PRIMARY LIFELINES: INFORMAL FRIENDSHIP GROUPS OF WOMEN IN HIGHER

EDUCATION

by

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The idea for this dissertation first came to me from my participation in an informal friendship group of women counselors at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. During the seven years of our active membership and the many years since, this group has been an essential and supportive part of my life as a woman in higher education. We celebrated our successes together, cried over our troubles, and generally supported one another throughout many life changes. As we met for snacks and conversation each Friday evening at one of our homes, our trust and friendship for one another grew. In many ways, those seven women have given me more than I have ever received from any other friendship. During the years I have been away at other campuses, they have continued to be supportive influences in my life—sending email notes, care packages, and cards. They have read parts of this dissertation, commented on it, and offered support and encouragement when the road to finishing seemed overlong and difficult. I would like to acknowledge my personal friendship group, The Nurturing Group, as the inspiration for this dissertation: Thank you for sharing yourselves and your friendship with me. In addition, I especially wish to acknowledge all the women who volunteered their time to participate in my study. The opportunity to meet and talk with you was a gift I felt honored to receive.

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Abstract

Primary lifelines: Informal friendship groups of women in higher education (Abstract)

A qualitative study of women in seven informal friendship groups identified the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes utilized to support women working in higher education and traced the movement of each group through the friendship phases of formation, maintenance, and dissolution. Phenomenological interviews were conducted with 36 women friendship group members in colleges and universities with different Carnegie classifications throughout the country. Case data were transcribed and analyzed using constant comparison with the aid of qualitative research software QSR NUDIST™ and NVIVO™. Findings of the study encompass three major areas: (1) results highlighted the influences of context on development of friendship groups at the personal, network, community, and societal levels; (2) the processes which demonstrate trust at cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels of group interaction; and (3) the major role that friendship groups play in providing psychological support, affirmation, and instrumental aid for some women entering academe in professional roles and (4) showed how friendship group phases affect development of cohesive groups through factors such as constant renewal and group interaction style. The continued involvement of women in informal friendship groups depended upon the intersection of context, group cohesiveness, and changing expectations of members as individuals and groups moved through phases of group development from formation to maintenance and possible dissolution.

The findings of this study challenge higher education to move toward significant changes in policies regarding hiring and retention all employees, especially women and minorities. Issues of community and context must be addressed in order to retain and support newly hired faculty and staff. Varying forms of support must be initiated institutionally to provide opportunities for productive career development of employees.

Recommendations for further study include further inquiry into the impact of context on the development of women's friendships, friendships as a factor of support for retention of

women staff and faculty, factors affecting generativity (constant renewal) in friendship groups over time, and the effects of race, class, and confrontational style on friendship group cohesion.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

<u>Popular Culture</u>

In recent years, popular culture has created an interest in women's friendships with the publication of books and movies such as <u>Little Women</u>, <u>Circle of Friends</u>, <u>Steel Magnolias</u>, <u>Waiting to Exhale</u>, <u>How to Make an American Quilt</u> (Alcott, 1924; Binchy, 1991; Harling, 1988; McMillian, 1992; Otto, 1991). Publications of this type portray women's friendships as elastic, on-going, and supportive relationships that are significant in the development of women as whole persons. A recurring theme is the support provided by female friends through life transitions and toward their developing womanhood. These transitions include milestones shared through the periods of adolescence to adulthood, young adulthood to engagement in significant romantic relationships, and years of living and growing older.

The popular media celebrate modern women's friendships as providers of strength and ever-present support without the saccharine stigma historically attached to such relationships. The portraits depict real women maintaining strong, deep, and continuously rich female relationships despite the disconnected world in which they live. They send a clear message that women's friendships can span time, space, and adversity to become significant features of women's development. Friendships such as these transcend women's roles as mothers, wives, lovers, and career professionals.

Friendship Groups

Another significant feature of recent portrayals of women's friendships is the depiction of <u>friendship groups</u>: several women who maintain connected relationships with one another over long periods of time and travel through life stages together. In some instances, the portrayals depict friendship groups as a substitute for geographically or psychologically unavailable kin relationships. The intensity and involvement of relationships such as these are like becoming "sisters" (O'Connor, 1992).

Friendship groups such as those described above and in the popular media may represent women's attempts to develop a community within a community. Looking at the development of women's friendship groups historically, shows that such a phenomenon is really nothing new; that is, that women have always done this. It is true that women have formed sewing circles, quilting bees, and women's church mission societies for centuries (Block & Greenberg, 1985). Although women have long defined themselves in terms of their relationships to others, the scholarly and popular literature has begun to note the positive benefits only recently (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976). Only in the past 25 years have women's close relationships been depicted as positive relationships of some depth (O'Connor, 1992).

My interest in women's close personal relationships and their effect on professional life in work communities, particularly the academy, has guided this research study. It is only since the middle of the 20th century that women have won acceptance as full members of the academy. Even then, acceptance has come with reluctance. As women in academe struggle to find their places and voices, affiliation and the support of female friends become increasingly important (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Bernard, 1964).

Rationale for the Study

In this dissertation, I explored the phenomenon of women's informal friendship groups by considering the experiences of professional women in higher education. Through in-depth interviews, I attempted to discover the meaning of friendship groups for women who are well educated and have busy personal and professional lives. I had many questions about why and how this lived experience became important to women. If book and movie portrayals of women's friendships noted earlier are indeed a reflection of real life, what meaning does membership in an informal friendship group have in the lives of contemporary academic women? What are friendship groups, how do they form, how are they maintained, and how do members attend to the needs of the group? How are friendship groups supportive relationships? Having a "best friend" (Mathews, 1986; Oliker, 1989) provides support, exchange of services, and someone with whom to discuss problems, particularly those concerning children and spouses.

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Are friendship groups different from best friendship and if so, in what ways? In what ways do informal friendship groups become a part of the process of self-understanding and support as "relationships of care" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 170)? If friendship groups truly affect personal development in women, then do they also provide support for professional roles?

In this study, I consider the relationships among women, their work environment (higher education), and group supports. Results of this study will contribute to literature in the fields of faculty and staff development, counseling, career development, and higher education as practitioners seek to enhance supportive community structures for women in academic settings. As a woman and an educator with a background in career development and student affairs, I have worked with many women who were having difficulty integrating into the academy. I have viewed their struggle to achieve credibility and tenure within their departments and to become accepted within their research areas. The result of this struggle is an eventual feeling of disenfranchisement in women who are bright and articulate people. They are not, nor do they feel, part of the community. Conversely, I meet other women who seemed less affected by this struggle but have no obvious mentor within the system. Could there be a relationship between support of friends and successful integration into the academy? For a university to attract and keep the good people it hires, it must promote systems that can support a successful holistic learning community (Claxton, 1991). I observed that life for women professionals in academe is often more complicated than for males. Block and Greenberg (1985) attributed this phenomenon to women frequently juggling conflicting life roles of family and career. Could having the support of friends make the crucial difference in their success?

Research Questions

To explore the phenomenon of informal friendship group process and phases as well as issues of support for women members, it was necessary to examine interaction at both the group and individual levels. The synergistic character of an informal friendship group creates an environment of constant change at both levels. I constructed research questions to examine the relationships of the macro and micro processes, combining a focus on issues of the friendship group with a second focus on women's developmental processes within the group. Viewing

these processes as intertwined was essential for me to bring to light subtle effects created by group and individual interaction. Keeping this dual focus in mind, I posed the following research questions:

1. What interaction processes (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) occur within informal friendship groups of women in higher education?

2. How do informal friendship groups move through phases of development (formation, maintenance, and dissolution)?

3. How do informal friendship groups provide support for women in higher education?

<center>Operational Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts</center>

It is important to define several terms for this research project. As the scope and purpose of friendship groups for women evolved through contributions of the study's participants during the research project, I used the following working definitions.

Personal network. "An individual's relatives, friends and associates; the set of people with whom an individual is directly involved" (Fisher, 1982, p. 2).

Bounded group. A group whose parameters of group membership are defined or implicitly understood regarding who is a member, how membership is achieved, and the purpose of the group.

Informal friendship group. A spontaneously formed, bounded group of close friends who meet regularly over an extended period (more than one year) for purposes of support and sharing.

Context: The extrinsic environment that surrounds a friendship.

