

# Perceived Barriers to Friendship With Lesbians and Gay Men Among University Students

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*Survey data from 2,925 incoming college freshmen at a state university revealed that nearly 40% of the participants reported that they might like to have a lesbian or gay friend, despite anticipations of discomfort. Perceived barriers were significantly related to gender, diversity orientation, shyness, and religious commitment. Implications for research and intervention are discussed.*

A considerable body of research has been devoted to exploration of the correlates of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Herek (1991) reviewed this literature and identified key correlates of intolerance, including a wide range of experiential variables (e.g., minimal previous contact with lesbians and gay men), demographic variables (e.g., living in non-urban areas), moral orientation variables (e.g., high levels of religious commitment), and personality characteristics (e.g., low tolerance for ambiguity).

Although this research has provided a basis for understanding general levels of tolerance, scholars have noted the need for greater focus upon determinants of behavior toward lesbians and gay men (Cramer, 1997; Sattel, Keyes, & Tupper, 1997; Sears, 1997). The need to broaden research efforts is apparent when considering studies on interventions designed to improve the college campus climate for lesbians and gay men. The vast majority of such studies have been focused only on changes in tolerance levels and not changes in overt behavior (Sears, 1997). One of the implicit assumptions that may underlie such research is that intolerance leads to antigay behavior, whereas tolerance leads to progay behavior. Evidence from the few studies that have examined links between attitudes and behavior, however, suggests that the connections may be

much more complex than initially believed. For example, Reinhardt (1994) found that a speaker panel presentation on lesbian and gay male (LG) issues for undergraduates reduced cognitive but not behavioral aspects of intolerance. In another recent study, Franklin (1998) found that negative attitudes constituted only one of many factors that motivated college students to engage in antigay behaviors. The association between negative attitudes and negative behavior was far from perfect, and factors such as peer group dynamics, self-defense, and thrill-seeking tendencies were cited as primary motivating forces for a number of the students.

The potential lack of connection between tolerance levels and behavior has been further underscored by Devine, Evett, and Vasques-Suson (1996), who have suggested that behavior appearing to be intentionally antigay may, in fact, be the unintentional result of individuals' social anxiety and inefficacy in social interactions. They base this conjecture on findings from their own studies in which heterosexual college students with moderately low levels of prejudice were found to doubt their ability to demonstrate unbiased behavior in interactions with lesbians and gay men. These students also tended to have high levels of anxiety regarding such social interactions. Devine et al. suggested that this social anxiety and low interpersonal self-efficacy may translate into awkward or avoidant behavior with lesbians and gay men, which may in turn be interpreted as signs of disapproval by LG individuals. This illustrates a potential type of self-fulfilling prophecy among heterosexuals with relatively low levels of prejudice in which anxiety about appearing antigay may actually increase the likelihood of demonstrating behavior that could be interpreted as antigay.

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The implications of such research and theory are clear for programs aiming to promote positive intergroup contact on campus among people of different sexual orientations: Understanding behavior toward lesbian, gay male, and bisexual individuals requires more than understanding tolerance levels. Although some individuals have already begun to design programs to facilitate behavioral change and define criteria for assessing behavior (McNaught, 1997; Sattel et al., 1997), it may be important to gain basic knowledge about barriers to positive intergroup contact. Knowledge about barriers could be used to help tailor behavior change interventions to specific populations. For example, interventions created for low-prejudiced individuals who avoid interacting with LG people because of low interpersonal self-efficacy may differ substantially from interventions aimed at high-prejudiced individuals who avoid interacting with LG people because of a moral objection to same-sex relationships. Greater understanding of barriers to positive contact with lesbians and gay men may be especially important in light of evidence that knowing a lesbian or gay man is a strong predictor of positive attitudes regarding LG sexual orientations (Herek, 1995). Thus, informed efforts to increase positive contact with LG people may also help to increase tolerance for lesbians and gay men. In short, knowledge about barriers may provide a foundation for developing interventions that promote both positive contact and, through this contact, positive attitudes.

