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# Manhunt

## The Challenge of Enticing Men to Participate in a Study on Friendship

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This article explores the methodological problems encountered as I attempted to locate and recruit 40 male participants for the research I am currently undertaking on the experience of friendship across gender and the life course. The situation I found myself in was that men were considerably harder to recruit than women. In this article, I describe the various problems I encountered and I propose several reasons that men's reluctance to participate may have occurred. I outline the strategies I employed to counter these recruitment difficulties and reflect on some measures that might have been taken to avoid these problems. This is in no way a conclusive article, but it aims to raise the issue of male reluctance, which I believe requires serious discussion in the wider social research community due to the "interview society" in which we currently find ourselves.

**Keywords:** *research method; recruitment; respondent reluctance; gender; masculinities*

In 2003, when I set about planning my research, which examines the everyday gendered world of friendship across the life span, I set my participation numbers at a total of 90: 15 men and 15 women in three different age cohorts: early 20s, 40s, and retirement age (65 and older).<sup>1</sup> My focus was on the details surrounding my data collection, which included a mixed research method of qualitative in-depth interviews and quantitative time-use diaries that participants would keep over a period of 1 week. In all my attention to getting my collection, reliability, and validity of data as fool-proof as possible, I had entirely overlooked a problem that would occur even sooner than the data collection. It was not until I began recruiting participants for my research that my biggest problem became glaringly obvious. Men were not interested in participating.

In this article, I will explore this problem, outlining the recruitment methods that I resorted to in order to fulfill my numbers. I will then explore reasons

that men may have been reluctant to participate and explain the measures I have had to incorporate to counter these problems. From the outset, I acknowledge that, as a female, I am attempting to gain a sense of understanding and meaning from the position of the Other. This article is not so much a critical analysis as it is a reflective work that attempts to unravel the reasons for my recruitment problems and suggest strategies for working through and learning from the experience. I do not aim to provide set solutions to the problem but to bring this issue up as a serious dilemma that must be carefully thought through and allowed for in the planning stages of social research. This issue raises interesting questions for social researchers about how we gain sociological knowledge in certain subject areas and what effect gender has on the process of gaining access to reluctant participants. I leave the topic open for further debate in the academic community as to how we can conduct strong social research when men are seemingly unwilling participants on “soft” topics.

### **Why Was I So Ill-Prepared?**

It is not surprising that I had entered my recruitment stage so blissfully unaware of the problems that might occur. First, acknowledgment of difficulties in obtaining willing participants is not something addressed in social research textbooks. In researching this article, I spent considerable time at the library in search of some guidance on recruitment problems. I sifted through literally dozens of books on the practicalities of doing social research and found that although they all had sections on sampling, the starting premise in each of these texts is that there is a world of people out there waiting to be interviewed; our job as social researchers is to make sure we select the most suitable of these. The focus is on applying the right sampling method for our particular type of research to make sure that we have either a random selection that is representative or a purposive one that covers either a wide range of our chosen population or a specific group of people who we wish to investigate. The few written works that address the issue of participant reluctance tend to focus on issues of rapport building once in an interview situation (Adler & Adler, 2001; Johnson & Weller, 2001; Ostrander, 1993), of conducting research on sensitive subjects (Morse, 2001; Renzetti & Lee, 1993), or of the challenges of gaining access to elites (Odendahl & Shaw, 2001; Ostrander, 1993; Undheim, 2003).

Although it would be hard to imagine why friendship would be viewed as a sensitive subject, I had to look to work on sensitive topics for current

explanations concerning participation reluctance. Renzetti and Lee (1993) state that there are four reasons that participants might feel threatened by participating in research: (a) where research intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some personal experience, (b) where the study is concerned with deviance and social control, (c) where it impinges on the vested interests of powerful persons or the exercise of coercion or domination, and (d) where it deals with things sacred to those being studied that they do not wish profaned.

Renzetti and Lee's focus is on the type of research that struggles to attract participants. Adler and Adler (2001), however, look to individual characteristics of potential participants to explain participant reluctance. They find that there are certain types of reluctant participants: the secretive, sensitive, advantaged, and conversely, disadvantaged.

Neither of these approaches can fully explain why I had difficulty in my research. Friendship is a matter that would not generally be considered sensitive and one would imagine it would be something that both the advantaged and disadvantage would experience and have some sort of opinion on. The only area that might be applicable in Renzetti and Lee's explanation might be the desire for privacy, something that will be discussed further in this article.