Interaction processes. Cognitive, affective, and behavioral interactions occurring within friendships.

Relationship phases. Formation, maintenance, and dissolution phases of friend relationships over time.

<center>Contributions of the Study</center>

The field of close relationships is a relatively new one and is still very much evolving.

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Adams and Blieszner (1994), revised from Blieszner and Adams (1992), developed an integrative psychosocial theoretical model of friendship used to review friendship literature and suggest directions for future research. In the literature review, the authors remarked on the absence of research discussing friendship network processes or phases. The current investigation viewed women's informal friendship groups as a friendship network sub-set, thereby expanding the literature on cognitive, behavioral, and affective processes at the network level. By examining the effects of group membership, this study also expanded knowledge of the process of friendship group formation, maintenance, and dissolution. Consequently, this study contributes to research in small group process in the fields of communications, psychology, and counseling. Later, Adams and Allan (1998) looked outside the processes of friendship to examine the impact of context on friendship. They identified four levels of context effecting friendship: personal, network, community, and societal. This study examines the context of higher education on the friendship groups of women who work in the academy.

<div align="center">Forecast of the Literature Reviewed</div>

To consider implications of informal friendship groups in the personal and professional lives of women in higher education, I began by reviewing the literature in three areas that have an impact on this phenomenon. These were close relationships, specifically women's friendships and friendship network/group process and structures; higher education, particularly literature relating to women in higher education; and career and work development, especially role balance and support issues for women in the workplace.

It is important to note that because research in the area of close relationships is relatively new, most of the work is concentrated in areas of gender differences in dyadic friendship formation and process. The research neglects two areas of particular interest to this study: friendships of middle-aged adults and friendship networks. Although it is not extensive, recent research on friendship network process, formation, and maintenance was most relevant to my research topic. First, most of the studies on friendship formation have concentrated on populations of the very young (children, adolescents, and college students) or older adults who are often retired (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Mathews, 1986). Very little friendship research has

discussed the friendship patterns and needs of either middle-aged or professional populations of either gender (Gouldner & Strong, 1987). Blieszner and Adams (1992) commented that in light of research on stress and coping, knowledge of strategies for creating adult friendship support is sadly lacking. Second, there is little exploration in the area of friendship network research. The few existing studies have concentrated on sociological exchange theory, structural areas, or intervention strategies (Gottlieb, 1988; Wellman, 1983) rather than on connections between membership processes and their influences on network structure.

For the purposes of this study, I viewed friendship groups as network subsets. Networks studied in the literature are frequently "open" or "loose" and allow fluidity for both access and membership. I characterized friendship groups in this study as uniquely bounded (having known membership parameters) nonintervention-based friendship networks. In contrast, an intervention-based group might act as a support group for a particular issue or problem. Much of the research on group process is a product of the 1960s and early 1970s. Although research interests on small group processes have moved beyond the growth group or sensitivity group analysis of that era, the basic definitions of the group interaction process still hold and are useful in discovering parameters of friendship group dynamics (Wilson, 1978).

Women's and other minorities' entrance into the professorate have been responsible for some of the greater changes in the face of higher education today. I explored literature on higher education to trace influences of that work environment on women (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Sandler, Silverberg, & Hall, 1992).

<div align="center">Limitations of the Study</div>

The scope of this study presents the following limitations. First, the sample for the study was limited to the 36 members of seven women's friendship groups who were faculty or staff members of a college or university. Although I made an effort to include a diverse sample, the population included in this study is overwhelmingly white middle-class women who are highly educated and cannot be considered representative of women at all socioeconomic, racial-ethnic or educational levels. Second, the conclusions of this study are limited to women's informal friendship groups meeting the criteria I established as project researcher. Cross-gender or

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predominately male informal groups may exhibit different characteristics. Third, friendship groups outside of the university may obtain professional and educational support in different ways.

In terms of its focus on women in higher education, the findings of this study add to the growing richness of work in the field of close relationships, particularly in the area of network processes and friendship phases. Additionally this study contributes in its exploration of career and personal support mechanisms utilized by a growing population of women in higher education.

<div align="center">Organization of the Study</div>

In chapters one, two, and three of this study, I provided an outline for the reader detailing the basic framework of the inquiry. Chapter 1 outlines the importance and rationale for a study of the role of women's informal friendship groups. Arguments link this study to popular culture. Additionally, a brief overview of related literature directs the reader to the contributions of this study toward research on friendship networks. The chapter also introduces the research questions that focused the inquiry around the processes and phases of women's informal friendship netgroups and the interplay between group membership and support for women in higher education. Chapter 2 contains a comprehensive review of the major literature in areas of close relationships and more specifically, women's friendship, group development, concepts of community in higher education and the impact of workplace environment on women in academe. Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework of the study and grounds it firmly in the qualitative literature. Chapter 4 tells the stories, in the form of case studies, of the seven friendship groups participating in this research project. In Chapter 5, I discussed the findings of the study and their relationship to the research questions. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the major findings, relates them to current literature, and offers suggestions for further for research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Friendship

History of Close Relationships

Until 1992, when Blieszner and Adams published their book, Adult Friendship, there had
been no comprehensive interdisciplinary theoretical framework developed for friendship
research. Previous investigations viewed aspects of friendship through the lens of the particular
discipline of the researcher. Because friendship research included investigations from many of
the behavioral and social science areas, studies were difficult to compare and synthesize. That
year, 1992, was a seminal one in the area of friendship research with publication of the work of
Blieszner and Adams and the almost simultaneous presentation of two additional works on
friendship. O'Connor's (1992) book, Friendships Between Women, synthesized all the related
research in the area of women's friendship, while Friendship Matters by Rawlins (1992) offered a
discussion of dialectical tensions implicit in friendship communications through the life course.
The introduction of these three books synthesizing friendship literature emphasized the
interdisciplinary character of the field of close relationships. Blieszner and Adams wrote from
the fields of psychology and sociology. O'Connor is a feminist sociologist, and Rawlins' roots
are in socio-linguistics and communications. Fehr's book (1996) undertook a synthesis of
friendship research through 1995. The most recent piece, added in 1998 when Adams and Allan
published their book, Placing Friendship in Context, discussed the effect of the environment as a
prominent factor influencing the development of friendships. Consequently, it is now possible
for researchers in the friendship area, particularly women's friendship, to begin new
investigations with these frameworks in mind.

A Theoretical Model of Friendship

The Blieszner and Adams (1992) model, revised in Adams and Blieszner (1994),
analyzes friendship from both the sociological and psychological perspectives. In this model,
Individual Characteristics (e.g., age and sex, race, class) interact with Friendship Patterns
(network and dyad structure and processes). Age is the common denominator for specific tasks
or opportunities of the life course and stage of psychological development. For example, a

woman of 30 may be ready to think about parenting (a life course stage) and establishing intimacy in Erikson's (1968) scheme. Social structural opportunities and constraints are those involving class, expectations, and role demands, as well as availability of friendship partners. Blieszner and Adams see gender as the essential differential for both social structural issues and psychological issues (personality) in that socialization provides strong gender messages regarding appropriate expectations and behavior for friendships. Aspects of social structure and psychological disposition constantly interact to create individual attitudes each person maintains toward other relationships. This section of the theory addresses a lack of theoretical specificity in the literature when researchers have used effects of social structure and psychological disposition. The effect of influences of structure, process, and phases on friendship patterns illustrates either the network or dyad level in this model. Dyadic structure is composed of four areas: power hierarchy, status hierarchy, solidarity, and homogeneity. Power and status reflect the advantage partners in a dyad may have over one another; solidarity reflects the degree of intimacy, and homogeneity examines similarity in demographic factors. Research in this area often considers questions of relationship between two or more factors, e.g., power to intimacy.

Collections of individuals or dyads create networks. Their structure is studied in terms of numbers of members and personal relationships of members, particularly network size, density, and configuration. Typically, researchers in this area do not discuss the quality of the relationships within the network; they merely quantify. The quality of the affective, behavioral, and cognitive areas of the networks and dyads can be assessed the through friendship process. Cognitive processes include thoughts one has about oneself, evaluations of others, and perceptions of similarity among friends. Affective processes are feelings and emotional reactions to friends; behavioral processes, on the other hand, involve an action, e.g., exchange of a resource or social support. Network process includes those factors previously mentioned but also is affected on a larger scale by the density of the internal clusters of the network. For example, networks with higher density make it easier to locate a friend for assistance or share information among members.

