges and same-sex friendship challenges.

Conclusions

The present study applied a within-subjects design in order to compare cross-sex friendships and same-sex friendships in the workplace. Analyses were conducted to investigate whether challenges were reported as greater barriers for cross-sex or same-sex friendships. In addition, exploratory analyses were performed to determine which challenge was perceived to be more of an obstacle in the workplace and to determine which "type" of friendship was more easily formed and maintained in the workplace.

Findings from this study revealed that employees feel their cross-sex friendships offer stronger obstacles than their same-sex friendships. Employees indicated that the emotional bond challenge, the audience challenge, the sexual challenge, and the equality challenge were reported significantly more of a barrier with their cross-sex friends than their same-sex friends at work. Demographics did not appear to be potential covariates for the challenges. The two items related to sexual harassment did not yield significant results for differences between males and females. These non-significant results should be viewed with caution, however, because the effect sizes were high enough to suggest significant results with a larger sample size. Results from the Cross-Sex Friendships with Peers Scale presented "Men and women have different interaction styles or different ways of talking to each other" as the greatest perceived obstacle for employees and "Men
and women can’t be friends without some sexual tension” as the least perceived obstacle for employees. Furthermore, employees were significantly more likely to report a stronger opportunity for and prevalence of same-sex friendships in the workplace than cross-sex friendships.

Results from the present study suggest employees perceive their same-sex friendships as easier to form and maintain than their cross-sex friendships in the workplace. However, further studies should develop a framework for friendships in the workplace in order to decrease ambiguity. Future studies should include larger sample sizes, especially with regards to sexual orientation categories. Adequate sample sizes may show the need to use sexual orientation as a covariate with future research, or to treat it as its own research factor in considering forming and maintaining workplace friendships. Lastly, further studies should include qualitative items. Qualitative questions investigating why challenges affect employee’s cross-sex friendships more than same-sex friendship may lead to answers regarding the breakdown of barriers.
Chapter VI

Summary

Employees sharing similar interests or goals commonly form friendships in the workplace (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). Organizations can also play a role in the formation of friendships because of the physical proximity of employees and formally assigned work relationships (Dotan, 2007; Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). Organizations should be interested in the formation of friendships because research has demonstrated that such relationships are beneficial to both the employee and the organization (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Morrison, 2009). Even though literature has supported the positive outcomes associated with workplace friendships, little research has specifically examined cross-sex friendships. O’Meara (1989) proposed four challenges cross-sex friendships may face in addition to challenges same-sex friendships encounter. These cross-sex challenges may be one of the barriers faced by women in the workforce as they enter predominantly male positions and organizations, a phenomenon known as the glass partition (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Herman & Ellen, 2005).

The main purpose of this study is to identify potential challenges to forming and maintaining cross-sex friendships in the workplace. The study will test hypotheses regarding O’Meara’s (1989) proposed four challenges: the emotional bond challenge, the audience challenge, the sexual challenge, and the equality challenge. Because the emotional bond challenge was the most common challenge reported outside of the
workplace for cross-sex friendships relative to same-sex friendships (Monsour et al. (1994), it is expected that it will also be present in the workplace.

Hypothesis 1: The emotional bond challenge will be more commonly reported as an issue in the workplace with cross-sex friends than same-sex friends.

The audience challenge was the second most reported challenge outside of the workplace, and employees partaking in cross-sex friendships may view this as more of a challenge than their same-sex friendships. The audience challenge should be reported frequently in a workplace based on Elsesser and Peplau’s (2006) findings that employees worried about their cross-sex friendships being viewed as romantic relationships. Organizations may possess policies restricting romantic relationships, and thus, creating more of a concern for employees to ensure coworkers see their relationships as strictly friendships.

Hypothesis 2: The audience challenge will be reported more often as an issue within the workplace for cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships.

