

### Original Article

## Friends with Benefits, but Without the Sex: Straight Women and Gay Men Exchange Trustworthy Mating Advice

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**Abstract:** Although research has made progress in elucidating the benefits exchanged within same- and opposite-sex friendships formed between heterosexual men and women, it is less clear why straight women and gay men form close relationships with one another. The current experiments begin to address this question by exploring a potential benefit hypothesized to be uniquely available to straight women and gay men in the context of these friendships: trustworthy mating advice. Experiment 1 revealed that straight women perceive mating-relevant advice from a gay man to be more trustworthy than similar advice offered by a straight man or woman. Experiment 2 demonstrated that gay men perceive mating advice offered by a straight woman to be more trustworthy than advice offered by a lesbian woman or another gay man. Overall, the results provide initial experimental evidence that relationships between gay men and straight women may be characterized by a mutual exchange of mating-relevant benefits in the absence of sexual interest or competition.

**Keywords:** friendship, heterosexual women, homosexual men, trustworthiness, human mating.

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### Introduction

Both popular culture and the psychological literature have recently begun to recognize the special significance of the “straight female-gay male” friendship (Castro-Convers, Gray, Ladany, and Metzler, 2005; Cruz and Dolby, 2007; Grigoriou, 2004; Hopcke and Rafaty, 1999; Maitland, 1991; Malone, 1980; Thompson, 2004). However, in contrast to a growing body of work examining the benefits of platonic relationships

between heterosexual men and women (e.g., Bleske-Rechek and Buss, 2001; Lewis, Al-Shawaf, Conroy-Beam, Asao, and Buss, 2012; Lewis et al., 2011), there has been no experimental research examining the nature of close relationships formed between straight women and gay men. The current research begins to address this gap in the literature by experimentally examining the nature of the perceived benefits available to gay men and straight women in the context of these friendships. Using insight provided by an evolutionary social psychological perspective, we predicted that relationships between straight women and gay men may be uniquely characterized by an exchange of unbiased mating-relevant advice in the absence of ulterior motives.

### **The Nature of Friendships Formed Between Straight Women and Gay Men**

Preliminary investigations have begun to examine the unique closeness of friendships formed between straight women and gay men. However, many of these studies have been qualitative in nature and focused primarily on the women - often referred to as “fag hags” or “fruit flies” - who regularly associate with gay men (see, e.g., Castro-Convers et al., 2005; Grigoriou, 2004; Moon, 1995; Tillmann-Healy, 2001). These studies suggest that gay men provide positive attention for these women that straight men do not provide. For example, gay men are viewed as accepting and admiring women for who they are, regardless of their physical appearance (Cho, 2001; Warren, 1976). As a result, women with more gay male friends report increased feelings of sexual attractiveness and greater appreciation for their body relative to women who do not have gay male friends (Barlett, Patterson, VanderLaan, and Vasey, 2009). They also report feeling valued for their personality instead of their sexuality when they are with their gay – as opposed to straight – male friends (Cho, 2001; Hopcke and Rafaty, 1999; Malone, 1980). Finally, heterosexual women report an increased sense of honesty and security when interacting with their gay male friends compared to their heterosexual male and female friends (Grigoriou, 2004).

Although most of the research conducted up to this point has examined straight female-gay male friendships from the female perspective, there is research suggesting that gay men place similarly high value on their friendships with straight women. For example, a study conducted by Grigoriou (2004) revealed that gay men view their straight female friends to be particularly trustworthy sources of information regarding their romantic lives, contrasting it with their experiences with other gay men. In this study, gay men described their friendships with straight women to be ‘meaningful’ and ‘deep,’ whereas their platonic relationships with other gay men were described as ‘shallow’ and ‘superficial.’ Taken together, these findings suggest that honesty and trust may be the foundation for close friendships formed between straight women and gay men.

### **The Absence of Deceptive Mating Motivations Among Gay Male and Straight Female Friends**

Although previous research suggests that gay men and straight women perceive one another to be uniquely trustworthy sources of social support, researchers have not yet experimentally examined what distinguishes these friendships from those that gay men and straight women form with other individuals. Though seemingly counterintuitive, a functional psychological perspective suggests that these friendships may be set apart by

unique mating-relevant benefits exchanged by individuals within these friendships in the absence of sexual interest and competition.