Friendship researchers identify phases of friendship in terms of initiation, maintenance,

and dissolution. The initiation or formation stage indicates the emergence of a new network or integration of individuals and dyads into existing networks. The maintenance process indicates ways that individuals, dyads, and groups sustain the network in its current configuration or initiate changes. The dissolution stage documents the elimination of one or more persons or dyads or the breakup of all friendship bonds in the network. At this time, few researchers' work examines these characteristic phases of friendship.

The Effect of Context on Friendship Groups

In 1998, Adams and Allan published their edited volume describing the impact of context on friendship. Adams and Allan (1998, p. 3) asserted that "friendships do not operate in some abstract, decontextualized world. Like all other types of personal relationship they are constructed—developed, modified, sustained, and ended—by individuals acting in contextualized settings." They define context as "the conditions external to the development, maintenance, and dissolution of specific friendships" (Adams & Allan, 1998, p. 4) or those elements surrounding friendships which are extrinsic rather than intrinsic. Context is the result of a process of interaction between these elements.

Adams and Allan (1998, p. 4-5) further outlined key characteristics in consideration of context: Contexts should not be considered one-dimensional, as acting independently of one another, or as static. Context must be considered at the personal, network, community, and societal levels. In this study, I described context as a factor affecting friendship group development and maintenance within the multi-level framework described by Adams and Allan.

Friendships and Work and Family Roles

Bates and Babchuk (1961) defined friendship as a primary relationship that includes spontaneity and freedom to make demands. However, Allen (1989) and others suggested this definition is only acceptable for women of the middle class. Gouldner and Strong (1987) asserted that there are really two definitions of women's friendship: one for the middle class which is affected to the greatest degree by mobility, education, and career factors, and another for the working class whose friendship patterns consist of predominately old friends and family members who offer reciprocal services across age groups (i.e., care-giving and babysitting).

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Working class women having long-established friendships or geographically available immediate family can call on family or friends to respond on a moment's notice to requests for support for illness, childcare, or other needs. In contrast, middle class women may be far away from long-time intimate friends and family members and may have developed only superficially reciprocal relationships with workplace friends or neighbors, not friends who are available on demand.

Friendship Patterns

Matthews (1986) studied friendships of both genders over the life course and found three distinct styles of friendship patterns: independent, discerning, and acquisitive. Discerning friends had a few very close relationships while acquisitive friends had collections of friends obtained during different points of the lifespan. Among other factors affecting the number of friends a woman may have is a personal "friendship budget" (Gouldner & Strong, 1987). Friendships require an investment of maintenance and commitment over time facilitated by membership in formal groups, situational involvement (similar hometown), or crisis friendships.

Women's closest friends seem to follow patterns similar to those of the society in which they reside. Women initiate friendships with those of similar race, age, marital status, and life cycle. Areas of lesser similarity include household income and religion (Matthews, 1986). Rawlins (1992), extrapolating on the work of Hess (1972), suggested that roles and relationships are of greater impact than age upon choice and availability of adult friendships. He regarded stage of life course as the primary factor affecting friendship formation as women proceed through predictable life stages at varying chronological ages. Some women, more often those who are single, widowed, or in the workforce, have what Simmel referred to as "differentiated friendships." Differentiated friendships are friendships in which people share only certain aspects or interests with a particular friend.

Friendship Groups

Bernard (1981) implied that the "kinship component" (ability to have family geographically proximate) is rapidly waning in the middle class due to the effects of work and mobility. Some women in friendships attempt to substitute friend relationships for the lack of

available family. O'Connor (1992) identified female friends who refer to one another in kinship terms as "sisters."

Becker's (1991) phenomenological study of women's friendship patterns highlighted what she termed "friendship families," networks of women who provide emotional support and sustain one another through important life events over time. In this way, friendship families act as substitutes for kin relationships otherwise unavailable due to mobility, educational level, or career choice. Components of friendship families are mutual care, prioritized commitments, comparable growth and change, synchronized movements, looking life in the eye together, reciprocal generosity, and shared timelessness (Becker, p. 178). In this way, friendship families augment or substitute what other relationships are unable to provide.

As I have collected informal research data on women's friendship groups, colleagues and friends have sent me articles from the popular press. These range from a review by fiction writer, Margaret Atwood (1986), "That Certain Thing Called the Girlfriend" which appeared in the New York Times Book Review, to articles in popular women's magazines such as Good Housekeeping, Redbook, Ebony, Working Woman, and regional newspapers (Greensboro News and Record and Charlotte Observer). Friendship groups recognized in these articles gave themselves names such as "The Girl's Party," "The 'O' Girls," and "Girl's Night Out."

Scholarly literature has been slower than the popular press to research women's friendship groups. Recent research has concentrated almost exclusively on dyadic friendships, while large network studies have involved whole or partial communities (Fischer, 1982b; Wellman, 1992; Willmott, 1987) rather than bounded friendship groups.

O'Connor (1992), in describing the growing phenomenon of women's friendship groups during the previous 5 to 10 years, conjectured that women have begun to see one another as acceptable partners for leisure activities. Although initially evidenced in the elderly (Jerrome, 1984), friendship groups are now common among women of all age groups. "The main stress is on companionship and shared enjoyment--a pattern which has long been characteristic of male friendships and which is seen by Argyle (1990) as reflecting the true nature of friendship" (p. 182). Grimes's (1987) dissertation involving case studies of three women's friendship groups

found that friendship groups tend to be subgroups of larger groups, tend to be leaderless, meet in domestic settings, and entail discourse that focuses on both personal and interpersonal issues. Key factors for success are shared trust, equality, and affection. An historical study by Palmieri (1983) documented groups of women faculty at Wellesley College meeting together for support and sharing as early as 1895. O'Connor viewed trends of this type as an indicator that women's friendship relationships are moving toward a point where women place equal value on their relationships with women as they do those with men. She interpreted this as a sign that women are becoming more autonomous and less defined by cultural norms. O'Connor asserted that group friendships have the most potential for bringing about social and cultural changes for women living in a patriarchal society.

<div align="center">Woman Talk</div>

Women in a family unit may use friendships for private "woman talk" or social support, "talk, understanding, and feeling" (Oliker, 1989, p. 35). Permissible talk involves discussion of money, sex, marital problems, and children. Women working inside the home who are primarily isolated due to child-care responsibilities report a higher level of friendship interaction than do women working outside the home. Friendships based on an equal-time arrangement with both parties in the dyad providing equal amounts of social support are similar to those mentioned above. In the marital unit, husbands most often talk while women listen or may listen without attending; therefore women's talk is very important (Gouldner & Strong, 1987; Lofland, 1973).

Although women at home seem to have primarily dyadic relationships, they may also befriend groups of other women at similar life stages to create informal friendship networks—neighbors, nursery school mothers, and others. At another level of friendship, women in marriages (especially non-employed women) tend to be the social negotiators for the family and make friendship connections at their husband's request or to enhance the family unit (McGoldrick et al., 1991; Wellman, 1992). Some husbands do not support independent friendships for their wives, feeling it takes away from the family unit. Friendships that are more successful occur when couple friendships contain a close female friendship dyad. With this arrangement, women are able to see friends on a regular basis while not taking away from "family time" (Gouldner &

Strong, 1987; Wellman, 1992).

<div align="center">Career Women and Friendship</div>

Career women suffer from role strain but also benefit from their multiple roles (work, family, friends) in terms of support for self-esteem and ego development (McGoldrick et al., 1991). Friendships are important to career women, especially friendship or mentoring roles with other women. McGoldrick and associates (see also Sandler, 1992) identified four problems affecting women's need for women mentors: (a) males may assume paternal or sexual roles, (b) lack of available appropriate female mentors, (c) males promote males rather than females, and (d) instances when women are not seen as "members of the club" and are therefore left out of the information loop.

