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The Friend zone: An In/inite Place Where Nothing Good Happens: A Comprehensive Study of Friend zoning Across Varying Genders and Sexual Orientations

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A Comprehensive Study of Friend zoning Across Varying Genders and Sexual Orientations

Lillian Harrington, Allison Butler, Mariel Boyle, Taylor Goodman, Shai Katz, Morgan Cinnamo

Mentors: Dr. Ann Merriwether and Dr. Sean Massey



Introduction

“Friend zone” is a popular culture term used to describe a friendship where one member in a friend dyad desires a romantic or sexual relationship and the other member does not. Sexual Script Theory (Simon & Gagnon, 2003) and Sexual Strategies Theory (Buss & Schmidt, 1993) suggest that individuals will typically view the friend zone as a field dominated by female-to-male interactions, given sexual scripts on women as gatekeepers and men as being more active in initiating relationships. It may be expected then that men and women and individuals who are not exclusively heterosexual may then follow different scripts for making and negotiating friend zone choices.

There is very little data available concerning instances of the use of the term friend zone in same-sex friendship interactions. Individuals are typically expected to have relationships that conform to the heteronormative script, so most people are resistant to the thought of being attracted to others of the same sex (Lamb, 2004). Because of this, many “best friendships” between those of the same sex have been used as protection against claims of same-sex attraction/relationships (Lamb, 2004). Given the lack of research on same-sex friend zoning, as well as the restrictive nature of heteronormative scripts, the current study explores the practice of friend zoning within same-sex friendships.

Hypotheses

- 1) Definitions of “friend zone” will assume that females friend zone men.
- 2) Individuals who identify with a sexual orientation other than “exclusively heterosexual” will friend zone others more frequently than those who identify as “exclusively heterosexual.”
- 3) Individuals who identify with a sexual orientation other than “exclusively heterosexual” will have been friend zoned more frequently than those who identified as “exclusively heterosexual.”

Methods

Participants were undergraduates from a midsize university in the northeastern United States. They were recruited through the Psychology Department subject pool and several large classes.

- 562 participants: 53.4% (305) identified as female, 45.0% (257) as male.
- 79.1% (427) identified as exclusively heterosexual, while 20.9% (113) identified as not exclusively heterosexual.
- 72.9% (412) white, 4.6% (26) Black/African American, 13.8% (78) Asian/Pacific Islander, .2% (1) Native American, and 8.5% (48) Mixed race/other; 11.6% (66) identified as Hispanic or Latino/a.

Procedure:

After consent was obtained, participants completed an online survey presented to participants using the survey service Qualtrics. Students filled out basic demographic information and were then asked to complete a series of survey questions. Information regarding participants’ sexuality was assessed using the Fritz-Klein Matrix, ranking sexual “Identity,” “Fantasies,” and “Behavior” in order to obtain a more comprehensive view of the participants’ sexuality. Following the questions students received a debriefing.

Measures:

Multiple choice and open-ended questions were used. Subjects completed questions regarding their definition and history regarding “friend zoning.” See below for sample questions.

- Define “friend zone” and please give as much detail as possible.
- Have you ever been friend zoned?
- Have you ever friend zoned someone else?