Similarly, the sexual challenge, the third most commonly reported challenge, may be viewed as a potential issue to cross-sex friendships in the workplace. The present study is focusing on heterosexual individuals, where same-sex friendships may not deal with the sexual challenge as often as cross-sex friendships because the sexual tension may not be as common with same-sex friendships in the workplace. Finally, although the least reported challenge for cross-sex friendships outside the workplace was the equality challenge, this challenge may be heightened within the workplace context because position/power levels are clearly defined in an organization.
Hypothesis 3: The sexual challenge will be reported more often as an issue within the workplace for cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships.

Hypothesis 4: The equality challenge will be reported more often as an issue within the workplace for cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships.

In addition to exploring the four challenges, the study will also address possible gender differences with perceptions of sexual harassment and cross-sex friendships. As Elsesser and Peplau (2006) found, males were more often concerned about their actions being labeled as sexual harassment by females than females were concerned about their actions being labeled as such by males.

Hypothesis 5: Perceptions of sexual harassment for cross-sex friendships will be reported more of an obstacle to the relationship for males than females.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The respondents were required to have a full-time employment status with an organization employing at least 50 workers to participate in the study. In addition, the respondents needed to be living in the United States. The sample consisted of 64 participants, and the age of the participants ranged from 22 to 63 ($M = 33.94$, $SD = 9.13$). Furthermore, the positions held by the participants encompassed a wide range such as administrative assistant, manager, and graphic artist.

Measures

Nielsen, Jex, and Adams (2000) developed the Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendship Scale to measure both the Opportunity and Prevalence for workplace friends.
The Opportunity and Prevalence subscales have six items each that are measured on a 5-point scale, and the measures are both scored by averaging responses within each scale. The scale was slightly altered to ask participants about their cross-sex and same-sex friendships in the workplace. Coefficient alpha for this study was .91 for the Friendship Opportunity of same-sex friends, .87 for the Friendship Prevalence of same-sex friends, .91 for the Friendship Opportunity of cross-sex friends, and .89 for the Prevalence Opportunity of cross-sex friends.

Questions regarding challenges to friendships in the workplace were developed for the present study in order to address the four challenges. The four challenges were measured using one question each, and the questions examined how often respondents report the challenges with cross-sex friends and same-sex friends. When responding to the questions, participants were asked to first think of their cross-sex friendships and secondly their same-sex friendships in the workplace. Respondents answered on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 9 (To a great extent), and the coefficient alpha for this study was .93 for the items relating to same-sex challenges and .95 for the items relating to cross-sex challenges.

Elsesser and Peplau (2006) developed a 10-item survey to assess the obstacles or barriers the workplace creates when initiating an opposite sex friendship. Response options on the scale range from 1 (No obstacle at all) to 9 (An insurmountable obstacle). Only the “peer” version of this survey was utilized in this study to obtain the general attitudes toward initiating cross-sex friendships with peers, and the coefficient alpha for the scale in this study was .92.
The demographic information collected included age, race, gender, position of employment, and sexual orientation.

Procedure

Participants viewed a consent form prior to participating in the research study, and the study was completed through SurveyMonkey.com. A within-subjects design was used in order to compare participants’ cross-sex and same-sex friendships in the workplace. The measures were presented to the participants in the following order: Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendship Scale, Questions Regarding Challenges to Friendships in the Workplace, Cross-Sex Friendships with Peers scale, and Demographics survey.