I was unable to find any work on participant reluctance that specified gender as being a particular problem in recruitment. Where gender is addressed, the focus is on how to interview men or women—how to draw them out and manage an interview (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001), not necessarily how to get them interested in participating in your research to start with. Sue Scott's (1985) reflective piece discusses the effect that gender and status had on her research, which involved interviewing researchers in a school of sociology. She found that the combination of sexism and elitism left her struggling to build a sense of credibility and even self-worth with her male participants. Likewise, Barbara Pini (2005) raises some interesting points in her article concerning issues of gender, (hetero)sexuality, and status in researching. However, as with the other writers on participant reluctance, both of these articles mainly relate to the power relationship, once access to the participant has been granted, not the problems in actually recruiting participants.

The second reason I could be forgiven for not expecting problems in fulfilling my participant numbers is that my target criteria were very broad, with anyone who fitted the right age (apart from my own friends and family members) being suitable. In my previous research, which investigated how women experience infertility in contemporary Western society, I found it quite simple to find my participants, even though they were a highly select

and in many ways invisible group, who were likely to find the topic sensitive and possibly distressing. If I had encountered no problems recruiting for that research, why would I expect problems for research on a seemingly harmless topic with no strict criteria for participation?

## The Experience of Trying to Recruit Men

My difficulties, therefore, came as something of a shock and the realization of my challenge hit after I had conducted my first 15 interviews and realized only three had been men. My sole focus over the 10 months that followed was on the project of enticing men to participate in my research. As I come from a recruitment and sales background, I had a range of skills and experience to draw on. I used all of my personal, academic, and professional networks, sending out my invitation to participate with “**especially men**” in bold letters whenever possible. I put a flyer up at the local bowling club advertising my research. I asked an associate to pass on my request for assistance to members of a men’s group he belonged to and received no response. I called football clubs to no avail. I appealed to the students in my sociology tutorials to participate or, if female, to ask their brothers, fathers, grandfathers, and male friends. I enlisted five other sociology lecturers and tutors to help and printed out more than 200 flyers advertising my research, which were passed out to students in their classes. I also strategically placed flyers on notice boards around campus.

Adler and Adler (2001) suggest using a sponsor—others have referred to gaining access through “gatekeepers”—as a way of overcoming participant reluctance. A sponsor refers to individuals with the power to persuade others in groups or organizations. Many social scientists find this an effective way of gaining access to participants. For example, Andrew Singleton (2003) was able to access his entire sample of men in his research concerning men’s capacity for intimacy with the help of office bearers from two men’s groups. I was fortunate with this project to find a sponsor in the president of a large chapter of the University of the Third Age (U3A), an organization that offers ongoing education to older citizens. This sponsor readily advertised my research. The response from the U3A request saw women outnumbering men at a rate of five to one. Upon hearing that I was still short on men, my sponsor personally approached members and strongly encouraged them to participate. Two more volunteered at that point.

I found with the recruitment methods that none of the nonpersuasive methods seemed to work. As can be seen in Table 1, only 15% of my male

**Table 1**  
**Recruitment Source of Participants for Research on Friendship**

Recruitment Method	Females				Males				Cohort/Age			
	20s	40s	65+	Total	20s	40s	65+	Total	20s	40s	65+	Total
Nonpersuasive/blind												
Bowls club	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	1	1
U3A	—	—	9	9	—	—	4	4	—	—	13	13
Flyers to students	1	1	—	2	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	2
E-mail to PACT	2	1	—	3	1	—	—	1	3	1	—	4
Total nonpersuasive	3	2	9	<b>14</b>	1	—	5	<b>6</b>	4	2	14	20
Persuasive (personal network)												
E-mails	—	4	—	4	—	1	—	1	—	5	—	5
Personal request	3	4	1	8	3	5	—	8	6	9	1	16
Plea to students	2	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	2
Total	5	8	1	14	3	6	—	9	8	14	1	23
Persuasive (others' networks)												
Sponsor (U3A)	1	—	—	1	—	—	2	2	1	—	2	3
Snowballing	1	3	3	7	3	4	6	13	4	7	9	20
Through friends/colleagues	—	2	2	4	3	5	2	10	3	7	4	14
Total	2	5	5	12	6	9	11	25	8	14	15	37
Total persuasive	7	13	6	<b>26</b>	9	15	11	<b>34</b>	16	28	16	50
Total number recruited	10	15	15	40	10	15	15	40	20	30	30	40