Previous research reveals some of the potential costs associated with women's friendships with heterosexual men and women. Although straight male friends frequently provide women with physical protection, economic resources, and valuable information about the "male perspective" (Bleske and Buss, 2000; Lewis et al., 2011), these friendships can also suffer due to men's sexual attraction toward their female friends. For example, men tend to perceive more sexual interest in women's actions than women intend (DeSouza, Pierce, Zanelli, and Hutz, 1992), and indeed, men often interpret friendly greetings or actions performed by their female friends as indicating sexual interest (Abbey, 1982; Browne, 2006; Saal, Johnson, and Weber, 1989).

Whereas women's friendships with straight men may be tainted by one-sided sexual interest, women's friendships with other straight women may be tainted by a different brand of mating-relevant mistrust: intrasexual competition. Despite the companionship and emotional support that straight women often receive from their female friends (Bleske and Buss, 2000; Gottman and Mettetal, 1986; Rose, 1985), these friends can also interfere with one another's mate attraction efforts (Bleske and Buss, 2000; Buss 2003). Indeed, previous research demonstrates that women utilize a number of deceptive strategies to successfully outcompete each other for access to desirable mates (e.g., competitor derogation and manipulation; Buss and Dedden, 1990; Fisher and Cox, 2010; Schmitt and Buss, 1996; Tooke and Camire, 1991). Research has also demonstrated that women's same-sex friendships are more fragile and less tolerant than men's (e.g., Benenson et al., 2009). Therefore, like women's friendships with straight men, straight women's friendships with each other can be maligned by skepticism and distrust, particularly with regards to mating-relevant concerns.

Relative to straight women's same-sex friendships, there has been very little research conducted on gay male friendships; however, some recent research suggests that gay men's friendships with one another may be tainted by similar concerns as those inherent in straight women's friendships with each other. Despite the benefits of social support and identity development that gay men receive from their gay male friends (Kocet, 2002; Nardi, 1992; Nardi, 1999; Shippy, Cantor, and Brennan, 2004), gay men (like straight women) often compete with one another for access to desirable mates. Although researchers have not explicitly tested the specific mate competition techniques most often utilized by gay men, it is possible that gay men use the same strategies employed by straight women when competing for mates (i.e., competitor derogation and manipulation; Fisher and Cox, 2010). Indeed, research suggests that gay men do view their gay male friends as potential threats to their intimate relationships (Grigoriou, 2004).

Gay men's relationships with each other are further complicated by potential sexual interest that may arise within these friendships. Although researchers have not yet examined the nature of sexual motives that may intrude into relationships between platonic gay male friends, it is possible that these relationships may possess some of the same characteristics as platonic friendships formed between heterosexual men and women. In other words, sexual interest on the part of one individual may prevent an honest exchange of information from taking place within these friendships. Due to concerns about

competitive and sexual deception that may operate simultaneously in gay male friendships, the lack of trust between gay men noted in previous research (Grigoriou, 2004) may be especially pronounced in mating-relevant contexts.

### **The Current Research**

In light of the various challenges that straight women and gay men often encounter in their other friendships (i.e., mating competition/interest), we hypothesize that the trust and honesty that often characterizes gay male-straight female friendships may be rooted in mating-relevant domains. For example, straight women may experience increased trust in their relationships with gay men due to the absence of deceptive mating motivations that frequently taint their relationships with straight men (sexual interest) and other straight women (mate competition). Similarly, the sexual interest and competitive motives that may taint gay men's friendships with each other are notably absent from their relationships with straight women. Despite being sexually attracted to the same gender (i.e., men), gay men and straight women are neither potential romantic partners nor mating competition for each other. They are thus uniquely positioned to provide one another with mating-relevant advice and support that is not tainted with ulterior motives borne from intrasexual rivalry or sexual attraction. Therefore, we hypothesize that gay male-straight female friendships may be characterized by a unique exchange of trustworthy mating advice not readily available to gay men and straight women via their other friendships. In the current research, we used an experimental design to test the prediction that straight women and gay men will perceive mating advice (e.g., information about potential mating opportunities) provided by one another to be more trustworthy than similar advice offered by other individuals.