Results

Hypothesis 1 proposed that participants would more often report the emotional bond challenge as a barrier with their cross-sex friends than their same-sex friends. Results of a paired-samples t-test indicated that the mean score for cross-sex friends ($M = 3.16, SD = 2.46$) was significantly greater for the emotional bond challenge than same-sex friends ($M = 2.53, SD = 2.02$), $t(63) = 2.76, p = .008, d = .34$. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 stated that participants would be more likely to report the audience challenge as a barrier with their cross-sex friends than their same-sex friends. The results revealed that the mean score for cross-sex friends ($M = 3.56, SD = 2.65$) was significantly greater for the audience challenge than same-sex friends ($M = 2.72, SD = 2.37$), $t(63) = 3.59, p = .001, d = .45$. Hypothesis 2 was supported as well.
Hypothesis 3 proposed that participants would more often report the sexual challenge as a barrier with their cross-sex friends than their same-sex friends. The results indicated that the mean score for cross-sex friends \((M = 3.31, SD = 2.56)\) was significantly greater for the sexual challenge than same-sex friends \((M = 2.41, SD = 2.39)\), \(t(63) = 3.03, p = .002, d = .41\). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 stated that participants would be more likely to report the equality challenge as a barrier with their cross-sex friends than their same-sex friends. The results revealed that the mean score for cross-sex friends \((M = 3.42, SD = 2.61)\) was significantly greater for the equality challenge than same-sex friends \((M = 2.92, SD = 2.34)\), \(t(63) = 2.70 p = .009, d = .34\). As with hypotheses 1-3, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Two independent samples \(t\)-tests were utilized to assess Hypothesis 5. The analysis for the item, “Worry that friendliness will be misinterpreted as sexual harassment,” indicated that the mean scores for males \((M = 4.06, SD = 2.51)\) and females \((M = 3.58, SD = 2.74)\) were not significantly different \(t(62) = .73 p = .47, d = .18\). The analysis for the other item used for perceptions of sexual harassment yielded comparable results. “Fear of sexual harassment charges makes it more difficult for men to initiate friendships with women” revealed that the mean scores for males \((M = 4.06, SD = 2.34)\) and females \((M = 3.35, SD = 2.12)\) were not significantly different \(t(62) = 1.26 p = .21, d = .32\). Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was not supported, though this is likely a function in part of the lower power for the test of between-subjects effects.

The **Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendships Scale** was utilized for exploratory purposes. The results of paired-samples \(t\)-tests indicated that the mean score for cross-sex friends \((M = 4.12, SD = .67)\) was significantly lower for the Friendship Opportunity
dimension than same-sex friends \((M = 4.30, SD = .66), t(63) = 3.34, p = .001\). The standardized effect size index, \(d\), was .42. In addition, the results revealed that the mean score for cross-sex friends \((M = 3.29, SD = .98)\) was significantly lower for the Friendship Prevalence dimension than same-sex friends \((M = 3.70, SD = .87), t(63) = 3.59, p = .001, d = .45\). The analysis revealed that participants were more likely to report higher scores of opportunity and prevalence for same-sex friendships in the workplace than cross-sex friendships.

**Discussion**

Overall, results from this sample showed that employees believe their cross-sex friendships have significantly more barriers than their same-sex friendships. Four hypotheses were examined in order to determine whether O’Meara’s (1989) proposed four challenges to cross-sex friendships had an effect on how people think about friendships at work.

The emotional bond challenge was, in fact, reported as more of an issue for cross-sex friendships than for same-sex friendships \((d = .34)\), supporting Hypothesis 1. Similarly, the audience challenge was reported to be more of an issue for cross-sex than same-sex friendships \((d = .45)\), supporting Hypothesis 2, the sexual challenge was more of an issue for cross-sex than same-sex friendships \((d = .41)\), supporting Hypothesis 3, and the equality challenge was more of an issue for cross-sex than same-sex friendships \((d = .34)\), supporting Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5 predicted the perceptions of sexual harassment for cross-sex friendships would be reported as more of an obstacle to the relationship for males than females, and was not supported. Although results were not significant, the effect size was
in hypothesized direction, and likely would have been significant had the *a priori* power analysis focused on the between-subjects portion of the study rather than the within-subjects hypotheses.

Further analyses were conducted to examine potential covariates. The demographic variables gender and race resulted in no significant differences on the eight items from *Questions Regarding Challenges to Friendships in the Workplace*. The small sample sizes for three of the four sexual orientation groups make interpreting sexual orientation differences questionable, and as such sexual orientation was also not used as a covariate.