Note: PACT = Postgraduates After Critical Thinking; U3A = University of the Third Age. Bold numbers represent the total amount of participants recruited from persuasive and nonpersuasive methods.

participants came through nonpersuasive recruitment methods, as opposed to 35% of women. In nonpersuasive methods, I include the student hand-outs, e-mails, and the advertisement at the bowling club (which only attracted a single participant from a club boasting 350 members). In fact, the way I secured the majority of my male participants was by literally spruiking my research at every available opportunity.<sup>2</sup> I constantly talked about my research and recruiting problems to friends and asked for their help. Where I knew they had brothers, parents, grandparents, partners, friends, or colleagues who were in the right age group, I would ask them specifically to go to that individual and ask for help on my behalf. If I saw a husband of a friend, I would ask directly for his help. With this resulting in 65% of my male participants, it was clear that this was my most effective means of recruiting men.

Returning to Table 1, one can see that males posed difficulties in all age groups. It should be noted that women in the oldest group were the most willing to help, and in fact, there were five too many volunteers from U3A for me to include in my sample who are not included in the table. There were also females who were the right age for the two younger cohorts who were willing to participate who I needed to decline due to already achieving my desired numbers for females.

One thing the table cannot capture is the salience of the persuasion required. For example, in the cases where I made a direct request of a female acquaintance, the response was almost always, "Sure, what do I need to do?" With virtually all the men I directly asked, it was either an outright "no" or a hesitant request for more information. In summary, overall, the female participants tended to appear without effort; however, recruiting men became tantamount to a full-time job.

## Possible Explanations

So why is it that men were so uncooperative in this research project? Should I simply conclude that men don't have friends or don't care about friendship? In his exploration of the psychological development of men over a lifetime, Daniel Levinson (1978) notes that friendship is not a feature of American men's lives. He explains that they have large networks and friendly acquaintances, but very few have "an intimate male friend of the kind that they recall fondly from boyhood or youth" (p. 335). Lilian Rubin (1985) had similar conclusions in her research, where she noted that only one third of the men interviewed could readily name a best friend and,

when Rubin then asked the same question of the named friend, very few of these friendships turned out to be reciprocated (pp. 62-63).

None of the men I approached, however, gave this as the reason. Overall, I found that the men I spoke to who would not participate as well as those who did all appeared to have a concept of friendship and were able to talk about some level of friendship in their lives. In social situations, I had many conversations with men who were very interested in the topic and asked me questions about my research, concurring with some of my observations and sharing their own anecdotal experiences and opinions. However, when I asked them to commit to the project, they were quick to decline. Some of them, especially in the older age bracket, said they weren't "into all that stuff" or were "just not too interested in talking about it." Therefore, the suggestion that men simply don't have friends could be criticized for being superficial. There may be several other explanations that I will now expand on.

### **Time Constraints**

The most common reason given by the men who would not participate was lack of time. Many social commentators claim that Western society is experiencing a "time famine" where "time-deepening" behavior is crucial to survival (Robinson & Godbey, 1997; Schor, 1991). It is widely accepted knowledge that men tend to work long hours, and those in full-time jobs have less flexibility to schedule in extra activities outside of their work than their female counterparts, who are more likely to be in part-time or casual employment or are absent from the paid workforce due to the responsibilities of raising families (Zajdow, 1995, p. 71). This limited availability was noticeable by the amount of time I have spent chasing up men after their initial agreement to participate, which involved many follow-up conversations to arrange interview dates and chase diaries and was evident even in the fact that several men had their wives fill in all or parts of their diaries for them rather than complete this part of the research requirement themselves.

Two of my male colleagues are in their 40s, so I enlisted their help in accessing participants. Neither one was able to produce a single participant. Both claimed limitation of time as being the main reason that there was no interest in participating. Part of my expectations of my participants was to keep a diary of their friendship activity for a period of 1 week. This extended commitment of time may have dissuaded many men from participating, and in fact, those who did participate often returned their diaries not filled in completely and requiring further follow up from me; in some cases, their diaries had to be returned to them to be properly completed.



The lack of time might seem a valid reason for the men in the middle age cohort not to participate but could not be used in the youngest or oldest, as in both cohorts, hours of paid work are similar to their equivalent female cohorts due to the absence of dependent children (Craig, 2004). In the oldest cohort, both men and women are retired and have the same amount of time available to them; in fact, women often spend more time in retirement in labor activities than their male counterparts, when adding the time spent caring for family members and their time spent in volunteer work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998, 2001; Zajdow, 1995).