### **Experiment 1: Straight Women's Perceptions**

Experiment 1 examined women's perceived trustworthiness of advice offered by a gay male target relative to straight male and female targets. Because straight women's relationships with straight men and other straight women are often tainted by deceptive motives related to mating interest or competition, respectively (e.g., Abbey, 1982; Fisher and Cox, 2010), we predicted that straight women would perceive mating-relevant information provided by a gay male to be more trustworthy than similar advice provided by a straight male or straight female.

### **Materials and Methods**

#### *Participants.*

Participants were 88 heterosexual undergraduate women ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.02$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.04$ ; 30 in the straight female condition, 29 in the straight male condition, and 29 in the gay male condition) recruited from the psychology subject pool at a mid-sized university. All students received partial course credit in exchange for their participation.

#### *Design and procedure.*

Participants completed the experiment at partitioned computer terminals. They were

told that they would be participating in a study examining how online profiles influence friendships, and accordingly, they were asked a few questions regarding online profiles in order to bolster the believability of our cover story. Participants were then asked to consider the following scenario:

Imagine that you have recently been invited to a party by your friend. It is the night of the party and your friend becomes ill. However, they suggest you attend the party with one of their neighbors. You do not know this person, but you decide to look them up on Facebook before accompanying them to the party.

Next, participants were randomly assigned to view a fictitious Facebook profile ostensibly belonging to one of three targets: a straight female, a straight male, or a gay male. They then answered a series of questions about the scenario and the target they viewed. At the end of the experiment, participants were asked to identify the sexual preference of the target that they viewed to verify that they had noticed the target's sexual orientation. Additionally, participants were asked to indicate whether they themselves identify as gay, bisexual, straight, or other. We excluded from the final data analyses participants who failed to correctly identify the sexual orientation of the target ( $n = 7$ ) and non-heterosexual participants ( $n = 2$ ).

#### *Target stimuli.*

The Facebook profiles were identical (e.g., all profiles indicated the target's name was "Jordan," listed the same hobbies, etc.) except that target photographs and sexual preference information were modified and paired to create three different target profiles (i.e., a straight female, straight male, and gay male). Therefore, the same target photograph was used for the straight male and gay male target profiles. We selected female and male targets that appeared to be around college-aged and were averagely attractive. To ensure there were no significant differences in attractiveness between the male and female targets, participants were asked to rate the attractiveness of the target they viewed on a scale ranging from 1 (*very unattractive*) to 7 (*very attractive*). The analysis revealed no significant differences in attractiveness ratings given to the male and female targets ( $p > .99$ ). Further, all targets received mean attractiveness ratings near the mid-point of our 7-point rating scale (female target:  $M = 4.83$ ; gay male target:  $M = 4.83$ ; straight male target:  $M = 4.83$ ).

#### *Dependent measures.*

After viewing their randomly-assigned target profile, participants were asked to imagine attending a party with the depicted individual and to consider a variety of hypothetical scenarios in which the target offered them mating-relevant advice (e.g., told them how to interpret an interaction with an attractive member of the opposite sex). We assessed the degree to which participants said they would trust this advice using eight items (see Appendix for full list of items). All items were presented on 7-point Likert-type scales, with higher values corresponding to greater perceived trustworthiness of advice offered by the target.

Participants also answered three questions designed to assess their perception of the target's ability to help them find a mate. Specifically, participants rated the likelihood that the target could help them find an opposite-sex other in the form of (a) "a fling," (b) "a date," and (c) "a potential relationship" on 7-point rating scales (endpoints: 1 = *very unlikely*, 7 = *very likely*).