Gouldner and Strong (1987) identified a new breed of women professionals with solid friendships among males and females in the same profession or business. This network of friends, built simultaneously with a career, emphasizes both intellectual and emotional support. "New breed" women are characterized as highly energetic, affluent, mobile, successful career professionals on a tight schedule. Time, or lack of it, is the over-riding factor in their relationships but perhaps because new breed women have access to financial resources not available to many others, they lead a full life of career, friendship, and family or relationship interactions. Unlike unemployed married women, these women have friendships outside the couple and are supported in this end by their spouses. Among these friends, frequency of interaction is more limited but of high quality and satisfaction. New breed women regard friendships as a necessity, not as a luxury or as secondary to kin or family relationships. This characterization of new breed women is very different from traditional friendship patterns of married couples found by Oliker (1989) and others. Gouldner and Strong (1987) commented that this new type of friendship pattern might well be a harbinger of things to come.

Changes in the life course create change in network patterns for women. Mobility creates the biggest change for workingwomen and forces identification and initiation of new friendships (Gouldner & Strong, 1987; O'Connor, 1992). Older women, especially widows, may become ensconced in family relationships to the exclusion of friendships (Milardo, 1982) or become

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more invested in friendships like Jerrome's (1984) "Tremendous Ten." The "Ten" were older women who used a friendship network for closer ties and intimacy. Jerrome's study was one of the few early studies highlighting group norms rather than dyadic relationships. Jerrome portrayed the group as supporting gender roles of women members who viewed themselves as equal rather than in subordinate roles to men. In addition, group membership provided autonomous outlets for a variety of social activities.

<center>Friendship Formation, Maintenance, and Dissolution</center>

Formation

Gouldner and Strong (1987) created criteria for friendship formation using what they called "liking criteria" with which women identified others with whom they would like to be friends. Most friends were not consciously aware that this assessment was taking place and recollections of how friendships began were often "fuzzy." The four criteria for choosing friends are dislike criteria, disregard criteria, liking criteria, and friendship budgets. Important for the first cut are the dislike and disregard criteria, followed by a tentative choice using the liking criteria which may then result in being considered for the available friendship budget or rejected through the dislike or disregard criteria. Middle class women tend to meet friends through mutual social or educational involvement or through the workplace.

Maintenance

Class has a direct effect on friendship maintenance habits (Walker, 1995). Walker's study of middle and working class adults showed that working class friendship networks were denser and territorially based than middle-class friendships. When working class men and women moved to new neighborhoods, they often found it difficult to establish new friendships. In contrast, middle-class respondents reported less density in friendship networks but were able to maintain important friendships over long distances and time via letters and telephone calls. Rubin (1985) also supports this trend. Although not indicated in Walker's study, the use of email will most certainly add another dimension to the middle class person's ability to communicate and maintain long-distance friends. Middle-class and elderly respondents in studies consistently report that they view themselves as close friends with people with whom they rarely spend time

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or see. In contrast, they also agree that a definition of a friend is someone with whom they talk and share

activities (Adams, 1989; Walker, 1995). This makes it difficult for researchers to isolate maintenance processes between friendships <u>perceived</u> as close and friends who actually spend considerable time together.

<u>Dissolution</u>

Researchers describe friendship dissolution in two words: "fade away." Gouldner and Strong (1987) found that women tend to ignore those friendships they feel unsure about, choosing not to confront the friend. Ultimately the friendship ends through lack of shared time together. Neither men nor women seem effective at confrontation to resolve friendship difficulties. Women, however, do tend to work harder to maintain positive relationships or resolve problems (Gouldner & Strong, 1987).

<div align="center">Role Balance</div>

<u>Role Strain</u>

Working women seem ravaged by not having enough time. During the middle years of the life course women, especially, are often in "sandwich positions" which force them to juggle several life roles. At any given moment, women may be simultaneously acting in roles of wife, mother, daughter, employee, citizen, and colleague (Super, 1980). Role stress has risen incrementally with this phenomenon (Bird & Bird, 1986; Stoltz-Loike, 1992; Voydanoff, 1988). As a result, time for maintaining friendship roles can be limited.

<div align="center">Impact of Career</div>

Women's patterns of career development and family mobility also play a part in the establishment of friend relationships. As they move from one career role to another, women find it difficult to maintain friendships due to changing mutual interests and, probably greatest of all, time commitments (Levy, 1991). For example, old networks of friend relationships may not be comfortable with the "new identity" of an emerging woman professional. Career women often say they have little time for themselves, let alone the time for friendships. These women feel at a loss as to how to include friendships in their lives (Atkins & van der Bogert, 1992; Gouldner &

Strong, 1987).

<div align="center">Social Support</div>

Crohan and Antonucci (1989) provided an excellent review of the social support literature as related to older adult friendship. The processes involved in social support have not received much attention in the friendship literature. Kahn and Atonnuci (1980) proposed the convoy model of social support: a role-supported model in which people move through the life cycle surrounded by a changing but similar group of individuals with whom they provide and receive support. Most researchers agree that social support provides several types of benefits. Benefits include positive effects on stress and mental and physical well-being, intimacy and companionship, ego testing, and affirmation of self-worth. Antonucci (1985) asserted that reciprocity is important in social support in order that each friend be a contributor. Antonucci has developed the concept of a support bank effect with each friend in the role of active contributor or withdrawer.

<div align="center">Groups</div>

<u>Group Cohesion</u>

To survive, a group must have its own self-described reason for acceptance by the membership. Kellerman (1981, p. 5) described the factors that must be present for group cohesion to develop: "members have strong affiliation needs, the group is a dependable source of support, and when personal achievement can be derived from the group." Greater cohesion can develop when the goals of a group and individual members are congruent.

> As an environment within a structure, the group's subculture (standards, values, overall work ethic, particular language idiom, and most importantly, philosophy of intergroup relations) will generate a directional coherence; that is, generate motivations in individuals to be part of the group, keep the group stable, maintain the group's course toward the achievement of certain articulated as well as unconscious goals,...and, most importantly, regulate and generate the expression of group attitudes in a consistent way.

According to Kellerman, a highly cohesive group becomes a "symbol and validation of one's

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identity." Two factors support identity development: (1) the fact of membership in a group; and (2) by the reciprocal validation of an individual's affiliation needs by group members. A spiral effect generates increasing cohesiveness, which in turn, increases group bonding. Greater bonding increases group cohesiveness as the group moves toward group crystallization. A caveat regarding this phenomenon is that the greater the cohesiveness of the group, the more structured the criteria for obtaining and retaining group membership. The group may then screen a potential member based on the group's perception of the individual's ability to affiliate at the group level. Several researchers developed stages or phases for group process. Yalom (1985) suggested these might be orientation (getting to know the group culture), conflicts (accepting or rejecting the culture), working through (issues of power, dominance, etc.), and consolidation (high group cohesion). Most other models use similar terminology.

<div align="center">Women in Higher Education</div>

Barriers to Equity

Sandler (1992) observed that women academics face structural, psychological, and sociological survival hindrances. Structural hindrances include a system that does not accommodate women's childbearing or child rearing needs in terms of tenure and advancement. Psychological hindrances focus on a belief system that acts on the premise that women are not fit for the academy as judged by either intellectual ability or skill level. Therefore, it is not up to the system to accommodate them. Sociological barriers focus on sexual stereotypes that result in women not being included as members of the "club" and consequently, unable to access insider information. Sandler asserted that change at all three levels is necessary for true equity for women on college campuses. In a survey of women faculty at a comprehensive university, women reported "slowed advancement, lower salaries, and lack of professional respect (Atkins & van der Bogert, 1992; p. 6). Prejudices about intellectual abilities and nurturing tendencies of women have given license to males in authority positions, relegating women to supporting roles throughout academe (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988).

A provocative book about the lives of women faculty is Women of Academe: Outsiders in the Sacred Grove by Aisenberg and Harrington (1988). Women faculty and graduate scholars

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interviewed for this book provided rich illustrations of Sandler's structural, psychological, and sociological barriers to equity on the college campus. Despite the time since its publication, many believe too little has changed. Aisenberg and Harrington portrayed women in academe as having slower and more difficult career paths than their male counterparts. Their research also showed that women receive lower pay and are concentrated in the lower academic ranks, often in part-time positions (Hersi, 1993; Johnsrud & Atwater, 1993). While we might like to think that this reflects historical rather than current practice, as recently as 1999 a major research university was found to have unknowingly but systematically discriminated against women faculty in a single college in terms of their salaries, research support, and tenure during the previous decade (Miller, 1999).

Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) described situations in which women scholars may be outsiders in their academic pursuits due to a tendency to choose research in applied rather than theoretical areas. Female scholars, who are more apt to focus their work in non-traditional and interdisciplinary areas, open themselves up to criticism for engaging in what some tenure committees have referred to as "soft research"—interdisciplinary research deemed lacking in rigor and less competitive for main-line funding or positive review. In the same way women choose non-mainstream research topics, women faculty interviewed in <u>Outsiders in the Sacred Grove</u> often felt unheard and unsupported as they made their way through the daily life of the academy. Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) and Hersi (1993) found women tend to use education as personal empowerment—meaning that as they become engrossed in the process of their work, their progress up the academic ladder may be impeded by a natural naiveté that their own good work will be seen and rewarded. Women scholars may pay less attention to the politics of academic life than their male counterparts (Astin & Leland, 1991). These activities include the tenure process, getting research grants, and positioning for advancement. It is in the latter arenas, particularly, that social support comes into play.

<div align="center">Social Support in the Academy</div>

Academic women benefit from mentoring and support while they learn the rules of the tenure game (Sandler, 1992). Members of an informal support group of women faculty

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commented, "Many [women] made their way through difficult situations by drawing on the support of women peers...there were probably 10 of us in this group and we met for two years, once a month. And that's what pulled us through" (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988, p. 50). Five of the 10 support group members mentioned having published books because of the group support. Astin and Leland (1991) reported "friendships of women working together brought support and affirmation that has sustained and empowered them in creating a collective sisterhood" (p. 138). Women in other professions where they are in the minority successfully used mentoring to foster less experienced colleagues through the system (Driscoll & Goldberg, 1993; O'Brien, 1994).

> From our perspective, there is nothing the matter with women, nor are they peculiarly dependent by nature. Rather they enter competitive professional worlds from different starting points and with heavier burdens than their male peers...and women bear heavier burdens because they carry the same sorts of individual disadvantage as men—matters of class, race, education, health, appearance—but in addition they carry the weight of the old norms that foster suspicion, in themselves and in others, about their professional capacities. (Aisenberg & Harrington, p. 50)

An indication of positive change is recent discussion by Palmer (1987) and other scholars about the academy as a learning community. Both men and women seek community. A 1991 survey of university faculty indicated that only 10% felt the sense of community at their institution was excellent and only 28% ranked it good (Change, 1991). Even those who have experienced successful careers in academe lamented that lack of time and always having too much to do resulted in lack of companionship and interchange (Tompkins, 1992). Women's ways of knowing--collegial, interdisciplinary, passionate, and organic—are those of community. Palmer (1987) expressed the hope that as the academic culture changes toward a more encompassing epistemological stance, it will begin to take on some of those characteristics and lose the long-held traditions of objectivism, analysis, and experimentalism that hold knowledge and people at bay in order to create a true learning community.

I reviewed literature from an interdisciplinary array of sources for this study. As the field of friendship research itself is an interdisciplinary one, sources consulted included those from the emerging literature in the field of close relationships as well as sociology, psychology, counseling, and women's issues (particularly those studies relating to women in academic environments. The 1994 framework presented by Adams and Blieszner (see also Blieszner & Adams, 1992) provided a theoretical framework for review of essential pieces of research related to the structure, processes, phases, and psychosocial support mechanisms of friendship at both the dyadic and network levels. This and three other recent publications synthesized much of the existing literature concerning women's friendships (O'Connor, 1992), process (Fehr, 1996), and dialectics (Rawlins, 1992). From this review, it is apparent that dyadic friendship has been the subject of numerous research studies while the study of small group friendship networks is in its infancy.

I designed this study to address the latter niche and to explore the impact of gender, career, and the higher education environment on women's friendship groups. Therefore, I placed special emphasis on the literature relating to friendship processes of women. Second, I explored friendship groups as they affect women employed in higher education. Finally, the emphasis is on the effect of the bounded group on the friendship context, processes and phases, including support issues.

Chapter 3: Methods

Overview of the Research Design

In this study, I explored the phenomenon of women's informal friendship groups by considering the experiences of professional women in higher education. I used collective case studies as the strategy of inquiry as outlined by Stake (1994). By conducting a series of in-depth interviews with members of seven friendship groups, I tried to discover answers to three major questions. First, what were the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes operating within informal friendship groups of women in higher education? Second, how did these groups move through phases of development? Third, I wondered how friendship groups provided support for women. I conducted the data analysis by using the constant comparison method to develop grounded theory as discussed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The computer software programs Qualitative Data Analysis Software for Research Professionals, QSR NUD*IST™ v.4.0 (Richards & Richards, 1997) and QSR NVIVO™ (Richards & Richards, 1999), assisted me in the analysis and coding.

Sample

Description. As I was considering using this topic for my dissertation, I identified an informal friendship group with whom I could conduct a pilot study. After interviewing three of its four members, I decided not to include my own friendship group in my research project. I realized that as a participant in the type of group under study, I have insider status that could be detrimental to me or my participants in feeling free to provide authentic responses to interview questions. I reasoned that I would receive freer responses to my questions from groups other than my own. I made the decision to include the friendship group from the pilot study as part of the research sample because it met the four criteria for inclusion, as did the remaining six participating groups. In the end, I interviewed 36 participants for the study.

The criteria for inclusion were: (a) all group members were female, (b) the majority of group members were currently working in higher education, (c) all groups were bounded, that is, membership was well-defined and accepted by members, and (d) all groups had met continuously

for one or more years. In including the pilot study, I accepted the limitation that the interview protocol differed slightly between the three pilot interviews and the current study. However, since I conducted the interview with the fourth member of this friendship group as a part of the current study, she was able to provide valuable additional information not requested of the pilot study participants.

Sampling Techniques

Participants for this study were selected from members of women staff, faculty, or in certain cases, graduate students at higher education institutions throughout the United States utilizing the snowball or chain method as an initial referral method. I sent notifications of the study to members of professional organizations in the field of higher education including the North Carolina Association of Women in Education (NCAWE) via their newsletter (see Appendix A) and to the 377 members of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators' (NASPA) Women in Student Affairs Listserv, WOMEN-SA@listerv.naspa.org (See Appendix B). I also made an announcement with a call for participants at the North Carolina Association of Women in Education 1996 Fall Conference and at the 1997 joint conference of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators and the American College Personnel Association (NASPA/ACPA) in Chicago, Illinois, March 19-23, 1997.

The next step involved selecting participant volunteer groups from those that conformed to the criteria for informal friendship groups described earlier. I considered over 15 groups for possible inclusion in this study. I based the final selections on strategies of multiple case and purposive sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994), in an effort to balance the geographical and ethnic diversity of the sample. Since I had initially used the snowball method to identity friendship groups, I had no way of knowing the ethnic complexity of a group until I made the initial contact. All respondents to the first call for participants were white. To increase the possibility of a diverse sample in the study I followed this with a call for participants on a listserv for black women scholars (AFROWOSCHOLARS) and re-contacted members of a black women's group who were previously not available for interviews. These contacts resulted in a group of women of color agreeing to participate in my study. Further selection criteria included

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identification of groups with whom I could conduct interviews in a timely manner and those whose stories I felt would be able to enrich the study. Often the initial contact person wrote at length about the makeup and special qualities of her group, providing a fascinating lead-in for me at the interviews. In the case of more than one group contacting me from the same university, I chose the group with greater diversity or availability.

I selected the following groups: from a southwest research university, Southern Stars; from a mid-western liberal arts college, The Wednesday Club; from a mid-Atlantic research medical school, The Merry Moms; from a small private southern university, the First Ladies; a southern community college group, the Sandpipers, the Best Friends [pilot group] from a mid-sized southern university; and finally, the Valley Women from a large southeastern research university. By the end of my selection process, I had identified seven groups including the members of the pilot study who agreed to participate in the study. None of the participants expected nor received any compensation for being a part of this project.

Procedures

I used email extensively to initiate and respond to the call for participants. The use of email in the early stages allowed me to broaden the geographical diversity of the study. However, using this format may have limited inclusion of friendship groups who were not members of the listservs I contacted, whose institutions do not provide personal email accounts, or for those persons who prefer not to use electronic communication.