Results

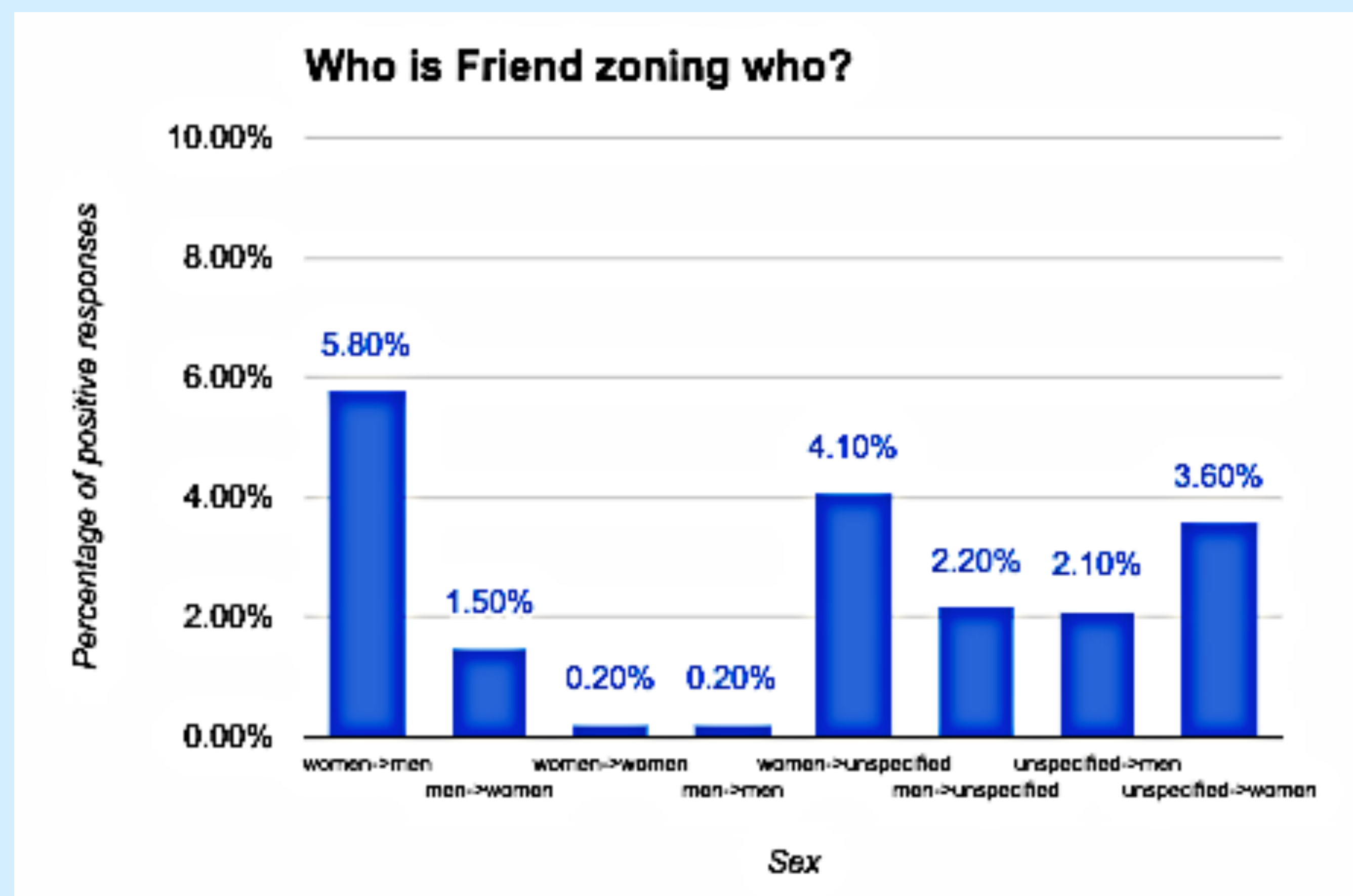


Figure 1.