## **Results**

We first created composite scores for items assessing the perceived trustworthiness of mating advice ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and perceived mating help ( $\alpha = .71$ ) provided by the targets. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) revealed differences in the perceived trustworthiness of mating advice offered by the targets,  $F(2, 79) = 4.63, p = .01$ . Follow-up tests (Tukey's LSD,  $p < .05$ ) revealed that participants perceived advice offered by the gay male target to be more trustworthy ( $M = 4.45, SD = 0.95$ ) than advice offered by the straight male ( $M = 3.84, SD = 0.81$ ),  $p = .01, d = .69$ , or the straight female targets ( $M = 3.84, SD = 0.68$ ),  $p = .01, d = .74$ . There was no significant difference in the perceived trustworthiness of advice provided by the straight male and female targets ( $p > .99$ ), nor was there a significant difference in the perceived mating help provided by the targets ( $p = .77$ ).

## **Discussion**

Experiment 1 revealed that straight women perceive mating advice provided by gay men to be more trustworthy than similar advice offered by straight men or women. Although women did not indicate that the gay male target would be any more helpful in finding them a potential mate than the other targets, the results provide preliminary support for the hypothesis that friendships between gay men and straight women may be characterized by an exchange of mating advice that is not tainted by ulterior mating motives. Experiment 2 examines this hypothesis from the gay male perspective.

## **Experiment 2: Gay Men's Perceptions**

Previous research suggests that gay men perceive their friendships with straight women to be more meaningful and honest than their friendships with other gay men (Grigoriou, 2004). The logic of our functional perspective suggests that this may be due to gay men's friendships with one another being tainted by deceptive mating motivations similar to those that taint straight women's friendships with straight men (e.g., sexual interest; Abbey, 1982) and with other straight women (e.g., mate competition; Fisher and Cox, 2010). Therefore, Experiment 2 was designed to test the prediction that gay men will perceive mating advice offered by a straight female target to be more trustworthy than advice offered by a gay male target.

Experiment 1 demonstrated that straight women's increased perceived trustworthiness of mating advice was specific to gay men, and did not generalize to straight men, who may possess deceptive intent due to sexual interest in their female friends. In

order to test the specificity of our predicted effects to *straight* women, Experiment 2 included a novel “lesbian female” target condition. Previous research suggests a unique bond that exists between gay men and straight women, specifically (e.g., Grigoriou, 2004; Hopcke and Rafaty, 1999; Malone, 1980); however, there has been very little research conducted examining friendships between gay men and lesbian women. Although the research that does exist suggests that gay men and lesbian women have little in common and therefore rarely enter into close relationships with one another (Grigoriou, 2004; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan, 2001), lesbian women lack ulterior motives that could potentially taint the mating advice they offer to gay men (i.e., lesbian women are neither sexual competition nor potential romantic partners for gay men). In sum, lesbian women may lack the motivation to deceive their gay male friends in mating domains; however, their mating advice may not be seen as particularly useful either since lesbian women and gay men do not share many common interests, including the gender to which they are primarily sexually attracted (e.g., Weeks et al., 2001). Accordingly, our analyses regarding gay men’s perceptions of lesbian relative to straight women were somewhat exploratory in light of the dearth of research exploring friendships between gay men and lesbian women.

## **Materials and Methods**

### *Participants.*

Participants were 58 homosexual men ( $M_{\text{age}} = 21.28$  years,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.59$ ; 20 in the straight female condition, 20 in the lesbian condition, and 18 in the gay male condition) recruited from the university and at community-wide events geared towards the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community. A trained research assistant invited prospective participants to complete an online survey for which they would receive no compensation beyond their participation. Again, we excluded from the final data analyses participants who failed to correctly identify the sexual orientation of the target they viewed ( $n = 16$ ) and any participants who did not identify themselves as exclusively gay ( $n = 9$ ).

### *Design and procedure.*

Participants completed the experiment online. The cover story, design, procedure, and target stimuli were the same as Experiment 1, except that the straight male target condition was replaced with a lesbian female target condition. The lesbian female target profile was the same as the straight female target profile (e.g., we used the same target photo and presented the same profile information) aside from indicating the target’s romantic interest in women (as opposed to men). Again, there were no significant differences in attractiveness ratings given to the three targets ( $p = .93$ ).

