

Mini Project # 6

# Theory: There Can Be Only One

Gender Roles and Communication

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An individual can have many cross-sex acquaintances at any given point in their life, but there is only room for one strong cross-sex friendship at any given point in time. Before illustrating this theory, it is necessary to depict the components and define them. First, the definition of a cross-sex acquaintance, according to the theory, is any individual of the opposite sex that you *may* spend time with, communicate with, and consider a friend. The definition of a cross-sex friendship, according to the theory, is any individual of the opposite sex that you *do* spend time with, communicate closely with, and consider your best friend. Therefore, a strong cross-sex friendship is your best friend of the opposite sex, and cross-sex acquaintances are the people you would consider a friend of the opposite sex. With this understood, I will further explain why this theory of only one strong cross-sex friendship is possible at a time.

Initially, all strong cross-sex friendships begin as cross-sex acquaintances. The reason for this transformation is an attraction towards that cross-sex acquaintance. This type of attraction is very basic in nature and can include their voice, smell, dancing, partying, listening, physical features, or even the people they are with. It is anything that makes you want to learn more about that cross-sex acquaintance. With this attraction, many individuals mutually start to communicate and/or disclose information about themselves whether it is by body language, oral communication, or another form of communication. However, if the attraction is not there, many individuals will not take the time to learn more about the individual of the opposite sex, and tend to focus more attention on those individuals they are attracted to. For an example, if a male approaches a female and introduces himself, more times than not, he is somewhat attracted to that female since he could of picked any other female, but he chose one particular female. He may be looking to only be nice, and make a new friend, or he could be looking for romantic possibilities. However, if the female does not have the mutual attraction for the male, more often than not, she will not mutually communicate or disclose information, which allows the male to understand her level of attraction for him.

Mutual communication between two individuals of the opposite sex is the first step in building a cross-sex acquaintance and cross-sex friendships. Without the mutual communication, the cross-sex acquaintance is merely an introduction and conclusion the first time you meet. However, if mutual communication does occur, the cross-sex acquaintance is allowed insight to your personality, ideas, and attitudes. If attraction is still a component of the cross-sex acquaintance at this point, this development starts to change the relationship to a cross-sex friendship. Once this cross-sex friendship is established, more becomes disclosed and communicated which allows you to learn more about the individual you are in the cross-sex friendship with. This causes the cross-sex friendship to develop and strengthen over time, and become the one person of the opposite sex, excluding family, that you count on when you have a problem, also known as, “best friend”.

Therefore, creating a relationship to a “best friend” level is difficult and there are many factors that are included in the process, which takes time to develop. Throughout our lives, we develop many of these same “best friend” relationships and repeat this process many times. According to our textbook, the term coined by Author Jan Yager (1999), is called “friendshifts”) (218). This refers to maintaining friendships, which is essential to sustaining a “best friend” relationship because throughout time, many friends change. Our textbook also states, “If someone takes friendship for granted, assuming that this form of relationship does not require as much attention and maintenance as other types, that person could find himself or herself with a narrowing circle of friends,” which further illustrates that maintaining certain friendships is a decision, and unless there is motivation in doing so, like attraction or interest, then the effort to maintain that friendship is not put into action, or it is focused in other areas.

Once a “best friend” relationship has been established with an individual of the opposite sex, with opposite gender preference, the relationship is a strong relationship that has taken time and effort to create. However, depending on the stage you are at in life, these types of “best friend” relationships

change often. Most of these relationships change from one individual of the opposite sex to another and this change is often caused by attraction. Our textbook explains it as, "...this tendency shifts as we age and mature. It's interesting to explore the unique properties of each type of friendship, as well as the communication that sustains them."(219) The key part in this statement is "communication that sustains them," which implies that without stable communication that type of relationship will fall short due to neglect, and leave an individual searching for that same relationship.

The commitment of the "best friend" relationship is parallel with the maturity of those involved in it. Many people throughout their lives find one cross-sex friendship that they commit to keeping and sustaining. However, throughout certain contexts and situations in life, individuals also look for similar additional relationships, which often can cause troubles within the current "best friend" relationship you may be involved in. The causes for these troubles often is a product of responses like jealousy, envy, and even betrayal, due to the lack of attention towards their own "best friend" relationship and more advancements towards another "best friend" relationship with another individual. For an example, look at grade school "best friends", college "best friends", and married "best friends". Chronologically, the amount of cross-sex friendships at each of these stages of life diminish until there is one cross-sex friendship that is considered your "best friend".

Throughout the length of your cross-sex friendship, "best friend" relationship, the attraction for that individual grows to become romantic or committed to a point that you require having that individual in your life. The conclusion of this cross-sex friendship becomes a strong relationship and a sole partnership. According to our textbook, Aristotle describes this as "a single sole who resides in two bodies", which I personally agree is the definition of a "best friend" in a cross-sex friendship, but this type of friendship can only exist with one individual of the opposite sex at a time due to negative components of human nature like jealousy, envy, etc. In conclusion, having multiple cross-sex

acquaintances is acceptable and achievable, but have a strong cross-sex friendship (“best friend” relationship) with multiple individuals of the opposite sex (with opposite sex orientation) is impossible.

References:

Gender Speak by Diana K. Ivy and Phil Backlund