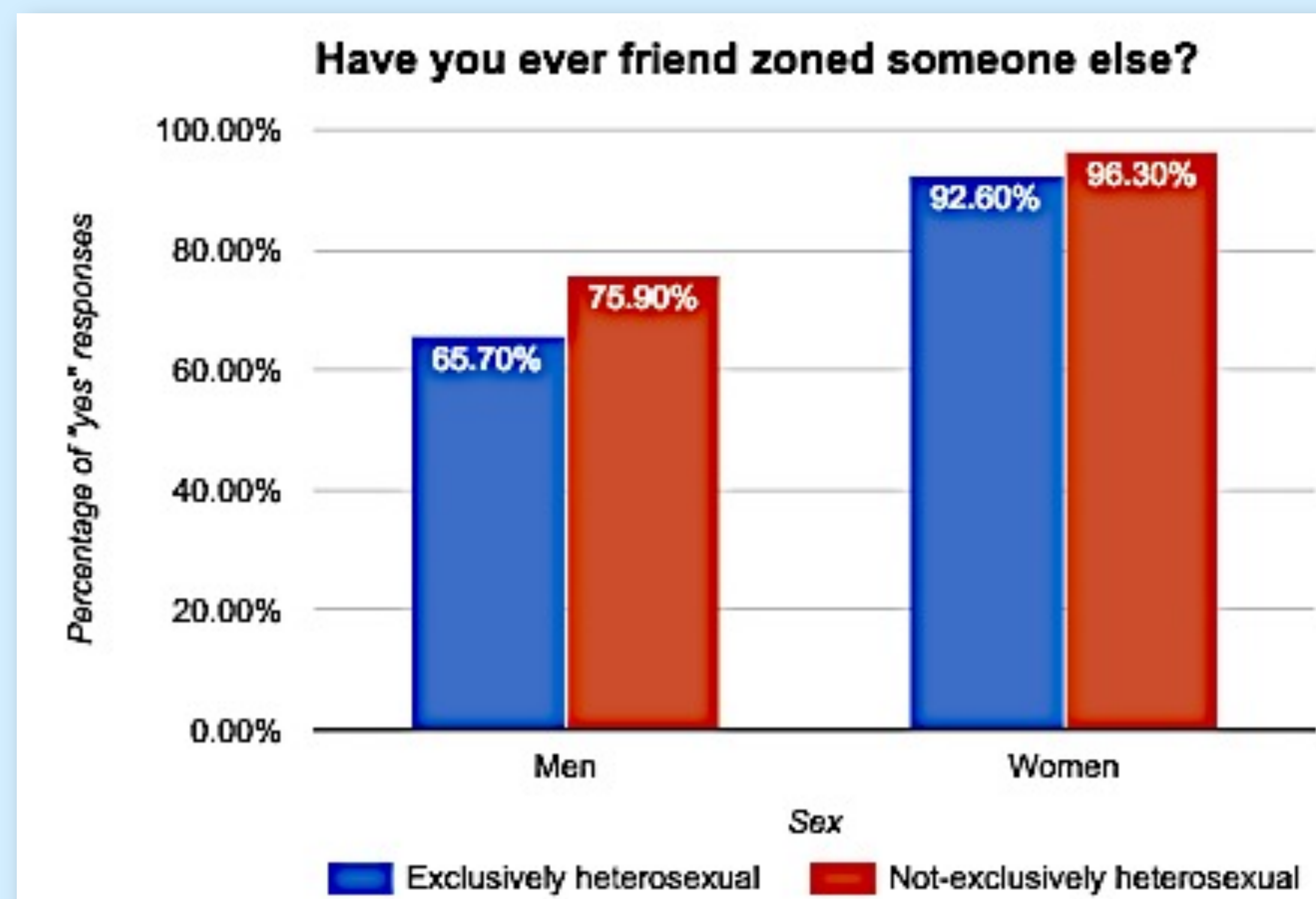


Figure 2.