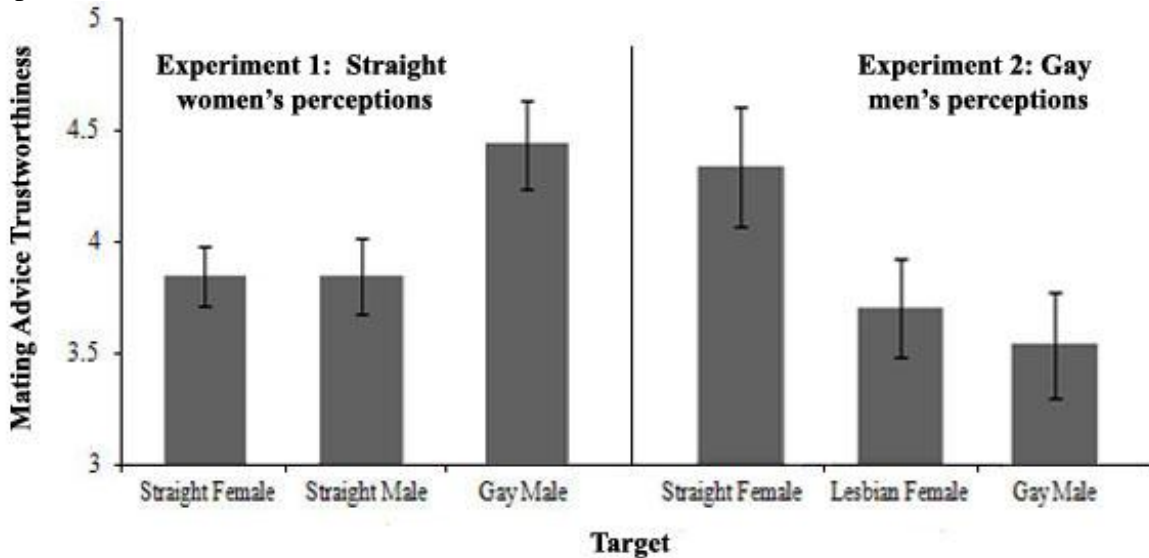
### *Dependent measures.*

The scenario and dependent measures were similar to those used in Experiment 1, but items were modified to reflect the participants’ sexual orientation (e.g., the potential romantic interests in the scenarios were gay men).

## Results

Again, we created composite scores for items pertaining to perceived trustworthiness of mating advice ( $\alpha = .83$ ) and expected mating help ( $\alpha = .75$ ). A MANOVA revealed differences in the perceived trustworthiness of mating advice offered by the targets,  $F(2, 55) = 3.80, p = .03$ . Follow-up tests (Tukey LSD,  $p < .05$ ) revealed that gay men rated the mating advice provided by the straight female target as more trustworthy ( $M = 4.37, SD = 1.08$ ) than similar advice given by the lesbian female ( $M = 3.72, SD = 0.89$ ),  $p = .04, d = .66$ , and gay male targets ( $M = 3.56, SD = 0.93$ ),  $p = .01, d = .80$ . There was no difference in the perceived trustworthiness of advice provided by the lesbian female and gay male targets,  $p = .61$ .

**Figure 1.** Mean trustworthiness of advice offered by targets as rated by straight women (Experiment 1) and gay men (Experiment 2). *Note:* Full scale runs from 1 to 7. Error bars represent  $M \pm (2SE)$ .



In addition, the degree to which gay men believed that each target could help them acquire a mate varied between conditions,  $F(2, 55) = 3.91, p = .03$ . Follow-up tests revealed that participants rated the straight female target as more likely to help them acquire a mate ( $M = 4.38, SD = 0.85$ ) compared to the gay male target ( $M = 3.35, SD = 1.18$ ),  $p = .01, d = 1.00$ . However, the difference in perceived mating help offered by the straight and lesbian female targets ( $M = 3.88, SD = 1.32$ ) was not statistically significant ( $p = .17$ ), nor was there a significant difference in perceived mating help provided by the lesbian female and gay male targets ( $p = .16$ ).

## Discussion

The results of Experiment 2 provide additional support for the hypothesis that close friendships between straight women and gay men may be characterized by a unique exchange of unbiased mating-relevant information that may not be available in their other



relationships. Specifically, gay men perceived the mating advice offered by a straight female target to be more trustworthy than similar advice offered by a gay male target. They also rated the straight female as more potentially helpful in finding them a romantic partner than the gay male. These effects were predicted due to the absence of sexual interest and competitive motives between straight women and gay men that may hinder the formation of close and honest friendships between gay men.