Although it is often assumed that males have less time due to work commitments, research shows that women in the middle age group struggle with time constraints just as much as, if not more than, men due to their unpaid working responsibilities. Using time-use diaries, Hook (2004) found that when combining paid work with volunteer and support work, there was virtually no difference in the amount of time spent working between men and women, with men recording 54.6 hours of work per week and women recording 54.0. Other studies contend that women are working much more than their husbands (Craig, 2004). Moreover, in Almeida and Kessler's (1998) study of the stress levels experienced by men and women, they found that mothers experience more stress on a daily basis because of the number of roles they undertake, as emotional carers, negotiators with teachers, tradespeople, salespeople, home organizers, and caretakers of children.

This was certainly the case with the 15 female participants in the middle age cohort of this research project. There was only one who was not participating in public life in the capacity of studying or paid work. This participant had a baby and preschooler, which is accepted as the most labor-intensive phase of childrearing, requiring an estimated time commitment of 12.5 hours per day in unpaid domestic labor (Craig, 2004, p. 73). I did not get the impression from any of the female participants in my research that any had much idle time on their hands. Therefore, I am unconvinced that, in reality, men have less time available to them than women.

Although it seems that women and men are both having their time commitments challenged in contemporary society, perhaps one of the answers to this being used as a reason to withhold help by men is that they are used to being sheltered from uninvited challenges to their time due to the privileged role they hold in society. In Undheim's (2003) investigation of gaining access to elites, he explains that whereas technological advances prevail, there is the paradox of it being easier to find and get in touch with elites (via Internet, e-mail, mobile phones, etc.), however, there are more ways elites

are able to protect themselves from unwanted intrusion (caller ID, answering machines, never being available due to constant mobility). He also points out that secretaries can limit access, and I would add that wives and children can equally exacerbate difficulties in gaining access to men in the private sphere. What we might conclude here is that men are not necessarily busier; they are simply better protected and not used to participating in activities they do not see as their obligatory domain to participate in.

So, from this, do we assume that the men I approached to participate in this research did not volunteer because they are simply lazy? Research on the amount of community service and volunteering men participate in would support this claim, showing that it is women who are at the forefront of our unpaid labor force (Zajdow, 1995). When men tend to volunteer, it is when there is a direct payoff. For example, participating in groups such as Rotary or Lions results in networking opportunities, or sitting on various committees offers levels of prestige and has career-enhancing benefits (Wilke, 1999). However, men clearly participate in some activities that do not come with immediate benefits. For example, there appears to be no shortage of men participating in research that investigates politics, global trends, or specific aspects of their work, and they do volunteer to assist in activities such as coaching sporting teams, helping with Working Bees,<sup>3</sup> moving house, and other such altruistic work (Brown, Lipsig-Mumme, & Zajdow, 2003; Piliavin & Charng, 1990).

### “Doing” Masculinity

Hook (2004) asks similar questions when exploring the politics of household labor and notes that this is a “site for women and men to display and reproduce gender.”

Wives perform housework and husbands avoid housework as a way to do gender. Similarly, we might expect that because of the gendered conception of care, wives will do gender by helping, and men will do gender by avoiding helping. (p. 104)

By looking at the areas that men do participate in voluntarily, we soon realize that those volunteer activities are examples of doing masculinity.

West and Zimmerman’s (1987) ethnographic concept of doing gender makes the distinction that gender is not something we are but something that we perform throughout our daily lives in accordance with the expectations of our given society. It has been described as a “*cultural* prescription

for self-presentation” (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001, p. 203). At the conclusion of his exploration of the way men are pushed toward expressions of “hypermasculinity,” Roger Horrocks (1994) states,

We can tentatively conclude that hypermasculinity in men is “unnatural” and has to be forced. Both men and women contain both masculine and feminine elements: but men are constantly vigilant about and repressive towards their own femininity. (p. 91)

Acting in the socially prescribed masculine way in Western culture means being in control, independent, rational, courageous (Connell, 1987; Goffman, 1963), and in extreme cases, “macho” (Horrocks, 1994). Friendship, however, is a relationship marked by vulnerability, altruism, openness, impulsiveness, and a need for belonging, traits that tend to be attached to femininity (Jary & Jary, 2000). Many theorists have suggested that men shy away from overt demonstrations of affection due to homophobia and the fear of being perceived as homosexual by others (Connell, 1995; Tognoli, 1980). Therefore, would it be taking too broad a leap to claim that men do not wish to indulge in research about friendship because it deviates from notions of masculine behavior? This certainly would appear to be the case in my experience, as several men, when I mentioned that my research was about friendship, immediately responded, “Oh, you don’t want me, but my wife would be great in your research!”