I contacted participant volunteers in three steps. The first contact by email was to announce the study to potential women participants (see Appendices A and B). Following a positive response to this initial contact, I conducted the screening interview and provided more information about the study. The screening interview protocol (see Appendix C) consisted of an introduction to my work and some background on why I wished to conduct this particular study. I also shared with them that I am a member of an informal friendship group. During the screening interview, I asked four confirmatory questions to assess whether each friendship group met the selection criteria. Most importantly, I confirmed whether all members of a group were willing to participate and asked to set an appropriate time and place for the in-depth individual

interviews. I then emailed each group member a Participant Data Sheet (Appendix D) to complete and return to me before the time of the personal interview.

My second contact came at the time of the one-to-two hour taped individual interviews. I conducted interviews in a phenomenological style with one open question followed by probes, as they were necessary. Interviews took place in person or by telephone in my office, the home or office of the participant or at a mutually agreed upon site, such as the participant's conference hotel room. Before the interview, I asked each participant to read and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix E). One interview was lost due to tape malfunction; however I was able to reconstruct part of that interview from my notes.

Effect of on-site interviews. The ability to meet group members in their own environment deepened the quality of the interviews as well as my understanding of their stories. I conducted on-site interviews with five of the seven groups participating in this study. While I do not feel the interviews I conducted away from a group's home campus by telephone or in-person lacked substance, it is also true that being able to use all of my perceptual senses during the interviews enriched the data collection. For example, I found the on-site interviews I conducted for the First Ladies, especially illuminating. In the latter, the on-site interviews exhibited how the campus environment vastly influenced everyone in that campus culture and thus enabled me to define the relationship of context to the development of friendship groups.

After the completion of an interview, I transcribed the tape. As I proceeded with the study, I was able to contract with a transcriptionist whom I trained to work with me in transcribing the tapes. This strategy, although costly, allowed me to begin preliminary analysis much earlier than I would have been able to if I had continued to be simultaneously involved in conducting interviews and transcribing them. As soon as a transcript was complete, I sent a copy to the participant to provide her with an opportunity to add further comment or clarification. The participant also received a letter thanking her for her involvement in the project and a self-addressed stamped envelope in which to return the corrected transcript (Appendix F). I reviewed each participant's comments and incorporated them into the final version of the transcript during the data analysis process. I made every effort to provide in-person, in-depth interviews during

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this study. However, in certain circumstances, in order to broaden the geographic sample of participants, I conducted some of the interviews by telephone. These interviews involved the same format and protocol as in-person interviews. Questions asked as part of the interview protocol were:

1. (Please)Tell me about your friendship group.
2. What do you talk about or do within your group that is meaningful for you?
3. How has your group evolved over time?
4. How do you feel participation in this group has (or has not) supported you?

Confirmability and Trustworthiness

I used three types of confirmability in this study. In the early stages of data collection, I asked a trained qualitative researcher to review a coded portion of transcribed material. I used QSR NUD*IST 4.0 to view reports on the data following a technique developed by Northey (1996). With this method, the reviewer could see the actual text coded at each node as well as ascertain the hierarchical decisions made as I organized and coded the data. Being able to use QSR NUD*IST in this way allowed a large amount of data to be considered in assessing how effectively my codes were grounded in the participants' responses. Second, by conducting a pilot study I was able to refine the interview process before embarking upon the full study. I was also able to identify possible codes using constant comparison analysis (Glaser, 1978) as themes emerged from the data. Third, I began a journal at the beginning of the construction of the research process entailing my associations with friends and friendship groups. This process allowed me to deal with preconceptions I had about friendship processes and about my research and my insider status.

During the data collection process, I recorded notes about the interview content and process along with personal observations following each interview. I also prepared a <u>contact summary sheet</u> (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (see Appendix G) prior to each interview to organize the interview process, provide opportunities to summarize important points, and plan further lines of inquiry. Following each interview, I wrote each contact summary.

<u>Data Analysis</u>

I analyzed the data using the constant comparison method of grounded theory as discussed by qualitative researchers such as Glaser (1978) and Guba (1990). To assist in the processes of coding and creating relationships within the data, I utilized a computer data analysis program, QSR NU*DIST 4.0™ or its later version, NVIVO™ (Richards & Richards, 1997, 1999), which are not only powerful text management programs but also allowed me to build hierarchical frameworks on the coded data to assist in creation of theory.

<u>Coding</u>

<u>Coding process</u>. Coding proceeded on several levels. First, I reviewed and sorted the transcripts for open coding, meaning that they provided initial categories. Next, I used comments and notes from my interviews and developed further codes after subsequent readings of the completed transcripts expanded my thinking. These initial categories were used to develop a beginning hierarchy for coding after the transcripts had been loaded into QSR NU*DIST™. I later regrouped the categories using an axial coding technique that placed coded categories together in new ways. The QSR NU*DIST™ index tree was helpful in visualizing this part of the organization. Finally, I developed categories as parts of memo writing—writing memos relating to codes or connections between emerging concepts in a movement toward constructing theory (Bryman & Burgess, 1994) by using the document annotation function of the software. The last step incorporated responses from participant's transcript reviews into the data and coding.

<u>Cross case analysis</u>. After I had finished coding the entire project data, I ran reports in QSR NU*DIST™ from the project as well as each case. From these reports, I could see not only which codes appeared in the overall study most frequently but also which codes appeared in each case. I continued a process of axial coding comparing the frequency of these categories with intuitive notes and observations made during the interviews to create and verify key concepts, regrouping categories into larger categories. As coding developed, the constant comparative units changed from comparing one incident with another to comparing an incident with properties of the category that grew out of initial comparisons of incidents. I also used the power

of the data analysis package to conduct several searches on the data for key words, emerging concepts, and relationships between concepts that I checked back against the data. For example, during the interviews of the Valley Women and the First Ladies, I observed firsthand in my field notes the impact of the academic environment (context) on group processes. Later, during coding of the other group interviews, I searched for key words and phrases that might affirm or disaffirm this concept within other individual interviews or groups. I found the concept occurring in one degree or another within each group. For example, I found many references to the effect of the environment on "driving you to seek out other women" and on being the "only women" or "few women"in a particular environment or having to "put aside female things [balancing family and relationships] to be successful [here] ", "lack of women in key roles", and "survival in this culture as single [or black] woman." There were also references to the culture of small college/university towns as limiting privacy in social relationships for single women and the effect of having to conduct a social life in full view of students with whom participants interacted in the classroom or as student affairs administrators.

I repeated this process with other key findings, for example the concept of the group as a lifeline, working slowly from the original coded data to comparison between cases to overarching themes or concepts grounded in the research. With this kind of reinforcement, I began exploring relationships among the concepts and their support categories with the computer modeling programs, Inspiration™ and Decision-Maker™, playing with different schema until I had developed several key concepts into series of hierarchies that I will present in Chapter 6.

Summary

The members of the seven groups participating in this study offered a rich source for me to explore the cognitive, affective, behavioral and support processes and phases friendship groups provide to women in higher education. The case study method enabled me to examine each bounded group as a unique entity and compare findings across cases. Qualitative data software significantly assisted the management of the huge amount of data I collected from the 36 interviews that resulted from this work. Utilizing qualitative data software provided visual,

quantitative, and confirmatory support for the findings of this study that I will present in further chapters.

Chapter 4: Results

Primary Lifelines: Identifying Friendship Groups

In order to identify friendship groups appropriate for my study, I contacted women through professional organizations and listservs that reflected women's roles in higher education. I initiated contacts through three professional organizations: the National Association for Women in Education (NAWE), the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). As an active member of all three and similarly involved in NCAWE, the North Carolina branch of NAWE, I know that these organizations provide excellent contacts for women faculty and staff in higher education. In addition, I contacted the NASPA listserv for women administrators (WISA-SA), the NCAWE listserv, and the African American Women Scholars listserv (AFROWOSCHO). As a woman professional in higher education, I use email extensively to communicate with friends and peers, and to obtain information. In my experience, women (who would not otherwise take time to respond to a mailed research request) willingly respond to a professional listserv such as WISA-SA. The inherent culture of support and sharing that I have found on lists of this sort virtually assured an active response to my request for participants.

