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Diverse Friendships

Formation, Maintenance, and Benefits

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Friendships are an essential part of everyday life. Friends are the people with whom we exert effort to maintain contact, form an emotional connection, and share our lives (Dunbar, 2018). Friendships are often constrained by homophily, meaning that people make friends with those who are similar to themselves on dimensions such as race, religion, and politics, as well as behavior and personality, giving weight to the adage "Birds of a feather flock together" (McPherson et al., 2001). Overall, cross-group friendships are less prevalent, reciprocated, and stable than same-group friendships (Jugert et al., 2013; Vaquera & Kao, 2008).

Because cross-group friendships are relatively less common, the rich body of literature on friendships, and close relationships more generally, typically reflects relational processes in same-group friendships. In contrast, the development and maintenance of cross-group friendships has been under-studied. Indeed, a recent review of articles published in top relationship science journals from 2014 to 2018 found that only 3% of articles reported including couples in cross-race relationships, and only 10% included samples that were primarily nonwhite, low-income, and/or sexual or gender minorities (Williamson et al., 2022). This is unfortunate because the intimate connection associated with cross-group friendships has benefits for intergroup relations (Davies et al., 2011). In this chapter, we synthesize recent research on cross-group friendships.

Our review is divided into three parts. First, we review factors that contribute to the initial stage of friendship formation, with a focus on how ecological- and individual-level characteristics influence friendship formation. Second, we discuss psychological processes that facilitate the maintenance of cross-group friendships. Third, given that close-relationships

researchers have identified a plethora of benefits associated with friendships in general (see Chapter 14 of this volume), we review the benefits of cross-group friendships specifically, focusing primarily on intergroup benefits. Across these three parts, we apply the processes that close-relationships researchers have identified as integral to friendships in general to understand cross-group friendships specifically. We argue that, although some of these processes function similarly in cross-group friendships, others do not because of the unique aspects of intergroup relations.

Given that the focus of most cross-group friendship has been on race/ethnicity, our review draws primarily from that literature. To the extent possible, we include research across other identities. We acknowledge, however, that some processes for cross-group friendships may differ as a function of the specific group identity. Moreover, we focus primarily on psychological research, drawing on insights from sociology and political science when possible, although this is not an exhaustive review.

Friendship Formation

Much research has been conducted within the close-relationships field to understand what draws people to one another. However, this research has largely focused on partners who are of similar backgrounds. We build upon this literature to consider the factors that shape cross-group friendship formation. We organize the research around ecological and individual-level factors that contribute to the development of cross-group friendships, specifically: (1) the *ecological factors* that allow opportunities for exposure, interaction, and ultimately friendship between out-group members, and (2) the *individual beliefs* that influence the likelihood of forming friendships with out-group members, given opportunities to do so.

Ecological Opportunities for Cross-Group Friendship Formation

To form close relationships, people need the opportunity to meet and interact with others. This contact allows people to determine whether there is mutual attraction in becoming closer. The larger a person's network of interaction partners, the greater the probability that they will form a friendship

with some people in the network—and the more hours people spend to-gether, the more likely they are to become close friends (Hall, 2019).

Likewise, intergroup contact is a precursor to cross-group friendship. The more people interact with out-group members, the more likely they are to develop cross-group friendships over time. For example, the more cross-race interactions White and Black students had before and during college, the more cross-race friendships they had at the end of their first year of college (Schofield et al., 2010). Once cross-group friendships are formed, sustained cross-group interaction within these friendships can also predict the devel-opment of additional cross-group friendships later on; for example, the more cross-race friends people have in high school, the more cross-race friends they have in college, although the effects vary by racial group (Fischer, 2008; Stearns et al., 2009).