It should be noted that this was very much a generational situation. The older the male, the more likely he was to discuss friendship as a feminine skill. Sully<sup>4</sup> is a perfect example of this. He was home when I visited to interview his wife, who was a participant in the retired cohort. I asked him directly if he would also be interested in participating, explaining my difficulties in getting men involved in the research. Sully was very reluctant to commit, citing that he was not the right person to talk to about friendships, that he didn’t have much to tell, and that he wasn’t good at talking about “that sort of thing.” When I prompted him to explain what he meant by “that sort of thing,” he went on to say that he was referring to emotions. He equated friendship with emotional labor and did not feel that he, or any man for that matter, was adequately equipped to speak about it. When I pressed him further and reassured him that his view of friendship was very important to my research and that I would have no problem understanding him, he further declined, saying, “No, I’m just not good at that stuff. Men aren’t good at talking about emotional stuff like that.”

It should be noted, however, that the younger men in my research did not have the same traditional views of openness and emotional labor in friendship, and only one had a wife he could divert me to. With that being the case, why was it that it was difficult to entice younger men to participate? Could it be, as Natalier (2003) suggests in her research on young men's domestic labor in male share-houses, that they are already starting to practice "doing masculinity" by acting out heterosexual gender roles prior to entering the settling stage of life? Expanding on this, it quickly became clear in my interviews that the core focus of young men was in creating their public personae. Their priority was on studying and career building. Friendship is something they openly claim to enjoy; however, they are prepared to put it on hold to reach their goals around setting up a secure, independent, and prosperous life—all features required for achieving the prescribed status of hegemonic masculinity. This shows that although young men do not shy away from discussing emotional labor, it is not their priority, and therefore participating in research on the topic detracts from the more important work associated with creating their masculine identity.

## The Interview Society

A key characteristic of masculinity is the need for privacy and compartmentalization of roles, which is another reason the men I approached may not have wanted to participate. Andrew Singleton (2003), in his exploration of men's level of emotional sharing in men's groups, found that although they "did intimacy" within the security of the group, when they went back to wider society, they returned to more hegemonic forms of masculine relating (p. 144). This illustrates the need to keep certain aspects of the self locked away from the public gaze.

In a similar situation to the one I described earlier, a retired husband was home when I was interviewing his wife. She was a lively and spirited woman, and after the interview, she dragged me through to the kitchen because I had told her of my predicament concerning male participation. "Oh, my husband will help you, won't you dear?" she gushed. He lifted his head from his paper and uttered a single word, "No." She continued, saying, "It's not hard, darling. You just have to tell Karina about your friends; you have lots of friends." When he responded the second time, he did not even raise his head, but this time I got three words, "No, not interested." I can only speculate why his reaction was so uncooperative. It may be that he feels similarly to Sully, or it could be a simple wish to protect his privacy,

something that is becoming more difficult to do in our information-driven society.

Adler and Adler (2001) point out that contemporary Western society has become extremely surveillance oriented, to the point where almost every aspect of our lives may be monitored.

Concealed audio and video devices record behavior, phone calls may be monitored and taped, Internet communication may be invaded, and secure documents and systems hacked. Records of individuals' lives, in this information age, are readily accessible to those with the necessary technological expertise, and privacy consequently has been diminished. All of these factors exacerbate individuals' reluctance to reveal too many aspects of their selves to others. (p. 516)

Market research is rife in our competitive capitalist society. In the week that I wrote this article, I was required to fill out an online customer satisfaction survey for our university buildings and maintenance performance, to provide written feedback for a sociology review. I received two calls from telemarketers, one wanting to survey me on my household consumption and one asking me to sell raffle tickets for a charitable organization, and I had an uninvited visit from a pair of religious gentlemen wanting to discuss my relationship with God. It certainly is an era when privacy is no longer part of our everyday experience of the world, which Gubrium and Holstein (2001) have referred to as "the interview society". As researchers, we need to be aware that gone are the days when being asked to participate in social research is something of a novelty or even a privilege. From the perspective of "Joe Citizen," an academic social researcher is just another wolf at the door wanting to chomp on a chunk of their private lives.