To this end, the purpose of this study was to explore barriers to friendships with lesbians and gay men among college freshmen. A forced-choice measure was designed to assess the nature of students' perceived barriers. Based upon a review of the limited literature on LG friendships, three potential barriers were chosen for investigation: disapproval of LG sexual orientations, perceived lack of commonalities with lesbians and gay men, and discomfort with the thought of befriending a lesbian or gay man.

We hypothesized that differences among incoming freshmen with regard to perceptions of barriers would be associated with variables that have been found to predict attitudes and

behaviors relating to lesbians and gay men. Four such variables were examined: religious commitment, diversity orientation, shyness, and gender. Religious commitment has been found to be a robust predictor of negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (Herek, 1991), and it was expected to be associated with disapproval of LG sexual orientations as a barrier to such friendships. Diversity orientation refers to one's level of interaction with and interest in people from groups (e.g., racial, ethnic, religious, class) other than one's own. Research has indicated that high levels of diversity orientation are associated with positive attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (Fuentes, Miville, Mohr, Sedlacek, & Gretchen, 1999). Individuals high in diversity orientation are believed to exhibit greater than average levels of contact with people and practices from groups other than their own; thus, we hypothesized that high levels of diversity orientation would be associated with desire for friendships with lesbians and gay men, whereas low levels of diversity orientation would be associated with perceptions of barriers to such friendships. Next, we hypothesized that individuals who rated themselves as shy would tend to view discomfort as a barrier to friendship with lesbians and gay men. This hypothesis is derived from the bias reduction theory proposed by Devine, et al. (1996), which suggests that social anxiety and low social self-efficacy may inhibit the degree to which individuals seek contact with and successfully interact with LG people. Finally, because college-age heterosexual women, more than men, have been found to be open to interpersonal contact with LG people (Waldo, 1998) and to have LG friends (Malaney, Williams, & Geller, 1997), we hypothesized that women would report greater desire for LG friends than men, whereas men would report greater perception of barriers to such friendships.

## METHOD

### Participants

The participants were 2,925 incoming college freshmen at a large mid-Atlantic public university who completed a student census as part of the incoming student orientation. The sample was

approximately 52% male and 48% female. Regarding ethnic and racial identity, approximately 12% self-identified as African American or Black; 13% as Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander; 70% as White; 4% as Hispanic, Latino, or Latina; and 1% as other. The mean age of participants was 17.7 years ( $SD = .62$ ). Most analyses were conducted using the full sample, but a random subsample of 1,219 students was generated in order to conduct the discriminant analysis (described below). This subsample was approximately 56% male and 44% female, and the racial and ethnic breakdown was 13% African American or Black; 13% Asian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander; 69% White; and 5% Hispanic, Latino, or Latina. The mean age of participants in the subsample was 17.5 years ( $SD = .64$ ). Sexual orientation was not assessed because this was considered to be too sensitive a topic to include in a nonanonymous, university-sponsored census.

### Procedure

Students completed a comprehensive questionnaire as part of their orientation program. They were told that the survey data would be used to improve student services and that their responses would remain confidential.

### Measures

The questionnaire included 102 items assessing a variety of variables considered to be relevant to college life, including study habits, future plans, computer use, attitudes related to diversity issues, religious orientation, and interpersonal style. The survey also included items measuring demographic variables such as age, racial and ethnic identity, sex, and intended major.

The survey included a single categorical item that assessed students' perceived barriers to friendship with lesbians and gay men, as well as their desire for friendship. Students were asked to choose one of six descriptive statements that best described their attitude about becoming friends with a lesbian or gay man (see Table 1). The first three of the six categories reflect a lack of interest in becoming friends with a lesbian or gay man, and each of the three categories includes a different barrier to friendship (i.e.,

disapproval of LG sexual orientations, lack of common interests, and social discomfort). The fourth category reflects a possible willingness to become friends with a lesbian or gay man, as well as expected discomfort in such a friendship. The fifth category reflects an unqualified desire for friendship, and the final category reflects already having LG friends.