Close-relationships research has demonstrated that opportunities for in-teraction with others are largely shaped by *proximity* (Festinger et al., 1950; Newcomb, 1956). Proximity is the idea that people are more likely to en-counter those who are physically or functionally nearby, and thus more likely to interact and develop relationships with these nearby individuals. Although proximity shapes opportunities for interaction and friendship formation in both same-group and cross-group contexts, unique factors underlie the role of proximity in cross-group friendship formation. In this section, we discuss the role of physical, functional, and social proximity in cross-group friend-ship development.

Physical Proximity

When asked to list close friends, people are more likely to list others who are physically nearby, including those who live closer within an apartment com-plex (Newcomb, 1956) or who sit closer within a class (Rohrer et al., 2021). This pattern is driven both by opportunity for interaction, as people are more likely to come into contact with those who are physically close, and by the mere exposure effect, as repeated exposure to the same individual increases familiarity and liking (Bornstein, 1989). This familiarity and liking can lay the foundations for an intimate relationship by increasing the chances of meaningful interaction: People not only prefer others to whom they have been exposed to a greater degree, but they also are more willing to disclose personal information to them, increasing closeness (Brockner & Swap, 1976). Thus, physical proximity to a person creates the opportunity for a pos-sible friendship to develop.

There are two unique considerations related to physical proximity in cross-group contexts. The first is that, whereas people are likely to be physically proximate to other members of their own social groups, persistent segregation along racial, economic, political, and religious lines decreases physical proximity to out-group members (Enos, 2017). If people do not live, work, or go to school near members of out-groups, opportunities for cross-group exposure and interaction are limited. The lack of physical proximity among members of different social groups is thus a barrier to the formation of cross-group friendships, but not to same-group friendships.

The second is that physical proximity has more mixed effects on friendship formation in cross-group (vs. same-group) contexts. On the one hand, physical proximity of out-group members can drive the development of cross-group friendships in a similar manner as in same-group contexts. Living in a neighborhood with more cross-race peers (Sigelman et al., 1996; Vanhoutte & Hooghe, 2012), attending a more diverse high school (Sigelman et al., 1996) or college (Fischer, 2008; Kim et al., 2015), having a cross-race roommate (Mark & Harris, 2012; Stearns et al., 2009), and being in ethnically diverse classes (Bohman & Miklikowska, 2021) have all been associated with greater levels of cross-race friendship. Additionally, longitudinal work shows that the diversity of one's environment increases cross-group friendships over time; for example, students in diverse schools and classrooms are more likely to have cross-group friendships years after leaving that space (Bohman & Miklikowska, 2021). These findings suggest that physical proximity—and the resulting opportunities for exposure and interaction—facilitates cross-group friendship formation, consistent with close-relationships findings on proximity in general.

On the other hand, the effect of physical proximity of out-group members has its limits. Physical proximity may be more likely to increase friendship between same-group individuals than cross-group individuals (Munniksma et al., 2016; Rohrer et al., 2021). For example, although assigned classroom seating for Hungarian students increased the likelihood of students selecting the person seated next to them as their "best friend" over time, this pattern was stronger for same-gender compared with different-gender students, and seating Roma and non-Roma students next to each other did not reliably increase the chance of cross-group friendship. Other studies indicate that students in racially balanced classrooms are still more than twice as likely to choose a same-race peer than a cross-race peer

as their best friend (Hallinan, 1982), students are more likely to have same-race friends than what would be predicted by the racial composition of the school (Joyner & Kao, 2000; Quillian & Campbell, 2003), and people are more likely to socialize with same-race others even in public spaces that are racially diverse (e.g., bars and nightclubs; May, 2014). Still other results suggest that increasing diversity may, in some instances, be associated with a *decreased* likelihood of cross-group friendships: Moody (2001) found a positive correlation between school racial diversity and friendship segregation, such that greater heterogeneity was associated with a greater tendency to have same-race friends.

In sum, although increasing physical proximity between out-groups *can* foster cross-group friendships, it does not always. The link between physical proximity and friendship formation is more complex in cross-group than in same-group contexts. This explains why increasing diversity alone, whether in schools, workplaces, or neighborhoods, will not necessarily lead to more cross-group friendships.