Lastly, exploratory analyses were conducted using the *Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendships Scale* to examine participant opportunities for and prevalence of workplace friendships with both cross-sex and same-sex friends. Results indicated significant differences wherein participants reported more opportunities for same-sex friends than cross-sex friends and maintaining more same-sex friends than cross-sex friends.

The present study expanded on the literature for challenges faced by cross-sex friendships because O’Meara’s (1989) four challenges had not been explicitly examined in the workplace, let alone using a within-subjects design. It is possible that an organization may focus on one perceived barrier instead of all four barriers. The audience challenge (*M* = 3.56, *SD* = 2.65) was rated the highest for a perceived barrier, the equality challenge (*M* = 3.42, *SD* = 2.61) was rated second highest, the sexual challenge (*M* = 3.31, *SD* = 2.56) was rated third highest, and the emotional bond challenge (*M* = 3.16, *SD* = 2.46) was rated fourth highest. If this hierarchy is replicable, organizations may be able
to target initiatives to encourage building friendships in the work that specifically help to nullify perceived challenges. However, strongly advocating for a functional hierarchy of barriers should be delayed until future research can determine whether the differences observed are meaningful.

The significant results for Hypotheses 1-4 support the existence of the glass partition. The glass partition represents barriers in the workplace that prevent male and female employees from forming cross-sex friendships (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006). Even though Elsesser and Peplau (2006) emphasized the obstacles females faced in predominantly male organizations, this study did not find that the participant’s gender made a difference with the perceived barriers he or she faced with his or her workplace friends (though again, the smaller sample size for male-female comparisons may be partially at fault).

The present study also expanded the challenges faced by cross-sex friendships beyond the challenges in Elsesser and Peplau’s (2006) study. All four challenges proposed by O’Meara (1989) were found to be stronger perceived barriers for cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships in the workplace. This study revealed that employees not only perceived more challenges for their cross-sex friendships than their same-sex friendships, but they also perceived fewer opportunities for and less prevalence of cross-sex friendships than same-sex friendships. These results indicate that organizations may have environments that support more same-sex friendships than cross-sex friendships. However, because the sample was not restricted to a single organization, it may be that the barriers exist at a much broader cultural level. Regardless of their source, barriers appear to exist when forming and maintaining cross-sex friendships in
the workplace. At the same time, these findings are more relevant to heterosexual individuals, which comprised 90.6% of the sample.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The measurements used within the study refer to workplace friendships, but this relationship was not defined in the study. Future research should include a definition of a friend. For example, Elsesser and Peplau (2006) provided a definition for the participants to use as a reference.

Although the sample was compiled from full-time employees working within the United States, the participants were diverse on their employment and presumably the organizations for which they work, making it probable that the extent to which any given challenge is salient to the participants will have a great deal of variability. The lack of knowledge as to where the challenges to cross-sex friendships originate is a limitation to the study. Further examining the present research question at different positions in individual organizations or at different levels within the organizational hierarchy may reveal an extent to which the challenges may be influenced at a more narrow level.

Future research may also acquire qualitative data in order to investigate why participants feel the emotional bond, audience, sexual, and equality challenges affect their cross-sex friendships more than they do their same-sex friendships. Open-ended questions have been used in past literature to better understand relationship barriers (Elsesser & Peplau, 2006; Monsour et al., 1994; Morrison, 2009).

Another important limitation was the lack of power for the tests for mean differences with Hypothesis 5. The sample of 64 participants was not enough to test with the power of .80 present for the other four hypotheses. However, the effect sizes for both
t-tests relevant to Hypothesis 5 were high enough to suggest significant results would be obtained with a larger sample size. Future research should investigate these perceptions of sexual harassment using appropriate sample sizes.

Small sample sizes for the sexual orientation categories are another limitation to the present study. Larger sample sizes would be beneficial in order to understand the role sexual orientation may play in perceptions of cross-sex vs. same-sex friendships in the workplace. This future research may indicate that the perceived barriers affect employees differentially based on sexual orientation.