Scales based upon items from the survey were developed for another study using principal axis factor analysis (Fuertes et al., 1999). Because the survey was not created for the purpose of developing scales, the validity of the scales could not be thoroughly investigated. However, we report some convergent and discriminant validity findings here. Two of the scales were used in the current study: religious commitment and diversity orientation. All items were rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *agree*, 5 = *disagree*). The religious commitment scale consists of five items (e.g., "Religion is important in my life") and had an internal consistency coefficient of .73 in this sample. Black students reported higher levels of religious commitment than Asian American, Hispanic, and White students. As expected, religious commitment was negatively correlated with items relating to comfort around lesbians and gay men, and it was unrelated to items assessing levels of school pride and help seeking behavior. The original diversity orientation scale consists of seven items reflecting tolerance for a variety of religious beliefs and interest in knowing people from different backgrounds (i.e., race, culture, sexual orientation). The two items relating to sexual orientation were removed for the purpose of this study to assess only other forms of diversity orientation, resulting in a five-item scale with internal consistency reliability of .72. A sample item reads "I have a close friend who is not my race." Items were rated on a 5-point scale. The two sexual orientation items from the original diversity orientation scale were combined to form a scale of comfort around LG persons, with internal consistency reliability of .70. The items were "I am not comfortable around gay persons" and "I have lesbian friends." Scores on the overall diversity scale were not found to differ by race, but scores on the reduced diversity

TABLE 1.  
Percentage of Participants in Each of the Lesbian/Gay Friendship Categories: Total Sample and by Gender

Category	Total (N = 2925)	Female (N = 1406)	Male (N = 1519)
1. I would not like to become friends with a lesbian or gay man because I don't approve of that sexual orientation.	8.4	3.9	12.5
2. I would not like to become friends with a lesbian or gay man because we would not have anything in common.	2.1	0.6	3.4
3. I would not like to become friends with a lesbian or gay man because I would feel too uncomfortable.	8.4	2.4	13.9
4. I might like to become friends with a lesbian or gay man, but I would probably feel uncomfortable.	39.2	36.1	42.1
5. I would like to become friends with a lesbian or gay man.	13.2	18.7	8.2
6. I have gay and/or lesbian friends.	28.8	38.2	20.0

orientation scale (i.e., the scale focusing only on religion, racial identity, and ethnic identity) did differ by race such that Asian American and Hispanic students had higher scores than White and Black students. Women had higher scores than men on the overall diversity scale, the reduced scale, and the scale pertaining only to comfort around LG persons. Also, all three of these scales were unrelated to items assessing school pride and help-seeking behavior. Finally, shyness was measured by a single item: "I am a shy person." Students with high ratings on this item were more likely than other students to believe that they might be lonely at some point during the school year. All measures were scored so that higher scores indicate higher levels of the construct.

## RESULTS

Inspection of categorical data from the full sample indicated that 8.4% of the students did not wish to have LG friends because they disapproved of LG sexual orientations, and 2.1%

reported a lack of desire to have LG friends due to a belief that they would not share interests (see Table 1). Findings revealed that 8.4% of the participants were not interested in friendships with LG persons due to expectations of discomfort. A full 39.1% of the participants were potentially interested in befriending LG persons but had expectations of discomfort regarding this process. Finally, 28.8% of the participants reported having LG friends, and an additional 13.2% of the participants wanted to have LG friends (and presumably did not have expectations of discomfort). In all, 42% of the participants reported either having or wanting to have LG friends, and 18.9% did not wish to have LG friends.

Because this categorical item was newly created for the survey, preliminary convergent validity evidence was provided by examining differences among the categories with regard to the two-item scale measuring comfort around LG persons. A one-way ANOVA yielded significant group differences in comfort around LG persons,  $F(5, 2,919) = 893.81, p < .001, \omega^2 = .59$ . Results

from pairwise comparisons using Tukey’s HSD procedure revealed that the six groups were significantly different from one another at the .05 level (see Table 2). Group means ranged from the lowest comfort in the category of participants who disapproved of LG sexual orientations to the highest comfort in the category of participants who reported having LG friends. The observed pattern of findings provides evidence of the validity of the categorical measure and suggests that a substantial proportion of the variability in comfort with LG persons can be predicted by perceived barriers to friendship.