Functional Proximity

Close-relationships research has long demonstrated that it is not only *physical* proximity that drives opportunity for interaction and friendship formation, but also *functional* proximity (Festinger et al., 1950). In other words, it is not only the physical distance between two individuals that shapes their likelihood of developing a relationship, but also features of the environment that make interaction between individuals more likely. Classic research on functional proximity has illustrated that those who live near stairways in apartment buildings are more likely to become friends with people on other floors despite their physical separation, because the configuration of the building facilitates their interaction (Festinger et al., 1950).

Functional proximity is an important driver of cross-group interaction. Even when members of different social groups are physically close, they may remain functionally distant, reducing the likelihood of cross-group interaction. For example, highways, train lines, school district boundaries, and other barriers often divide neighborhoods in cities in which people of different racial/ethnic or economic groups live physically close to one another (Noonan, 2005; Roberto & Hwang, 2017). In fact, functional barriers to prevent intergroup mingling may sometimes be *more* common in diverse environments with close physical proximity between groups due to Whites'

racial anxieties. An examination of every tennis and golf facility in the United States revealed that the more racially diverse the surrounding community, the more likely these historically White facilities were to have guest policies, fees, dress codes, and other restrictive barriers in place (Anicich et al., 2021). Additionally, even as more White families move into diverse urban neighborhoods, schools remain segregated, as White parents frequently choose not to send their children to local public schools (Candipan, 2019). Despite physical proximity between out-groups in these settings, such barriers—whether physical, embedded in policy, or created through behavior—reduce functional proximity and thus limit opportunities for groups to interact and become friends.

In contrast, actions taken to encourage meaningful interaction between out-groups that occupy the same space, but might not otherwise interact, can facilitate cross-group relationships. A classic example is the jigsaw classroom (Aronson & Bridgeman, 1979), in which a diverse group of students engage in cooperative learning activities that require meaningful interaction between groups on equal footing. In addition, online dating platforms, which increase functional proximity by presenting people with opportunities to meet with potential partners nearby whose paths might not have otherwise crossed, have resulted in more interracial and interreligious relationships (Thomas, 2020). These effects may be small due to individual beliefs and preferences that limit interest in cross-group relationships (as discussed later in this chapter), but they illustrate the importance of functional, not just physical, proximity.

Social Proximity

People's relationships do not exist in a vacuum; rather, they are embedded in a larger social network. Social networks introduce another type of proximity that influences the likelihood of friendship formation: *social proximity*. Social proximity reflects the idea that people are more likely to interact and form friendships with people to whom they are more closely socially connected than with people to whom they are more distantly connected. In particular, people are much more likely to develop friendships with friends of friends (a phenomenon called triadic closure; Granovetter, 1973) than with people with a greater degree of separation.

Social proximity is particularly important in cross-group friendships. Triadic closure greatly exacerbates homophily in friendship networks

(Asikainen et al., 2020). Even a slight tendency of people to form same-group friendships is magnified by the tendency to develop friendships with friends of friends, propelling the entire network toward segregation. For example, if a White student's friends are predominately White, and each of those friends' friends are also predominately White, the student's network will become substantially more White over time due to triadic closure.

Friends of friends can also influence cross-group friendship development by informing attitudes and beliefs about out-group members. Learning that in-group members have out-group friends improves attitudes toward the out-group (Zhou et al., 2019). In turn, these improved attitudes prompted by the social proximity of out-group members may translate into cross-group friendships. For example, people who know that in-group members have out-group friends indicate both that they would like to have and actually have more out-group friends (Gomez et al., 2018; Schofield et al., 2010).