The results of Experiment 2 also suggest that this increased perceived trustworthiness of mating advice was specific to *straight* women. Specifically, gay men perceived advice offered by a straight female target to be more trustworthy than similar advice offered by a lesbian target. This finding suggests that gay men and straight women may perceive one another to be uniquely trustworthy sources of advice and support in mating-relevant domains. Although lesbian women may not harbor any deceptive mating motivations in their associations with gay men, our findings are in accordance with previous research noting the lack of closeness between gay men and lesbian women in social contexts (see e.g., Weeks et al., 2001). This finding is in stark contrast with the emotional depth that has been shown to characterize friendships formed between gay men and straight women (e.g., Grigoriou, 2004). Though gay men and lesbian women may face similar social challenges (e.g., prejudice) due to their shared stigmatized sexual identity (Herek, 2000), these global commonalities might not necessarily influence gay men's and lesbian women's ability to assist one another across more specific domains, including those related to mating.

## **General Discussion**

Previous qualitative research has noted that friendships between straight women and gay men are characterized by acceptance and comfort in the absence of sexual pressure, social stigmatization, or interpersonal anxiety (see e.g., Cruz and Dolby, 2007; Grigoriou, 2004; Hopcke and Rafaty, 1999; Malone, 1980; Tillmann-Healy, 2001; Warren, 1976). Although these studies provide some insight regarding the nature of close relationships formed between straight women and gay men, few empirical investigations have been conducted to examine the nature of the specific benefits perceived to be available to gay men and straight women in these relationships relative to their friendships with other individuals. Guided by a functional perspective on human mating, the current studies provide the first experimental evidence that straight women and gay men perceive each other to be uniquely trustworthy sources of mating-relevant information and assistance. Specifically, our results demonstrated that straight women perceive mating-relevant advice offered by a gay man to be more trustworthy than similar advice offered by a straight man or woman (Experiment 1). Similarly, gay men perceive mating advice offered by a straight woman to be more trustworthy than advice offered by another gay man or a lesbian woman (Experiment 2). Taken together, these findings provide preliminary support for our functional hypothesis that the emotional closeness shared by straight women and gay men may be rooted in the absence of deceptive mating motivations (i.e., sexual interest or intrasexual competition) that frequently taint their relationships with other individuals.

Interestingly, our results also demonstrated that gay men's perceptions of increased

trustworthiness were specific to *straight* women. Specifically, gay men in Experiment 2 rated advice provided by a straight female to be more trustworthy than information provided by a lesbian target. Although lesbian women may not bring any deceptive mating motives into their relationships with gay men, research suggests that close friendships formed between gay men and lesbians are relatively rare due to important social, cultural, and emotional differences that exist between these individuals (Grigoriou, 2004; Weeks et al., 2001). Indeed, even though gay men tend to befriend women more often than other men, research suggests that gay men tend to gravitate towards friendships with heterosexual females more readily than friendships with lesbians (Schneider and Witherspoon, 2000). Similarly, lesbians tend to befriend others who are of the same sex and sexual orientation as themselves (Schneider and Witherspoon, 2000; Stanley, 1996). In addition, because previous research suggests that the mutual attraction to men is highly valued and discussed in friendships between gay men and straight women (Hopcke and Rafaty, 1999), it is possible that the absence of this shared interest may hinder the formation of close friendships between gay men and lesbian women. Thus, despite the absence of ulterior mating motivations associated with attraction or competition, gay men may be less apt to trust mating advice offered by lesbians (relative to straight women) due to their lack of shared interests (specifically those related to the male gender).