Conclusions

Findings from this study revealed that employees feel their cross-sex friendships offer stronger obstacles than their same-sex friendships. Employees indicated that the emotional bond challenge, the audience challenge, the sexual challenge, and the equality challenge were reported significantly more of a barrier with their cross-sex friends than their same-sex friends at work. Demographics did not appear to be potential covariates for the challenges. The two items related to sexual harassment did not yield significant results for differences between males and females. These non-significant results should be viewed with caution, however, because the effect sizes were high enough to suggest significant results with a larger sample size. Results from the Cross-Sex Friendships with Peers Scale presented “Men and women have different interaction styles or different ways of talking to each other” as the greatest perceived obstacle for employees and “Men and women can’t be friends without some sexual tension” as the least perceived obstacle for employees. Furthermore, employees were significantly more likely to report a
stronger opportunity for and prevalence of same-sex friendships in the workplace than cross-sex friendships.

Results from the present study suggest employees perceive their same-sex friendships as easier to form and maintain than their cross-sex friendships in the workplace. However, further studies should develop a framework for friendships in the workplace in order to decrease ambiguity. Future studies should include larger sample sizes, especially with regards to sexual orientation categories. Adequate sample sizes may show the need to use sexual orientation as a covariate with future research, or to treat it as its own research factor in considering forming and maintaining workplace friendships. Lastly, further studies should include qualitative items. Qualitative questions investigating why challenges affect employee’s cross-sex friendships more than same-sex friendship may lead to answers regarding the breakdown of barriers.
References


Appendix A

MTurk Interface

Instructions

This study will ask you to respond to a number of questions about yourself and your experience with workplace friendships. This study should take no longer than 30 minutes, and you will be compensated 50 cents if you complete the study in its entirety and if your data pass all relevant quality checks. In order to participate in this survey, you must be a full-time employee to a company that employs at least 50 people, and you must be currently living in the United States. If you meet these qualifications, please click the link below to begin the survey.

Make sure to enter your MTurk ID below after completing the survey.

Survey Link: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Friendshipworkplacesurvey
Provide your MTurk ID here:

[SUBMIT]
Appendix B

Two-Dimensional Workplace Friendship Scale

Appendix C

Questions Regarding Challenges to Friendships in the Workplace

For each of the items below, please consider the extent to which each factor may be an obstacle to forming and maintaining friendships in the workplace. Use the following scale for your responses.

| Not at all | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | To a great extent | 8 | 9 |

Referring to Cross-Sex Friendships in the Workplace

1. In your relationships with your cross-sex friends, is ensuring other coworkers understand your relationship is strictly a friendship a challenge that has generally emerged?

2. In your relationships with your cross-sex friends, is defining the sexual boundaries of your relationship at work an obstacle that has generally emerged?

3. In your relationships with your cross-sex friends, is ensuring an equal status in the relationship an obstacle that has generally emerged in the workplace?

4. In your relationships with your cross-sex friends, is defining the emotional bond you and your coworker may possess an obstacle that has generally emerged?

Referring to Same-Sex Friendships in the Workplace

1. In your relationships with your same-sex friends, is ensuring other coworkers understand your relationship is strictly a friendship a challenge that has generally emerged?

2. In your relationships with your same-sex friends, is defining the sexual boundaries of your relationship at work an obstacle that has generally emerged?

3. In your relationships with your same-sex friends, is ensuring an equal status in the relationship an obstacle that has generally emerged in the workplace?
4. In your relationships with your same-sex friends, is defining the emotional bond you and your coworker may possess an obstacle that has generally emerged?
Appendix D