Lastly, given unique concerns regarding social rejection in intergroup contexts, people may also attend to a potential cross-group friend's existing friendships as a cue for whether that person is receptive to friendship formation across group lines. For example, White people report greater interest in befriending a Black person when that person is presented with a White friend than with a Black friend (Shapiro et al., 2010). Black people believe they would be perceived more positively and be accepted by a White person who has a racially diverse friendship network compared with a homogeneously White friendship network (Wout et al., 2010), which has implications for Blacks' willingness to befriend out-group members (Wout et al., 2014). In other words, cross-group friendship development is influenced not just by the social proximity of out-group members in one's existing network, but also by the social proximity of in-group members in an out-group member's network.

Taken together, increased physical, functional, and social proximity to out-group members increases the opportunity to have friendships across group lines. However, these friendships do not always develop. As Khmelkov and Hallinan (1999) argue, proximity is a "necessary but not sufficient" condition for cross-group friendship formation. In some cases, despite proximity to out-group members, people still prefer same-group friends, highlighting the role of individual factors in cross-group friendship formation. We next turn to these individual-level factors.

Individual Beliefs Influencing Cross-Group
Friendship Formation

In addition to ecological opportunities to develop friendships, people's individual characteristics also shape friendship formation. Beliefs, personalities, worldviews, and perceptions of similarity in these characteristics are all related to the quantity and quality of relationships (Doroszuki et al., 2019). Although these individual characteristics are related to both same- and cross-group friendships, certain characteristics uniquely impact cross-group relationships. In this section, we describe how intergroup beliefs, personality, and (perceived) similarity shape cross-group friendships.

Intergroup Beliefs
People's beliefs about out-groups play a role in their willingness to form cross-group friendships. Prejudice is negatively associated with perceptions that out-group individuals are even compatible as friends (McGlothlin et al., 2005). Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies show that prejudice has an adverse effect on actual cross-group friendships as well. For example, college students' racial bias as freshmen negatively predicts their number of cross-race friendships as sophomores and juniors (Levin et al., 2003). Likewise, European students' negative attitudes about ethnic outgroups are associated with a lower quantity and poorer quality of cross-group friendships over time (Binder et al., 2009). Prejudiced majority group members have fewer cross-group friendships in part because they tend to avoid in-group friends who have out-group friends (Stark, 2015). Importantly, no matter how many opportunities someone has in their environment to interact with out-group members, if they have negative attitudes toward the out-group or a preference for their in-group, they are unlikely to form cross-group relationships.

In addition to beliefs about a specific group, intergroup beliefs more generally are precursors for cross-group friendship development. Valuing diversity, for example, is positively associated with having a diverse friendship network. People who report positive beliefs about diversity are likely to have friends of different racial, religious, and sexual orientation groups (Bahns, 2019; Bahns et al., 2015). Perceptions of potential cross-group friends' intergroup beliefs are also influential; the more people believe out-group members value diversity, the more likely they are to be interested in developing and to actually develop cross-group friendships (Rivas-Drake et al.,

2019; Tropp & Bianchi, 2006). Lastly, color-blind ideology is also positively related to cross-group friendships. For example, the more ethnic minorities minimize racism (Gonlin & Campbell, 2017) and religious minorities prefer adopting the dominant culture's views (Zagefka et al., 2016), the more cross-group friends they have. Much of this work is correlational, so one must be careful to make claims about the direction of the relationship. Nonetheless, taken together, these findings suggest that intergroup beliefs are related to cross-group friendship patterns.

Personality

A small but growing body of research suggests that people's tendency to develop cross-group friendships is influenced not only by specific intergroup beliefs, but also by more general personality characteristics. In particular, openness to experience (Jackson & Poulsen, 2005), openness to others (Antonoplis & John, 2022), motivation for self-expansion (Paolini et al., 2016), open-minded thinking (Park et al., 2023), and receptiveness to opposing views (Reschke et al., 2022) have predicted interest in and/or actual development of cross-group friendships. Although this area of research is still developing and mostly correlational thus far, this work may suggest that some underlying construct related to interest in encountering different perspectives, expanding one's worldview, and learning from disagreement may contribute to individuals' tendency to form cross-group friendships.