Although gay men and straight women perceived each other as providing the most trustworthy mating advice, our results pertaining to the perceived mating help offered by each target were less clear. For example, women in Experiment 1 did not perceive the gay male target to be any more likely to help them find a mate than the straight female or male targets. On the other hand, gay men in Experiment 2 did expect the straight female to be significantly more helpful in this regard relative to the gay male. This discrepancy may owe itself to the fact that gay men do not readily form close associations with straight men, nor are these friendships very common (e.g., Grigoriou, 2004; Rumens, 2008; Walker, 1994a, 1994b). Therefore, it is not surprising that women do not expect gay men to be especially capable of finding them a mate. On the other hand, gay men do tend to form close friendships with straight women, as the previous literature has suggested (e.g., Grigoriou, 2004; Hopcke and Rafaty, 1999). Therefore, it is likely that gay men perceive women to have close connections with other gay men who could become romantic partners. Additionally, this finding could also be driven by the limited availability of gay – relative to straight – men. Unlike women, whose potential mating partners (i.e., straight men) are much more numerous, gay men are less abundant in the general population and are often more difficult to identify. Thus, it would be especially beneficial for gay men to utilize an unbiased source (e.g., straight women) to aid them in locating other gay men as romantic partners. Straight women, however, would not necessarily need to utilize gay men in this capacity because their mating opportunities with straight men are more numerous and readily identifiable. This relative difficulty in identifying gay men may have also contributed to the absence of a significant difference between straight and lesbian women's perceived likelihood of helping gay men find potential romantic partners (Experiment 2). Although we did not predict this in advance, due to the lack of competition between lesbians and gay men and the relative difficulty in identifying available gay men in the general population, gay men may look to lesbian women to help them identify potential

mates due to their involvement in the LGBT community (Garnets and D'Augelli, 1994; Warren, 1976).

In addition to providing initial experimental insight into the functional relevance of close relationships formed between gay men and straight women, the current research provides additional evidence that the mating psychologies of homosexual individuals may be functionally-tuned in ways similar to heterosexuals. For example, previous research demonstrates that gay men and straight men place a similar premium on physical attractiveness in their potential romantic partners, despite their discrepant sexual orientations (Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, and Gladue, 1994). Therefore, although gay men may not have an opportunity to directly participate in reproduction via conventional means, gay men, specifically, and homosexual individuals, more generally, likely possess evolved psychological mechanisms that would promote successful reproductive outcomes regardless of one's sexual orientation (e.g., gender-specific mate preferences, a tendency to trust advice offered by individuals lacking ulterior mating motives).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The results of the current studies provide convergent empirical support for the hypothesis that friendships between gay men and straight women are characterized by a mutually beneficial exchange of unbiased mating advice. However, there were some important limitations to our studies that should be noted. First, the participant samples used in Experiments 1 and 2 were restricted in important ways. Gay males were relatively unavailable in our university sample; therefore, a majority of our gay male participants in Experiment 2 were recruited from the local community. It is possible that this sample may have differed in a number of unintended ways – including socioeconomic status, education level, and ethnicity – from the female participants in Experiment 1, who were all college students. Further, because gay men were somewhat difficult to recruit, the final analytical sample for Experiment 2 was relatively small ( $N = 58$ ). However, despite this small sample size, the effect sizes obtained in Experiment 2 were relatively large, suggesting a robust effect. Regardless, future research should test the reliability of the demonstrated effects across a larger and more diverse sample of gay and straight men and women.

In addition, the current experiments did not examine straight women's and gay men's perceived trustworthiness of mating advice offered by lesbian women and straight men, respectively. Although lesbian women do not serve as potential mate competition for straight women, their lack of shared interest in men may decrease the utility of the mating-relevant advice with which they may provide straight women. Also, one-sided sexual attraction on the part of lesbian women may further complicate these relationships and decrease the perceived trustworthiness of advice they provide to straight women. Similar complexities may characterize relationships between gay and straight men. Again, gay men and straight men do not compete with one another for access to mates; however, they are not attracted to the same sex either, which may decrease the usefulness of mating advice provided by straight men to gay men. Further, research has demonstrated that close friendships between gay men and straight men may rarely form due to homophobic concerns that often operate within these dyads (e.g., Grigoriou, 2004; Herek, 1988; Rumens, 2008). For these reasons, we expect that the mating advice offered by lesbian

women and straight men to straight women and gay men, respectively, will be perceived to be significantly less trustworthy than the mating advice exchanged by straight women and gay men. Future research should examine how heterosexual and homosexual individuals perceive same-sex targets of different sexual orientations.

