

# **Rebel Friendships**

**Rebel Friendships**  
**“Outsider” Networks and**  
**Social Movements**

Benjamin Shepard

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REBEL FRIENDSHIPS

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2015 978-1-137-47931-0

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First published in 2015 by PALGRAVE MACMILLAN® in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-57071-3 ISBN 978-1-137-47932-7 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9781137479327

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Shepard, Benjamin, 1969–

Rebel friendships: “outsider” networks and social movements / by Benjamin Shepard.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Social networks.
2. Social movements. I. Title.

HM741.S54 2015

302.3—dc23

2015010783

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Scribe Inc.

First edition: September 2015

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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# Acknowledgments

## On Beer on the Sidewalk

We all walk on the footnotes of giants, Robert Merton used to say. A book is such a process. Writing this book, I engaged with my father about his best friend, who passed my junior year in college. Dad shuffled off this mortal coil while I wrote the final drafts of this text. “Seeing this finally in print will be really special,” he said to me in one of our last conversations. This book really is for Dad, who inspired me to think about the practice of friendship. These talks helped me see the ways in which rebel friendships change lives, extending from my family, my mom and my brothers, through networks of comrades. These friends have helped me understand our lives in relation to each other. They include friends from Time’s Up!, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), Right of Way, and Public Space Party, Barbara Ross, Brennan Cavanaugh, Keegan Stephan, Monica Hunken, Steve Duncombe, Ron Hayduk, and so many others. Thank you, Stacy Lanyon, Erik McGregor, Mickey Z., and Catherine Talese, and all the other photographers who donated their materials to this book. This book is about you and what we’ve done together.

Thanks also go to the anonymous reviewers as well as those such as Peter Nardi, Rob Smith, and Steve Duncombe, who read multiple drafts of this book. The book incorporated many of their suggestions, but it could only be one book. Friendship is the cornerstone of human life. There are a thousand ways to write on this topic. With their work and thoughts in mind, along with a few interviews and reflections on my experiences, I wrote this small volume, offering this highly idiosyncratic reading on the topic.

My dissertation advisor, Irwin Epstein, constantly talked about his advisor, Robert Merton, and mentor, Richard Cloward. His point, of course, was that we build on the collective efforts of countless others. Finishing this text, I am thinking of my mentors, including Eric Rofes, Stanly Aronowitz, Ray Buchanan, Bertram Cohler, and Irwin Epstein, who have given me so much. Like Harry Stack Sullivan, Bert Cohler reminded us that we all

need “essential others;” we all need “chums,” and not just as children, but throughout the course of our lives. These connections can be the source of profound connections and even social change.

In his retirement talk at Hunter College School of Social Work, Epstein framed the end of a four and a half decade teaching career in terms of friendships: “Bob Marley sings about ‘friends we’ve lost along the way.’ At this moment and at my age, I can’t help but think of all the dear friends at Hunter and elsewhere that I’ve lost along my way.”

“Only connect,” he explained, paraphrasing E. M. Foster’s message of longing in *Howard’s End*, concluding, “Freud wrote ‘lieben und arbeiten’—love and work with people you love—on his prescription pad as the central elements of the good life . . . I would add ‘lachen’ [laughter]. ‘Lieben und arbeiten und lachen!’” I thank you for that as well Irwin and all the other friendships known along the way.

Dad suggested the subtitle of the book be “Beer on the Sidewalk.” I didn’t understand the meaning at the time. But he thought anyone could be a rebel friend. When we brought his ashes to New Orleans, strangers walked up to us and toasted to his urn, pouring beer on the sidewalk for him and those who came before us. This gesture of remembering and honoring our ancestors is what rebel friendship is about. Here’s some beer on the sidewalk for you, Dad, and my other rebel friends everywhere.

This book is for you Caroline, Dodi, and Scarlett—my everything—thank you for being there as we move forward through time together. “*Siamo Forte!*”