Perceived Similarity

The close-relationships literature suggests that people prefer to be with others who they believe have similar beliefs as they do (McPherson et al., 2001), and that this perceived similarity is associated with greater relationship quality over and above actual similarity (Montoya et al., 2008). In intergroup contexts, however, the relationship between perceived similarity and friendship may not be as straightforward. In general, people do not expect to have similar beliefs as out-group members, but when they learn they are more similar than expected, it increases their liking for the out-group member (Chen & Kenrick, 2002). Similarly, when people perceive themselves as more similar to out-group members than expected, they have more positive expectations about cross-group interactions and feel less anxious in anticipation of the interaction (West et al., 2014), both of which facilitate friendships. Together, these results suggest that overriding people's default expectations that they will be dissimilar to out-group members increases cross-group

friendship attraction. However, in some circumstances, perceived intergroup *dis*similarity can also increase cross-group friendship attraction. According to social identity theory, people like to feel their groups are distinct, and believing their in-group is too similar to the out-group decreases liking for the out-group (Leonardelli et al., 2010). Consistent with this idea, a study of East Asian–South Asian dyads found that participants instructed to write about differences (vs. similarity) between these two groups expressed greater interest in initiating friendships with their interaction partner (Danyluck & Page-Gould, 2018). Overall, perceived similarity generally predicts friendship development, but the effects of perceived similarity in cross-group friendships are context dependent.

Friendship Maintenance

Once a friendship is formed, people must work to maintain it. In this section, we examine behaviors known to impact close-relationships maintenance in the context of understanding what makes cross-group friendships persist. Admittedly, research has not always been clear as to when these behaviors contribute to the formation or maintenance of relationships. They are likely to play a role in both areas.

Pro-Relationship Behaviors

People engage in a range of pro-relationship behaviors to promote relationship maintenance. For example, disclosing intimate details about oneself and, more importantly, having one's partner be responsive to that self-disclosure are important for increasing intimacy and relationship maintenance (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Moreover, helping, complimenting, and providing security enhances relationship maintenance.

Similar behaviors help maintain cross-group friendships, although people tend to engage in these behaviors less often, which may explain why these friendships are less stable. For example, Blacks and Whites disclose personal and race-related information less often and are less responsive to cross-group friends' disclosures, but partner responsiveness is the mechanism for the relationship between self-disclosure and intimacy for both same-race and cross-race friendships (Chen & Nakazawa, 2009; Sanchez et al., 2022;

Shelton et al., 2010). Moreover, for Black–White friendships, communal motivation (attending to the needs of relationship partners) and communal security (confidence in partners' motivation to attend to one's needs) enhance relationship satisfaction and prosocial behaviors, such as giving compliments, helping the partner, and self-disclosure (Lemay & Ryan, 2021). Overall, similar to same-group friendship, pro-relationship behaviors help maintain cross-group friendships, but cross-group friends engage in these behaviors less often.

Shared Activities

More time spent engaging in shared activities together, often in informal social contexts, is associated with closer friendships (Hall, 2019). Engaging in activities not only fosters interdependence, which is beneficial for the relationship, but also self-expansion, as people come to include the other in their own self-identity, taking on their partner's likes, hobbies, and traits.

Engaging in shared activities may be less likely to occur in cross-group friendships. Various studies report that cross-race friends engage in fewer shared activities than same-race friends (Kao & Joyner, 2004), negatively predicting cross-race friendship retention (Ruda & Herda, 2010). Additionally, cross-group friends may engage in less intimate shared activities. For example, cross-race (vs. same-race) adolescent friends are less likely to visit one another's home, although visiting a friend's home is positively associated with friendship stability (Kao & Joyner, 2004; Lessard et al., 2019). Spending time at home allows for more intimate connections, allowing friends to engage in activities and self-disclose more than might be permitted in formal settings such as schools and workplaces. Thus, the fact that these types of intimate shared activities are less likely to occur in cross-group friendships could be part of the reason that these friendships are less likely to be maintained than same-group friendships.