Similar univariate analyses were conducted to provide information about the degree to which diversity orientation, religious commitment, and shyness each significantly predicted group membership. ANOVAs on all four variables were statistically significant; Tukey’s HSD tests were used to test pairwise comparisons (see Table 2). Inspection of pairwise comparisons on diversity orientation indicated that the participants who did not want friendships with LG individuals had the lowest mean scores on this construct. Participants who were open to the possibility of LG friends had the next highest levels of diversity orienta-

tion, followed by participants who either wanted to have or who had LG friends. Next, participants who did not want LG friends due to disapproval of LG sexual orientations had significantly higher mean levels of religious commitment than participants from all other groups. Also, participants who might consider having LG friends despite discomfort had significantly higher mean levels of religious commitment than those who reported already having LG friends. Pairwise comparisons on the shyness item revealed that participants from the two groups involving discomfort with LG friendships were not significantly different from one another, but both had significantly higher mean levels of shyness than participants who had LG friends. Finally, a chi-square test was conducted to determine whether a significant association existed between gender and group membership. This test was significant,  $\chi^2(5) = 357.28, p < .001$ . Calculation of lambda (a measure of proportional reduction in error for nominal variables; Ott, Larson, Rexroat, & Mendenhall, 1992) indicated that 26% of the observed variability in gender could be accounted for by knowledge of participants’ group membership. Inspection of the percentage of

TABLE 2.  
Mean Differences in Lesbian/Gay Friendship Categories on Comfort With Lesbian/Gay People, Diversity Orientation, Religious commitment, and Shyness

Variable	Category						w <sup>2</sup>	F(5, 2,919)
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Comfort with Lesbian/Gay People	3.27 <sub>a</sub>	4.26 <sub>b</sub>	3.79 <sub>b</sub>	5.18 <sub>c</sub>	6.75 <sub>d</sub>	8.20 <sub>e</sub>	.59	893.81*
Diversity Orientation (Race/Religion)	18.67 <sub>a</sub>	19.19 <sub>ab</sub>	18.65 <sub>a</sub>	19.62 <sub>b</sub>	20.71 <sub>c</sub>	21.40 <sub>d</sub>	.12	87.55*
Religious commitment	16.84 <sub>c</sub>	15.20 <sub>ab</sub>	15.18 <sub>ab</sub>	15.27 <sub>b</sub>	14.72 <sub>ab</sub>	14.65 <sub>a</sub>	.02	13.06*
Shyness	2.87 <sub>ab</sub>	2.68 <sub>ab</sub>	3.01 <sub>b</sub>	3.04 <sub>b</sub>	2.92 <sub>ab</sub>	2.77 <sub>a</sub>	.01	6.62*

Note. Row means with different subscripts differed at  $p < .05$  according to a Tukey HSD test. Categories are fully described in Table 1.

\*  $p < .001$ .

TABLE 3.  
Discriminant Function-Predictor  
Correlations and Group Centroids for  
Predicting Lesbian/Gay Friendship  
Category Membership From Diversity  
Orientation, Religious commitment,  
Shyness, and Gender

Variable	Correlations Function		
	1	2	3
Diversity Orientation	.61	-.28	.45
Religious Commitment	-.20	-.58	-.52
Shyness	-.12	.79	-.19
Gender	.69	.02	-.70

  

Friendship Category	Group Centroids Function		
	1	2	3
1. Don't Approve	-.79	-.25	-.13
3. Too Uncomfortable	-.79	.07	.18
4. Uncomfortable	-.18	.27	-.07
5. Not Uncomfortable	.66	.06	-.11
6. Have a LG Friend	.83	-.14	.11

Note. Gender was scored such that men were assigned a value of 0 and women were assigned a value of 1. Friendship category 2 was not analyzed because of its low endorsement rate. Friendship categories are fully described in Table 1.

women and men in each group (see Table 1) indicates that more women than men had or wanted to have LG friends, whereas more men than women did not want to have LG friends.

Discriminant analysis was used to clarify the joint contributions of diversity orientation, religious commitment, and shyness to predicting group differences. As Stevens (1992) noted, discriminant analysis is ideally conducted with samples in which membership in the different group categories is relatively equal for all

categories. Consequently, participants were randomly sampled from each category to achieve relatively similar group sizes. Inspection of the original group sizes revealed that the smallest group, individuals who did not want friendships with LG persons due to a perceived lack of similarity, was substantially smaller than that of the other groups (i.e., 60 members versus 245 in the next largest category). To take advantage of the large sample size provided by the university-wide survey, as well as the higher power afforded by larger samples, this smallest group was eliminated in the following analyses. The random sampling procedure produced a subsample of 1,219 participants, as described in the Participants section.