Cross-Sex Friendships with Peers Scale

Appendix E

Demographics

1. Age: ______
2. Gender
   ______: Male
   ______: Female
   ______: Prefer not to respond
3. In terms of race/ethnicity, how do you describe yourself? (Please select the option that best describes you)
   ______: American Indian or Alaska Native
   ______: Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   ______: Asian or Asian American
   ______: Black or African American
   ______: Hispanic or Latino
   ______: White (Non-Hispanic)
   ______: Multi-racial
   ______: Other: _____________________________
   ______: Prefer not to respond
4. What is the position you currently hold at your organization?
5. What is your sexual orientation?
   ______: Gay
   ______: Lesbian
   ______: Heterosexual
   ______: Bisexual
   ______: Other
   ______: Prefer not to respond
6. What is your MTurk worker ID? (Note: This is needed only to ensure you can be paid, provided your data pass all relevant quality checks. No analyses will be run on your data until your worker ID has been removed from the data file.)
Appendix F

Quality Check Items

1. Please select ‘3’ for this item.

   \[
   \begin{array}{ccccc}
   & Strongly Disagree & & & Strongly Agree \\
   1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \\
   \end{array}
   \]

2. Please check ‘Packers’ from the list of NFL football teams below.
   
   _____: Bengals
   _____: Packers
   _____: Patriots

3. About how large is the organization in which you are currently employed?
   
   _____: 0 – 49 employees
   _____: 50+ employees
Appendix G

IRB Approval Letter

July 10, 2014

Brandy Fitzpatrick
3501 Section Road
Cincinnati, OH 45237

Re: Protocol #13-098, Challenges to Forming and Maintaining Cross-Sex Friendships in the Workplace

Dear Ms. Fitzpatrick:

The IRB has reviewed the request to modify your study, referenced above. We understand that you have modified the Mtrk interface and the informed consent by adding inclusion criteria. We are able to continue to approve your study based on the information you provided. Therefore, your above-referenced study, as modified, continues to be approved in the Exempt category under Federal Guidelines 45CFR46.

Please note that if you wish to further modify your study, it will be necessary to obtain IRB approval prior to implementing the modification. If any adverse events occur, please notify the IRB immediately.

We truly appreciate your efforts and attention to compliance within the spirit of human subject’s protection. We wish you great success with your research.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Kathleen J. Hart, Ph.D., ABPP
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board
Xavier University

KJH/sb
Appendix H

MTurk Inclusion Criteria

1. Does the organization where you currently work employ at least 50 employees?
   Yes
   No

2. Are you a full-time employee?
   Yes
   No

3. Do you currently live outside of the United States?
   Yes
   No
Appendix I

Informed Consent Form

You are being given the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a study conducted by Brandy Fitzpatrick through Xavier University. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this study. If you are not currently employed by an organization with at least 50 employees, or if you are not a full-time employee based on your company’s definition of the term, you cannot take part in the study.

The research involves your participation in a study concerning challenges faced by cross-sex friendships and same-sex friendships in the workplace. Your contribution should be reflective of your experiences with forming and maintaining friendships in the workplace. This study will ask you to respond to a number of questions about yourself and your experience with workplace friendships. This study should take no longer than 30 minutes, and you will be compensated 50 cents. If you agree to take part in this study, you will receive compensation if you complete the study in its entirety and if your data pass all relevant quality checks. There are no known or anticipated negative consequences associated with your participation in this study. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from Xavier University. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, but you will not be compensated for an incomplete survey.

In order to process your payment, at the end of the study you will be asked to enter your unique MTurk worker ID; you will also need to enter this in the study’s MTurk front-end screen, so that the researchers can appropriately distribute payments.

If you have any questions at any time (during or after the study), you may contact the principal investigator, Brandy Fitzpatrick, at fitzpatrickb1@xavier.edu or her project supervisor, Dr. Morrie Mullins, at mullins@xavier.edu. Questions about your rights as a research subject should be directed to Xavier University’s Institutional Review Board at 513-745-2870.

None of your answers from the surveys will be distributed in a way that would allow you to potentially be identified. The answers are kept anonymous, and will be electronically stored without your name attached.

By clicking the “NEXT” button and continuing on with this project, I indicate that I have read and agreed to all of the above, and am voluntarily giving my informed consent.