About the same time that I was finishing the writing of my proposal, I had the opportunity to submit a call for participants in the fall 1996 issue of the NCAWE newsletter. The text of this and subsequent requests to the other groups (February 1997) contained a description of my definition of a friendship group as well as a call for participants. It was very important to me to provide interested groups a conceptual framework by which they could evaluate their potential fit for my research study. I carefully constructed the following statement that appeared in the NCAWE newsletter and later in my email call for programs through listservs contacted for this study. (See Appendices A and B)

An informal friendship group consists of women who have spontaneously and, over a significant period of time (one or more years), formed a bounded group (membership is closed) that meets consistently for the purpose of sharing their mutual experiences of being women. These groups are not "official" groups of any kind such as professional organizations, Junior League, church women, or support groups for any identified problem area, nor are they formed with an official agenda in mind (i.e., they are not self-esteem groups, nor recently divorced women's groups, nor career transition groups). The women in them know exactly to whom they refer when they mention this group to others in their world and consistently commit time and support to one another as part of their mutual involvement.

Responses to the Call

"In general, my women friends have been a primary "lifeline" during the ups-and-downs of working in higher education." (Email communication, 2/20/97)

I was amazed and gratified at the enthusiastic response resulting from my initial call for research participants. Moreover, the poignancy of the stories shared by the nominators of several of the groups deeply touched me. I received the following response from my notice in the NCAWE newsletter. After reading it, I knew the writer had interpreted my careful construction of the definition of a friendship group appropriately.

I read with interest, your request for sharing stories regarding friendships with other women. Here at ____, there is a core group of four women, myself included, who took a trip together for the first time 3 ½ years ago. We have been to the beach for this trip twice each year since. We have dinner together at birthdays and at Christmas, and sometimes even throw "pajama parties" when we feel the need to talk an "all nighter." Others are invited to our events and have often joined us, but the core group talk with each other almost daily and lunch together at last once per week. One of the core group who attended our first beach trip died of breast cancer 1 year ago and we visit her grave each season to change

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the wreath. We unofficially named ourselves the [group name] when we took our

first trip, and the name has stuck. I feel that we have a truly unique friendship

though we are very different individuals. (Written communication, 12/9/96)

While I received only one response from my contacts to NAWE and NCAWE, responses

from the WISA-SA listserv were immediate and plentiful. Within a one-week period, I received

nine responses from women at colleges all over the country volunteering their friendship groups

for participation in my study! From the Midwest:

I'm not sure how this group got started; we just sort of gravitated to one another.

We are all involved in projects that we believe will enhance the well being of the

College, and have worked together in this regard. Perhaps this is how it began?

We recognized each other as kindred spirits, in a way, although we are each as

different as could possibly be. (Email communication, 4/24/97)

From a faculty member in student affairs came this message, "I am most interested in your study;

it sounds fascinating. I could never have made it through the tenure process without my female

friends." (Email communication, 2/21/97) A researcher at a large private university wrote: "This

informal group of women friends has been and continues to be a very important source of support

for each of us." (Email communication, 2/27/97) Some women even thanked me for doing this

research; the response left me humbled and gratified.

I have used our group as the subject of research papers in the past. In doing so, I

couldn't help but notice how difficult it was to find references or research about

groups such as ours, so I'm very glad to know that you are doing this. (Email

communication, 4/3/97)

Moreover, the stories they had to tell were compelling. I received email replies of a page

or more enthusiastically and poignantly describing their friendship groups. A vice president of

student affairs sent the following message.

I am fascinated by your description of your research. I have been a member of

these kinds of groups my whole life since grad school. However, most have been

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more informal—at one point at least seven to eight other women and I called it our "card club," with membership being limited to those women who did <u>not</u> like to play cards. Most of us were associated with the college where either the woman or her husband worked. We met about every six weeks, at different homes, but many times at mine, because I had a hot tub…☺

Currently, there are four of us from that group, who get together only about twice [a] year, because three of the four of us have moved from the original town. However, we have a round robin letter that goes around about every six to eight weeks, and we keep in phone contact more often. I'm the organizer of the reunions. Sometimes the reunions are just the four of us, sometimes only three come, and for the next one, in June, we're expanding to a hiking adventure in Arizona, and bringing friends. (Email communication, 2/29/97)

The following response came from a dean of a technical college in the mid-west.

This group stays in touch by telephone and email, frequent lunches, and occasional dinners and/or drinks after work. We support each other's professional efforts both informally and formally. We also share information somewhat freely, with the understanding that certain information will not be discussed outside the group. I would venture a guess that this is one of the best-informed groups, formal or informal, at the college—in terms of what the "big picture" is for the institution, and what kinds of decisions are being made and by whom. There are some male administrators at the college who would feel very threatened if word got out about how much this group knows!

Conversely, there were also a few disappointments. For example, I received the following email from a member of a group of African American women, "I sent your email out to several people to see if they would like to participate and …no one had the time. Sorry." (Email communication, 2/24/97)

The Process of Selection

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After I received the initial contacts, I asked for more specific information about each group to assure myself that they met my research criteria. This process usually involved an exchange of email asking for names and occupations of group members and a confirmation of their willingness to participate in an individual interview. I eliminated several interesting groups at this point because the majority of members were not in higher education, were not currently meeting as a group, or were not able to create an interview schedule within an appropriate timeframe. Most of these groups were willing to be "on hold" for me, should I require additional groups later in the study. The generosity of the women who had contacted me astounded me. I knew from their titles that they were all very busy professionals who had little free time and yet they were more than interested in assisting with my research. I was, and am still, extremely grateful to them.

In the end, I identified five of the seven friendship groups selected for participation in this study through my initial call for programs. Four of these groups resulted from contacts through the WISA-SA list. The fifth group, and actually the first response I received, came from the NCAWE newsletter. I added these groups to the data collected from a pilot study of a North Carolina friendship group of four women I had conducted during a qualitative research class project. Although the interview protocol differed slightly, my committee and I had decided that the information obtained from the earlier study was appropriate for inclusion in this project. Actually, I interviewed the fourth member of that group as a part of this study because she had been unavailable during the previous interview period. Therefore, I was able to obtain information from her that I had not asked of her three colleagues. Had I felt it necessary to do so, all members of the pilot study would have been happy to provide additional data for my project. After completing the fourth interview, I did not feel that this was necessary.

Continuing the established protocol, I created a data sheet for each group member to complete and return before the interview (see Appendix D). I followed the suggestion of my dissertation advisor, and included the four open-ended questions later asked during the interview.

Interview questions were:

1. Please begin by telling me in general about your friendship group.

2. What do you talk about or do, within your group, that is meaningful for you?

3. How has your group evolved over time?

4. How do you feel participation in this group has (or has not) supported you?

By providing this information early, the participant was able to take time to think about possible responses and eliminate stress related to "What is she going to ask me?" I also enclosed a copy of the IRB form (Appendix E) that I asked each participant to read, sign, and return. Fortunately, I was able to accomplish almost all of this information collection by email even if the interview was to take place in person. I found that my participants were very comfortable using an electronic format. The ability to use email allowed my study greater geographic and institutional diversity, as well as speedy access to document exchange.

Efforts to Achieve a Diverse Group of Participants

The manner in which I set up my initial call for participants and follow-up protocol did not require that participant groups share information about group diversity until each member received the data sheet just before setting up the interview. Meeting the criteria for my definition of an informal friendship group was the focus of initial screening for a group. Initially this was not a problem. However, as the process of identification and interviewing progressed, it became a matter of concern to my dissertation committee and me that all the participants in my study were Caucasian. I consulted a number of times with my dissertation co-chairs and members of my committee about how to handle this situation.

It was not my intent to conduct a study that lacked an ethnically diverse group of participants. However, attempts to contact diverse groups of women in higher education had yielded no response. My committee and I attempted to try to understand why there had been no responses to my calls for participants and develop a strategy to either identify other groups not addressed by the first round of calls or to describe my efforts to be inclusive. I felt frustrated by my inability to achieve a diverse sample for my study. In fact, this was probably one of the most difficult times for me as a researcher/student during my study. Up to this point, I had conducted successful interviews all over the country, in person or by telephone, with 27 members of six friendship groups. The diversity of my participants included age, marital status, parental status,

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career area, geography, and Carnegie type. However, I realized the incidence of women of color in higher education is historically low. When coupled with my research criteria, the problem of finding a group of minority women friends began to look insurmountable. Nevertheless, I redoubled my efforts to locate a group of women of color willing to participate. I re-contacted the AFROWOSCHO (African American Women Scholars Listserv) and several of the groups I had initially rejected (or been rejected by) to see if their memberships offered ethnic diversity.