## **Part of the Feminist Backlash**

At this point, I feel that I have come close to uncovering the reasons for the lack of interest in participation by men. However, one last reason remains unexplored. Could it be that men are battle weary of feminist research? Norwegian sociologist Undheim (2003), when discussing strategies for gaining access to elites, points out that difficulty in accessing participants may be due to the research agenda being seen to be threatening. The assumption may be made that as I am a female, my agenda is to show weakness in men's friendships. We see in both popular culture and media representations, as well as existing research on male friendship, that men are shown to be shallow in

their emotional ties (Haas & Sherman, 1982; Horrocks, 1994; Rubin, 1985; Singleton, 2003). It would be plausible to assume that some men may imagine that my research goals are supportive of this perspective. I attempted to counter this in the early stages of my recruitment by being careful not to use any wording in my advertisements that even hinted at taking a feminist standpoint. However, I acknowledge that my plain language statement's heading may have put some men off. It read, "Friendship: Do gender and age have an impact?" Perhaps, because I made *gender* explicit in my plain language statement, some of my refusals were out of fear that the research might be used to fuel (perceived) claims that females are superior in matters of friendship practice. I was having a candid conversation with a nonacademic male colleague about this, and he immediately agreed that this would definitely put him off from participating in research.

As Pini (2005) also points out, another gender-related reason is that maybe men, especially older men, would not feel comfortable being interviewed by a younger woman. As researchers, we know that having a shared membership or area of expertise is an effective way of gleaning participants (Adler & Adler, 2001), and with one glaringly obvious membership being gender, it is clearly impossible for me to share that with my male participants. One must wonder, therefore, if a male had been conducting the research, would he have experienced the same difficulties as I did?

This is not an entirely convincing argument, as pointed out to me in a conversation with a male researcher recently. He stated that he found it just as difficult to gain male participation in his research as I had in mine. He posed the idea that men will only participate in research if it shows them to be "competently" masculine. In his research, he was investigating the use of farm equipment and he found that the farmers using the innovative equipment were easy to recruit; the struggle was getting men to participate who were using the more outdated equipment. His explanation was that men are happy to discuss publicly their experiences and opinions when they can be seen to be doing it well. However, if they are seen to be "not good" at something, they will decline participation. This added further weight to the argument that if research does not give the male a platform on which to display his success at doing masculinity, then he is unlikely to be interested in being involved.

## Overcoming Male Reluctance

What I have done to this point is explain the problems I have experienced with trying to entice men to participate in my research and to run

through some of the aetiological reasons for this. But what does this mean to my research? If large numbers refuse to participate, am I only attracting a certain *type* of male? What steps do I need to take to counter any bias that may result from this? What can other researchers learn from my experience to overcome similar gender-related problems in their own research. I have three suggestions that I will now outline.

## De-Gendering and Re-Gendering

First, as researchers, we need to be aware of our own effect on our research and try to counter this as much as possible. Some things, for example, the fact that I am a female, cannot be changed. However, it is worth considering partnering up with a male colleague and having both names on all literature inviting participation. This may help counter the problem of the battle-weary man. The male research partner would not necessarily have to be closely involved with the research, but simply the knowledge that there is a male associated with it may help alleviate any possible fears of information being used for an agenda that men may not appreciate. For postgraduate researchers, it would be well advised to include any male supervisors' names on documentation. I only had the name of my principal supervisor, who is female, on my plain language statement, but possibly having my male research supervisor's name included would have helped alleviate concerns that some men may have had about the intent of the research.<sup>5</sup>

Researchers need to be aware of any gendered language or bias that creeps into their advertising. It is worth having male associates check the wording of plain language statements and advertisements to be sure that the language used is suitable to the target sample. Flexibility in being able to adapt to different styles of speech, mannerisms, and demeanors is also crucial to attracting participants (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). For example, when talking to participants, I listened carefully to the words they used, then used them myself when I spoke. One common pattern was that men used the word *mate*, whereas women used the word *friend*. Likewise, many of the men, when using the word *relationship*, were actually referring to their romantic partner, whereas the women tended to have a much broader usage of the word. By recognizing and imitating individual and gendered patterns of speech, the researcher can build rapid rapport and gain commitment to participation.