A discriminant analysis was conducted in which membership in the five group categories was predicted by diversity orientation, religious commitment, shyness, and gender. Given the large sample size, the minimum participant-to-predictor ratio of 20:1 recommended by Stevens (1992) was exceeded. The results of this analysis were significant, Wilks's lambda = .64,  $\chi^2(16) = 542.11$  ( $p < .001$ ). Significance test statistics for the first and second residuals were, respectively,  $\chi^2(9) = 58.40$  ( $p < .001$ ) and  $\chi^2(4) = 20.83$  ( $p < .001$ ). The third residual was not significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 2.14$  ( $p = ns$ ), indicating that only the first three discriminant functions were significant predictors of group membership. The three significant canonical discriminant functions accounted for 38% of the observed variation in group membership (33%, 3%, and 2%, respectively).

Each of the three canonical discriminant functions uniquely contributed to predicting group membership. A two-step process was used to interpret these unique contributions. First, the correlations of the predictors with each discriminant function were examined in order to interpret the functions (see Table 3). This step is analogous to interpreting the factor loadings in a factor analysis. Next, to determine the unique way each discriminant function predicted group membership, the group centroids for each function were inspected (see Table 3). Group centroids are calculated by evaluating the discriminant functions at the mean values of the predictor

variables for each group.

Inspection of the function-predictor correlations revealed that the first discriminant function was primarily defined by diversity orientation and gender. Higher scores on this function were associated with greater diversity orientation and a greater likelihood of being female, and lower scores indicate the reverse. Group centroids indicated that higher scores on the first function were associated with greater likelihood of either having or wanting to have LG friends and with less likelihood of not wanting LG friends. Taken all together, the results show that participants who either had or wanted to have LG friends were likely to be female and to exhibit high levels of diversity orientation, whereas participants who did not want to have LG friends were likely to be male and exhibit low levels of diversity orientation.

Inspection of the function-predictor correlations for the second discriminant function revealed that it was primarily defined by shyness and religious commitment. High scores on this function indicated high levels of shyness and low levels of religious commitment. The group centroids revealed that high scores on the second function were associated with greater likelihood of being open to friendships with LG individuals despite expectations of discomfort and with less likelihood of rejecting the possibility of such friendships due to disapproval of LG sexual orientations. Thus, results related to the second discriminant function suggest that participants who were willing to consider the possibility of having LG friends despite expectations of discomfort were likely to be shy, whereas those who were unwilling to consider friendships with LG individuals due to disapproval of LG sexual orientations were likely to be religious.

Finally, inspection of the function-predictor correlations for the third discriminant function revealed that it is primarily defined by gender and religious commitment, and, to a lesser degree, diversity orientation. Higher scores on this function indicated greater likelihood of being male, nonreligious, and diversity oriented. The group centroids revealed that high scores on the third function were primarily associated with greater likelihood of rejecting the possibility of

LG friends due to discomfort. Thus, results related to the third discriminant function suggest that participants who were unwilling to cultivate friendships with LG individuals due to discomfort were likely to be male, nonreligious, and diversity oriented.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gather basic descriptive data regarding college students' perceived barriers to friendship with LG individuals and to investigate predictors of individual differences related to barriers. An encouraging finding was that 42% of the participants reported having or wanting to have LG friends, whereas only 19% of the participants did not wish to have LG friends. Among participants from the latter group, the two most common barriers to friendship were expectations of discomfort in friendships with lesbians and gay men and disapproval of LG sexual orientations; the barrier of lack of commonalities was endorsed less frequently. The remainder of the sample indicated an openness to the possibility of having LG friends, but this was qualified by anticipations of discomfort. These students constituted the largest of the six subgroups determined by the forced choice measure of barriers to friendship used in the study.