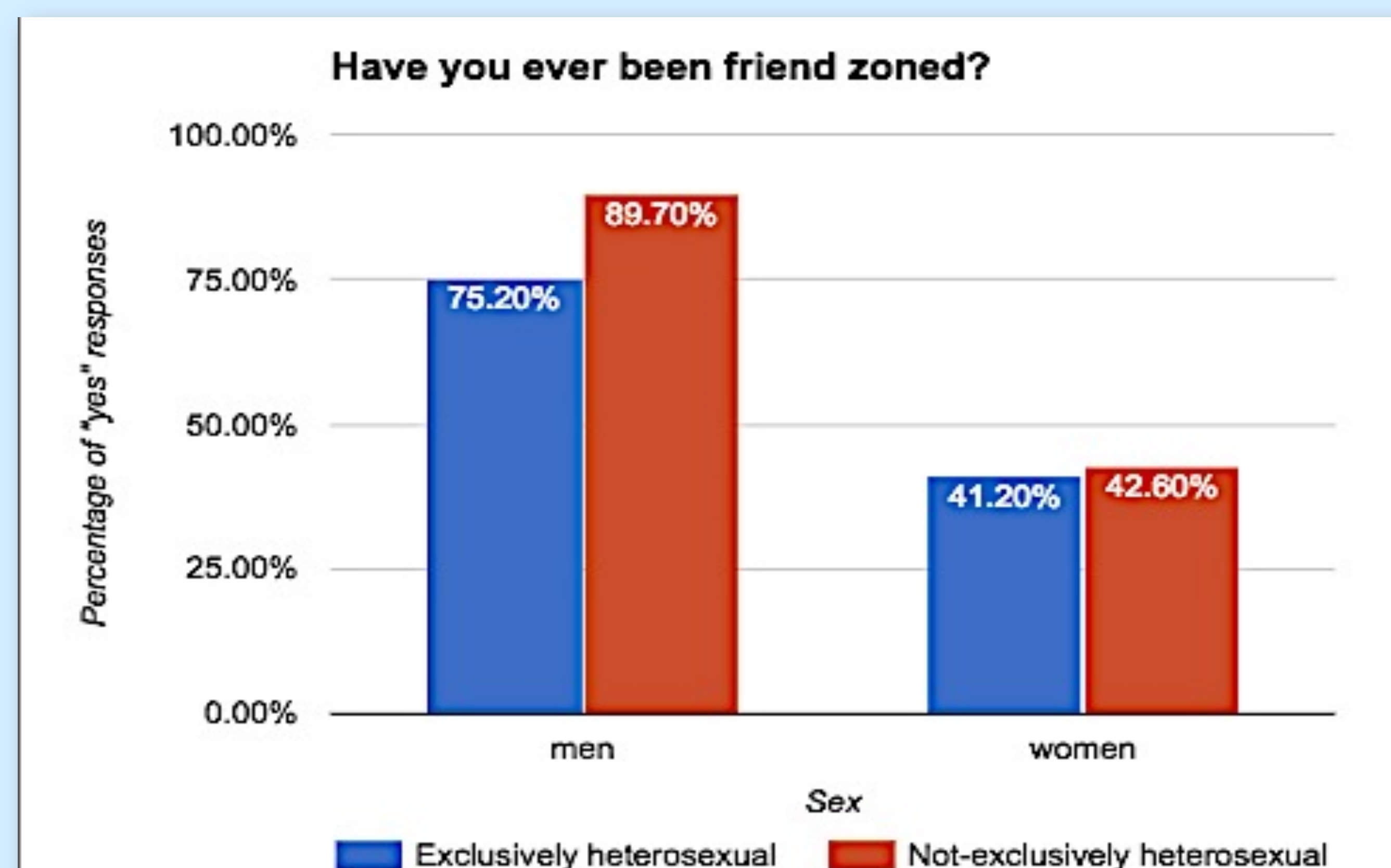


Figure 3.

Conclusions

1. In response to the question “What does ‘friend zoning’ mean?”, the vast majority (80.7%) of respondents did not specify the sex of the person friend zoning or of the person being friend zoned. In addition, of the remaining 19.3% of responses that did specify sex, half specified women as the individual who friend zones the other. A sex difference was observed, though it was not significant.
2. Although there is no statistically significant difference caused by sexual orientation in instances of friend zoning others, non-exclusively heterosexual men were shown to be more likely to have friend zoned than exclusively heterosexual men. Additionally, nearly all women, regardless of sexual orientation, claimed to have friend zoned another person.
3. In response to “Have you ever been friend zoned?”, the difference between exclusively and non-exclusively heterosexual men approaches significance, with 75.2% of exclusively heterosexual men and 89.7% of non-exclusively heterosexual men having been friend zoned ($X^2 = .073$). Women showed little difference in responses; however, they were significantly less likely than men to have been friend zoned.

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