Benefits of Cross-Group Friendships

Friendships shape many life outcomes. High-quality friendships are associated with health benefits (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2017) and cognitive and educational benefits (Wentzel et al., 2018).

These types of individual benefits also exist for cross-group friendships (Lessard & Juvonen; 2019; Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008), but relatively little is known about whether and how they differ from those of same-group friendships. Instead, the focus has been on intergroup benefits, which we review below.

Attitudes

Cross-group friendships embody the essential characteristics posited for improving intergroup attitudes: intimate contact, equal status, and cooperation between partners (Pettigrew, 1998). As a result, perhaps it is no surprise that the most-studied topic in the cross-group friendship literature is its impact on prejudice reduction. A meta-analysis of 135 experimental and longitudinal studies showed that cross-group friendships are associated with more positive intergroup attitudes (Davies et al., 2011). This relationship exists across various types of cross-group contexts and for members of both majority and marginalized groups, but studies involving racial/ethnic groups yield smaller effect sizes than friendships across nationality, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation (Davies et al., 2011). Similarly, a meta-analysis of 115 studies revealed that knowing or perceiving that an in-group friend has an out-group friend is related to positive out-group attitudes, independent of one's own out-group friendships (Zhou et al, 2019). Numerous factors have been identified as mechanisms for these effects, including increased knowledge about the out-group, empathy, and perspective taking and decreased intergroup anxiety, all of which in turn reduce prejudice.

Although cross-group friendships benefit intergroup attitudes for majority and minority groups, their association with other group-relevant outcomes varies across groups. For example, for Whites, having a greater percentage of racial minority friends is associated with an *increased* awareness of racial injustice and involvement in collective action to help minorities (Carter et al., 2018). For racial minorities, however, having a greater percentage of White friends is associated with a *decreased* awareness of racial injustice and involvement in collective action to help minorities (Carter et al., 2018). Similar to intergroup contact (Saguy, 2018), cross-group friendships may allow members of minority groups to see more similarities between them and their majority friends, which can be good for intergroup attitudes

but also diminishes their beliefs that majority group members can be biased, undermining the desire for social justice.

Social Support

Cross-group friendships buffer people from a range of negative outcomes associated with intergroup relations. For example, cross-group friends protect people who expect to be rejected in cross-group interactions from stress (Page-Gould, 2012) and low levels of belonging and dissatisfaction in college (Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008). Similarly, people who have cross-group friendships experience lower physiological stress reactivity in novel intergroup interactions (Page-Gould et al., 2008). Moreover, cross-group friendships provide social support when faced with cross-group conflict. Whereas people who experience intergroup conflict are less likely to initiate interracial interactions the next day, people with high-quality cross-group friendships demonstrate no change in initiating contact after intergroup conflict (Page-Gould, 2012).

Future Directions

There are many outstanding topics to explore about cross-group friendship. First, more insight into how to effectively facilitate cross-group friendships is needed. Given that the friendships yield important benefits for intergroup relations, we need to know how to facilitate them in the real world. In particular, more work should consider how ecological factors and individual dispositions may interact to yield divergent effects in cross-group friendship formation. Second, compared with the antecedents and consequences of cross-group friendships, there is considerably less research on the maintenance of cross-group friendships. More research on the specific factors that contribute to the maintenance of cross-group friendships would be fruitful, especially given that cross-group friendships often dissolve more quickly than same-group friendships. Third, as most of the literature on cross-group friendships focuses on interracial friendships, more effort is needed to understand cross-group friendships across other identities, including but not limited to political beliefs, socioeconomic status, culture, and sexual orientations. Future work should also consider how these different

identities interact with each other in cross-group friendship formation and maintenance. Finally, more research is needed on the benefits and costs of cross-group friendships beyond prejudice reduction. Furthering our understanding in these areas might be beneficial not only for intergroup relations but also for our understanding of close relationships in general.

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