A number of variables were found to significantly distinguish membership in the different subgroups. First, gender was related to perceived barriers. Female college freshmen were less likely than their male counterparts to perceive barriers and to report not wanting to have LG friends. This finding is in line with past research showing that college women know more LG people than do college men (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Malaney et al., 1997). Group membership was also related to students' levels of diversity orientation. Specifically, participants who did not want an LG friend tended to value racial/religious diversity less than other participants. Also, participants who had LG friends valued diversity more than those who wanted an LG friend, and those who wanted an LG friend valued diversity more than those who might want an LG friend. The most religious participants

were those for whom disapproval of LG sexual orientations was a barrier to friendships with lesbians and gay men. In addition, as predicted, the most shy participants were those for whom social discomfort was a barrier to LG friendships. Finally, nearly all of the groups differed from one another on comfort with lesbians and gay men, as expected. Interestingly, discomfort levels among participants who disapproved of LG sexual orientations were even higher than those who viewed discomfort as the main barrier to LG friendships.

Findings from the discriminant analysis indicated that the dynamics underlying perceived barriers are multidimensional in nature. Gender and diversity orientation discriminated between participants who wished to have LG friends (i.e., female and diversity-minded) and those who did not (i.e., male and not diversity-minded). The degree to which participants were shy and nonreligious discriminated between individuals who were open to LG friendships despite anticipated discomfort (i.e., shy and non-religious) and those who were not open to such friendships due to disapproval of LG sexual orientations (i.e., not shy, but religious). Finally, participants who viewed discomfort as a barrier to friendships with LG individuals were likely to be male, nonreligious, and diversity oriented. These findings suggest that the dynamics of perceived barriers may involve interesting interactions, such as that between diversity orientation and gender.

## IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Little research has focused on processes underlying friendship behaviors with lesbians and gay men. Thus, this study provides important preliminary data on college students' perceived barriers to LG friendships. One implication of the findings is that the meaning and significance of these friendships appear to vary widely across students. When considering whether to cultivate LG friendships, some individuals' thoughts may gravitate most to their lack of confidence in social interactions, whereas others' thoughts may focus on how such friendships conflict with one's core values. The idea that LG friendships have

different implications according to individuals' unique circumstances is related to Herek's (1995) theory of the psychological functions of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. According to this theory, attitudes may serve a variety of psychological functions. For example, negative attitudes can serve to affirm one's values (e.g., religious values) or one's social identity (e.g., male gender role identity). Useful knowledge regarding barriers to LG friendships may be gained by explicitly incorporating concepts from Herek's theory.

This perspective on barriers to friendships with lesbians and gay men suggests that there is no single road to promoting positive intergroup contact between heterosexual and LG college students. Multiple types of interventions may be necessary to address differences in perceived barriers. As Devine et al. (1996) noted, researchers have often concluded that antipathy underlies the avoidance of intergroup contact, even though no evidence exists that indicates this is true for most individuals. The results of this study suggest that the greatest barrier to friendships with LG individuals among college freshmen may be anticipated discomfort rather than value conflicts. Nearly 40% of the students in the sample reported that they might like to have a LG friend, despite anticipation of discomfort. This finding implies that much important knowledge may be gained by focusing on the sources of expected discomfort. As discussed earlier, Devine et al. have shown that anxiety about interacting with LG peers is often due to fear of inadvertently exhibiting prejudiced behavior and being rejected or rebuked. Thus, efforts to increase levels of positive intergroup contact may profit by focusing on improving heterosexual students' self-efficacy levels and outcome expectancies regarding interaction with LG peers. Such efforts could include skill-building components as well as educational components aimed at reducing negative outcome expectancies.

Also, the strong gender differences that emerged in this study suggest the need for interventions geared explicitly to the concerns of men. For example, interventions focused on male students could incorporate exercises and



experiences that help students learn to negotiate perceived conflicts between the male gender role and friendships with lesbians and gay men. Possible interventions could involve discussing issues related to gender role conflict (see O'Neil, 1982) and providing students with models of heterosexual men who have close LG friends. Focus on gender role conflict may be especially wise given evidence that gender roles mediate the relationship between gender and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (Kite & Whitley, 1996),