In addition, flexibility and being prepared to conduct an interview at a moment's notice is required to maximize opportunities to gain participants (Undheim, 2003). In several cases throughout the interview phase of my

research, I turned up for interviews to find other willing participants there. In one case, the interviewee had two friends visiting who were interested in participating. I only had two audiotapes in my bag and paperwork for one person. After some thought and discussion, I gained their approval to conduct the interviews as a single group interview. They commented that “there’s nothing I’d say to you that I couldn’t say to him,” and the interview turned out to be a useful source of data and a pseudo-ethnography, as I was able to observe their interaction as friends while hearing their stories. The other advantage of this was that they kept each other’s stories in check when the temptation of embellishment presented itself, they encouraged each other to tell me stories about different experiences, and they put each other at ease by their very presence.

### **Selling Rather Than Inviting**

Second, we need to understand when planning our sampling methods in qualitative research that it is not simply a case of selecting from an eager cross section of waiting participants. There is very little intrinsic incentive or prestige attached to participating in research anymore. In our interview society, there needs to be a *perceived extrinsic benefit* if men are to participate (Adler & Adler, 2001). Researchers now need to have strong marketing plans for our research and be prepared to use various methods of persuasion to entice participation. I expect this suggestion to sit uncomfortably with some academics; however, if we do not apply sales techniques in encouraging participation, we will only gain access to the most willing members of society, which means we miss the depth of information available to us. We need to spruik our research with passion and give people the impression that an interview with them is exactly what we need to make sure our research is as varied as it possibly can be.

If, as concluded above, a target participant is most comfortable doing masculinity, then the researcher needs to appeal to his masculine motivational triggers. To encourage men to participate in my study, it was necessary for me to approach them strategically, identify what type of masculinity they were comfortable doing, and then pitch my research accordingly. As part of my strategy, I appealed to my prospective participants’ masculine values to gain participation. I provided the opportunity to demonstrate their courage and strength by openly telling participants that I was in a major spot of bother and needed their help. I appealed to the masculine values of prestige, power, and pride by telling prospective participants that they represented a select group who I specifically



wanted to find out about. I appealed to their attraction to competition by mentioning that women were much better at volunteering their time than men. I highly recommend, as long as the dominant style of masculinity is in line with these values, that researchers approach their male target set accordingly. I also recommend the use of gatekeepers and allowing others to assert their own powerful influence to attract the participants required.

It must be noted that using methods of persuasion needs to be managed carefully because "if researchers are too aggressive in their requests, they may scare or threaten respondents" (Adler & Adler, 2001, p. 525). However, if the researcher has finely tuned emotional intelligence, using these techniques can work very effectively.

In the highly competitive, capitalist society we find ourselves in, it may be necessary to offer payment to participants. Market research companies commonly pay participants for their time, with their payment rates depending on the difficulty of accessing participants, the professions of those being canvassed, and the level of expected benefits that will result from their research for their participant (C. Thompson, personal communication, December 26, 2004). This is also commonly done in academic research where the study is seen as important and funding has been made possible. Researchers, such as Laumann and colleagues, have found that "the judicious use of incentive is cost effective," as it reduces the amount of time required to hunt down and chase participants (Adler & Adler, 2001, p. 524). I estimate that the difficulties I have had with accessing willing participants have cost me more than 300 hours of my time. Universities are now under even higher levels of pressure than ever to make sure research is being conducted in the shortest amount of time possible, therefore, providing funding to pay participants for their time may be one way of saving the researcher valuable recruitment time. If men are higher wage earners and feel the pressure to be the breadwinners even in the most so-called advanced societies (Kimmel, 2004), we need to understand that cash may be a strong incentive as well as adding a perceived value to their participation.

Of course, as Adler and Adler (2001) point out, the issue of payment raises many areas for debate and clarification, such as, Does payment have a negative effect on the power dynamics of the interviewer/interviewee? If you only pay men, or certain social groupings of men, do you reinforce existing inequalities that as social researchers we wish to overcome? If that is the case, should we pay everyone? Who pays? Do we get sponsors for our research? If so, what intentional or unintentional influence might that have on the outcomes? However, these dilemmas need to be tackled and

resolved if we are to make participating in research beneficial for our hard-to-secure target sample.