Third, the current experiments demonstrated the perceived trustworthiness of mating advice exchanged by gay men and straight women. However, we did not examine whether this increased trustworthiness is specific to mating-relevant domains or if straight women and gay men similarly value each other's advice across domains (e.g., career advice). Although future research should examine this possibility, the logic of our functional perspective suggests that the unique trust shared by straight women and gay men should be most pronounced in mating domains, where there is an increased likelihood of being deceived by other individuals harboring ulterior motivations related to mate attraction or competition. Gay men and straight women, however, may not view each other as being especially trustworthy sources of information in other domains within which they may compete with one another. In other words, although gay men and straight women do not directly compete for mates, their respective genders and sexual orientations do not preclude them from competing with one another in domains unrelated to mating (e.g., interviewing for the same jobs). Therefore, it is unlikely that the heightened trust demonstrated in our experiments would generalize across other domains within which gay men and straight women are likely to compete.

A fourth limitation of the current studies is that we examined the *perceived* mating benefits received by straight women and gay men within these relationships. We did not, however, examine whether either party actually benefits from this mating advice or if these perceived benefits influence the formation of actual friendships between gay men and straight women. Because previous research suggests that women benefit from friendships with gay men in a number of ways (e.g., with regards to having positive feelings towards their physical bodies; Barlett et al., 2009), the unbiased advice that women and gay men exchange likely benefits them both psychologically and socially. Future research should explore precisely how gay men and women benefit from this advice (e.g., enhanced attractiveness, social desirability, or ability to attract romantic partners) and whether these perceived benefits translate into actual mating success.

Finally, the conclusions that can be drawn from the findings of the current research are also limited by some of the experimental parameters that we put into place. Most notably, we presented only one target per experimental condition across both experiments. Therefore, it is possible that our effects may not generalize to other male and female targets. Also, although we hypothesized that close friendships between gay men and straight women are characterized by an exchange of trustworthy mating information, our experiments did not explicitly test this hypothesis as participants were asked to imagine interacting with a person that they had just met instead of a close friend. Therefore, the effects may not reflect women's and gay men's tendencies to trust mating advice offered by close friends with whom they regularly interact. Future research should examine whether our results generalize to close friendships formed between gay men and straight women. Regardless, our results highlight the perceived trustworthiness that characterizes mating advice exchanged by straight women and gay men and may provide insight into the

formation of gay male-straight female friendships.

## **Conclusion**

Popular culture and previous research alike have noted the special bond between straight women and gay men. The current studies explored whether unbiased mating advice exchanged by gay men and straight women may provide the foundation for these friendships. Our results suggest that straight women and gay men perceive mating advice provided by each other to be more trustworthy than similar advice offered by other individuals, whose advice may be tainted by deceptive mating motivations. In addition to being the first experimental examination of the nature of the perceived benefits available to individuals within these relationships, these findings provide an important step in understanding the unique and important bond shared by straight women and gay men.

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**Appendix – Mating advice items (Experiment 1)**

- Imagine that you have already picked out an outfit to wear for the party. However, Jordan offers you a second opinion and tells you to wear something else instead. How likely would you follow Jordan's advice?
- How likely would you see Jordan's advice as trustworthy?
- Imagine that you try on something different, and Jordan compliments you on your appearance. What is the likelihood that Jordan is being sincere?
- Before you arrive at the party, imagine that Jordan provides you with information about the men that are going to be there. How likely would you trust Jordan's information?
- How likely would you trust Jordan to tell you that you have something stuck in your teeth before talking to an attractive man at the party?
- Imagine that this attractive man at the party starts flirting with you. He seems really nice and is really interested with what you have to say. However, Jordan later tells you that, "He isn't really interested in you." How likely would you trust Jordan?
- When Jordan tells you about the man, he/she tells you, "I don't think he is your type anyway, but you should talk to his friend who he came with – he seems great." However, you don't find his friend attractive. How likely would you trust Jordan's advice?
- How likely would Jordan be to offer you trustworthy information about the availability of other men at the party?