The current research findings should be considered in light of several limitations. First, participants' sexual orientation was not assessed because it was considered to be too sensitive an issue to include in a university-sponsored new student census. Although similar studies at other campuses have not reported participants' sexual orientation (e.g., Malaney et al., 1997; Wells & Franken, 1987), the inclusion of sexual orientation in the current analyses would have enhanced the findings. For example, the distribution of respondents on the forced choice measure of barriers would likely have differed for students of different sexual orientations. Similarly, it is possible that sexual orientation might have moderated the relation between perceived barriers and the other variables examined in this study (e.g., shyness). Second, the measures used in this study were derived from census items. Future research should use established measures to replicate and extend the current findings. Third, results regarding religious commitment may have been enhanced by including information about participants' religious denominations. Fisher, Derison, Polley, and Cadman (1994) found that religious denominations differ with regard to levels of tolerance for lesbians and gay men, although they also found that even members of gay-tolerant religions have more negative attitudes than individuals who claim no religious preference. These findings suggest that religious denomination may have accounted for some, but not all, of the relation between religious commitment and perception of barriers. Fourth, although the sample was quite large, it was drawn from a single university. Data from other colleges and universities might have yielded different results.

Fifth, current findings should not be used to draw conclusions regarding barriers to friendships with bisexual women and men. Dynamics regarding friendships with bisexual people may differ in important ways from friendships with lesbians and gay men, despite commonalities (Eliason, 1997; Mohr & Rochlen, 1999).

Limitations related to the categorical item assessing perceived barriers should also be considered in evaluating the current findings. First, the item did not distinguish between friendships with lesbians and friendships with gay men. Perhaps men's perceptions of barriers may differ with regard to lesbian friends and gay male friends. Second, the item assessing barriers did not include categories for all possible combinations of barrier types (i.e., disapproval, dissimilarity, discomfort) and levels of willingness to consider having a LG friend (i.e., unwilling, possibly willing, definitely willing). Future research in this area may benefit from using either the full range of possible categories or using a dimensional approach to measurement (i.e., separate scales for each barrier and for level of interest in having a LG friend). Finally, the item lacked a response choice for individuals who do not have LG friends and whose preference for friends is unrelated to sexual orientation. In the present study, we believe that such individuals most likely endorsed the category "I would like to become friends with a lesbian or gay man" because all other available categories suggest a reluctance to befriend LG people.

Despite these limitations, the current study provides valuable preliminary data on college students' perceived barriers to friendship with lesbians and gay men. This study differs from many others in its focus on barriers to positive contact rather than predictors of negative contact. The study of antigay violence and other forms of negative contact is crucial given the current climate of hostility toward lesbians and gay men on college campuses (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Franklin, 1998; Malaney et al., 1997; Waldo, 1998), yet investigating barriers to and facilitators of positive contact with LG persons may be equally important. The few studies that have investigated friendships with lesbians and gay men (e.g., O'Boyle & Thomas, 1996; Price,

1998) have suggested that the sustained positive contact offered by friendships can help heterosexual women and men develop high levels of tolerance and dispel inaccurate stereotypes regarding LG people. We believe that visible friendships across sexual orientation lines can serve as powerful, positive models for college students who might otherwise forgo attempts to forge such friendships themselves. As Waldo suggested, greater visibility of intergroup alliances may also greatly enhance the college campus environment for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students.

Many avenues for future research are suggested by the current study. As mentioned earlier, we believe that attention could be directed profitably toward gaining a greater understanding of individuals for whom discomfort is the main barrier to LG friendships, using concepts based on self-efficacy theory (Devine et al., 1996) and gender role conflict theory (O'Neil, 1982). We also hope to see more studies on individuals' successful and unsuccessful efforts to forge friendships across sexual orientation lines. Such research could help

to identify naturally occurring facilitators of and barriers to such friendships on college campuses. Qualitative studies may be particularly useful at this stage because they could help to identify the diverse factors that come into play in friendship formation, maintenance, and dissolution. Findings from such studies may lead to the development of self-report measures of barriers that improve upon the instrument used in the current study. Also, rich findings may be gained by examining similarities and differences regarding friendships with lesbians and those with gay men, and by opening the field of inquiry to friendships with bisexual women and men. Finally, consideration of the role of race and culture in friendship formation with lesbians, gay, and bisexual individuals will be important, given evidence that concepts related to sexual orientation are culturally and historically defined (Rust, 1996).

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