### Theorizing “the Gap”

The final strategy I believe is needed to counter the dilemmas resulting from unwilling participants is to theorize “the gap.” It is important to acknowledge sampling difficulties and stress that our research is not representative but rather a snapshot of certain lives at a certain point in time. The beauty of using purposive sampling methods, however, is that one can attempt to identify a type (or types) of person who *may* be missing and go to lengths to try to recruit at least one person who may represent the gap. If the researcher is able to gain the cooperation of at least one or two participants in each cohort who are initially not willing to help, the information gleaned from their interview could be viewed as a possible way of filling the gap. I will illustrate this using one of my participants, Platts, as an example. He is a distant relative far enough removed that I only see him every few years. Platts is a retired man who comes from a military background and is very stern and officious. His wife had seen my e-mail inviting participation and called to say she would participate. At that point, I had already achieved my desired numbers in her cohort, but I asked if Platts would participate. She put him on the phone immediately and he said he would prefer not to participate. After using virtually every strategy in my arsenal of enticement methods (as outlined above), I finally received a reluctant “if I must” and set the interview time. The interview was invaluable. Platts had views and sentiments about friendship that none of the other men had brought up, which added much depth to my data. If I had not persevered in my attempts to persuade him, I would have missed that depth. I can now use his interview to present another person’s narrative, which may be similar to views held by others who were absent from the research.<sup>6</sup>

Another strategy I have used in theorizing the gap is to ask participants for their perceptions of how they compare to those around them as I encourage them to share their observations of others. Quite often in the interviews, participants would make comments such as, “I’m a bit unusual in that way,” which provided me the opportunity to ask them what they thought “usual” was and if they could give me some concrete examples of people like this. Again, this helped gain a wider picture of what may be closer to a perceived norm in friendship patterns and is one of the reasons that conducting qualitative

research is such an in-depth and textured way of gaining understanding of our social world.

## Conclusion

Gaining access to men and enticing them to participate in my research concerning their experience of friendship was fraught with difficulties. I believe the lack of interest by men in my research is a combination of doing masculinity under the guise of being too busy as well as simply not being interested in participating. Friendship is perceived by many men to be emotional labor and, therefore, comes under the umbrella of femininity and private life not worthy of research. They may very well have been put off from participating because of a fear that the research would be used as part of a feminist agenda to undermine men. As researchers, we must be aware of the gender assumptions we hold as well as the gender assumptions and perceptions our target sample may hold. This does not necessarily have to work against us if we are aware of the gendered nature of language, mannerisms, and motivations and ensure we allow for these differences in the planning and recruitment phase of the research. The research community does need to be aware that in our interview society, we must look for fresh ways of attracting participants, and research texts must address the difficulties that can be encountered during the recruitment phase of research projects. Incentive payments may be a suitable way to encourage participation, but this needs to be carried out in a well-planned and prudent manner.

By acknowledging the problems that have occurred during the research process and attempting to understand these, I have been able to begin conceptualizing some of the underlying issues of the gendered nature of friendship. Prior to analyzing any of the content from the data collected, a picture was already starting to emerge through these recruitment issues. The lack of interest by men in participating in this research project suggests that, despite claims that gender roles are becoming less defined, men still have a vested interest in maintaining a distinction between the sexes through doing masculinity by refusing to engage in my study on friendship. The overall lack of interest by men in participating in this research on friendship suggests that men are simply less interested or invested in matters pertaining to friendship than women are. Perhaps, Nietzsche's (1883-1885/1976) concern over men's ability to do friendship is just as relevant now as it was when he penned more than a century ago,

But tell me, you men, who among you is capable of friendship? Alas, behold your poverty, you men, and the meanness of your souls! As much as you give the friend, I will give even my enemy, and I shall not be any the poorer for it. There is comradeship: let there be friendship! (p. 169)

## Notes

1. It should be noted that once the interview process began, I reduced the number of participants in the youngest cohort, as I very quickly reached the saturation point in the detail that was coming forward.

2. *Spruiking* is a term commonly used in Australia to describe a method of selling that involves standing on street corners or at the entrance of retail outlets, often with a microphone, touting the benefits of purchasing a particular product. It is known for being highly motivational, loud, and crowd generating.

3. A Working Bee is when a number of people get together to complete a one-off, large-scale project involving property maintenance.

4. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the true identity of all individuals referred to in this article.

5. I acknowledge that this argument is not entirely strong, considering that my principal supervisor's name is Grazyna Zadajow and could be perceived as either a female or male name, as it is not a common name in Australia.

6. I acknowledge that just because the female participants were more willing to be part of this study than men, this does not imply that no gaps exist within my female sample. However, exploring the intricacies of the gaps that may be present within the female cohorts is outside the scope of this article.

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