After several weeks of concerted searching and contacts, I received permission to interview a group of African American women at a large southeastern research university. When I had previously contacted them, it had been during the middle of the term. They had refused my request saying no one had time. My contact to the group had, I found out later, misunderstood my request for interviews and thought I wanted to interview them all together, a platform which they could not accommodate with their busy schedules. By the time of my second contact, it was summer, their schedules were slightly less hectic, and they were very accommodating about providing me with individual interviews.

In retrospect, I must acknowledge a debt of gratitude to the African American women's group and to my committee for urging me to pursue actively a diverse group of participants for this study. It would have been easy to justify a homogeneous sample based on the low numbers of women of color in higher education; my efforts toward obtaining a diverse population as a rationale for the outcome of the study could have been acceptable. However, I would have lost an essential link to one of the most important themes of this study, institutional culture or in the larger sense, context. This theme and its links to the contextual effects of elitism, exclusivity, power, and gender created the framework for relationships I had begun to note in previous interviews. This group provided a rich dialog about their structure and communication patterns that also created important links to themes that I had noted in other friendship groups but had not been able to connect. Findings from this group were at once confirmatory and enlightening. I cannot thank them enough for their contributions that have added so much to the richness of this study. A table of participants represented in this study is available in Table 1.

Structure of the Analysis

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An irony inherent in conducting a major research project such as a dissertation is that the further into the study, the easier it is to forget the questions guiding the original inquiry. By the time I had come to the analysis stage of my project, I had to remind myself to return to my research questions for guidance. Many months of contacting participants, conducting and transcribing interviews, and coding data immersed in QSR NU*DIST 4.0 ™ transcripts organized in hierarchies including over 230 different codes, numerous document annotations and memos, and various searches began to blur the issues of the original inquiry.

Table 1

Selected Characteristics of Friendship Groups

Group Name	Geographic Location	Carnegie Classification	Educational Attainment	Ethnicity/ Marital	Age	Job Title
Best Friends	Southeast	Master's I.	Ed.D.	W-married	43	College administrator
			Ph.D.	W-single	47	Professor
			Ph.D.	W-single	48	Professor
			Ph.D.	W-married	46	Professor
WednesdayClub	Midwest	Bacc. L.A.	Ph.D.	W-married	45	College administrator
			Ph.D.	W-married	51	College administrator
			Ph.D.	W-married	60	Professor
			Ph.D.	W-single	49	Professor
Southern Stars	Southwest	Doctoral/ Research Ext.	MA/Doc. candidate	W-single	40	Graduate assistant
			MA/Doc. candidate	W-married	40	Mid-level college administrator
			M.A.	W-married	42	Administrator
			M.A.	W-single	39	Mid-level college administrator
			M.A.	W-married	38	Mid-level college administrator
Sandpipers	Southeast	Associate's.	B.S.	W-married	45	Staff supervisor
			A.A.	W- married	46	Staff
			H.S. Diploma	W-separated	45	Support staff
			A.A.	W-single	42	Director
First Ladies	Southeast	Bacc. L.A.	M.Ed.	W-single	34	College administrator
			Ph.D.	W-married	34	Assistant professor
			M.A./ Doctoral Candidate	W-single	33	Assistant professor
			M.A.	W-single	36	Instructor
			B.S.	W-single	36	Administrative assistant
			B.S.	W-married	34	Public school teacher

Group Name	Geographic Location	Carnegie Classification	Educational Attainment	Ethnicity/ Marital	Age	Job Title
Merry Moms	Mid-Atlantic	Doctoral/ Research Ext.	M.S.	W-married	36	Professional staff
			B.A.	W-married	38	Administrative assistant
			M.S.	W-married	43	Administrator, Financial
			M.B.A.	W-married	44	Computer administrator
			M.B.A.	W-married	43	Clinical staff
			B.S. Pharmacy	W-married	35	Clinical staff
			M.B.A., RN	W-married	41	Clinical director
Valley Women	Southeast	Doctoral/ Research Ext	M.S.	B-single	39	Mid-level college administrator
			M.S.	B-single	26	Coordinator
			Ed.D.	B-divorced	44	College administrator
			Ed.D.	B-married	48	Professor
			Ed.D.	B-single	45	College administrator
			M.S.	B-married	46	College administrator

The questions guiding this study focused on three areas. First, I wanted to find out about the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes occurring within informal friendship groups identified for this study. Second, I wanted to know how friendship groups provide support for women in higher education. Finally, I tried to discover how friendship groups move through various phases of development (formation, maintenance, and dissolution). I tried to approach the analysis in a systematic way for two reasons: (a) so that I would not leave out essential pieces and (b) to build in a process for trustworthiness. Given the amount of data and coding, I found the analysis quite challenging. It proved helpful to do a visual analysis of my QSR NU*DIST™ coding scheme using the programs Inspiration™ and Decision Maker™ by creating cognitive maps of the most predominantly coded items and themes. I reorganized the codes as my thinking about various relationships solidified. This process enabled me to identify the overarching themes and to organize them into a useful fashion.

In writing the case studies, I substituted pseudonyms for the actual names of each group as well as any member names. It is important to note that each group did have its own distinct name by which all members refer to it. Just as members of each group could easily identify the other members, they also agreed on the group name and used this referent in discussion about group activities. Clearly, having a name made each of the groups included in this study an entity in its own right. Each group maintained traditions and rituals followed by the old members and used to indoctrinate new members into group history. Table 2 illustrates the current status of each friendship group in this study.

Table 2

Attributes of Friendship Groups

Group	Number of Group Members	Years Since Inception	Initial Reason for Group Formation	Activity Status
Best Friends	4	14	Support, gender (single women faculty)	Moderately active
Wednesday Club	4	18	Support, gender (women faculty)	Active
Southern Stars	5	5	Support, social	Moderately Active
Sandpipers	4	5	Support, gender (women, staff)	Active
First Ladies	6	6	Support, gender (single women faculty)	Drastically curtailed
Merry Moms	7	4	Support, working mothers (breast-feeding)	Moderately active
Valley Women	6	15	Support, race and gender (women faculty and staff)	Occasional

Case Studies: Friendship Groups

The following case studies, which establish the foundation for this research project, provide profiles of the seven friendship groups participating in this study. I organized the cases for discussion in the order in which I interviewed them. They have been analyzed thematically according to the following common themes found among all groups: (a) effect of context; (b) membership and group identity; (c) support; and (d) communicating. <u>Effect of context</u> identifies the academic environmental factors influencing group formation, maintenance, and dissolution. <u>Membership and group identity</u> identifies factors involved in the membership criteria established by a group and describes how groups established themselves as an entity with their own traditions and rituals. <u>Support</u> shows how groups provided professional support for members through strong personal relationships. <u>Communicating</u> discusses the different communications media and discussion topics groups used to communicate member-to-member support and establish group trust. Trust is a factor common to all support, communication, and membership activities in order to establish and maintain friendship groups and is described further in Chapter 5. Therefore, the concept of trust manifests itself throughout the factors of establishing membership and group identity, showing support for others, and in the ability to risk, disclose, and share within the group. Presence or absence of trust is noted and/or implied in discussions of these themes in each case study.

Friendship groups varied somewhat in the degree to which they experienced the categories described above although they were common to all. For example, the First Ladies and the Valley Women felt the impact of context the most strongly; therefore much of the discussion of these groups revolves around the effects of context. In writing the cases, I gave the greatest emphasis to the most predominant features of each case in order to tell the story of that group while also describing the common themes noted above and differences within each friendship group.

<u>Best Friends</u>

The Best Friends were my first introduction to the world I was later to discover as the phenomenon of women's friendship groups. I came to know about them through a colleague who was a member. I found it fascinating to hear her tell about the activities of this group, their longevity, and the rituals they had established during their history together. At the time, I thought it highly unusual, perhaps even an anomaly, for women to form a relationship of this length and intensity. However, it was not long afterward that I too became involved in a similar women's group. Therefore, it was a natural choice to ask the Best Friends to participate in the pilot interviews for this research project.

Effect of context. The Best Friends began getting together on social occasions in the early 1980s. They were new, single women faculty or administrators at their state university located in a small southern town. Although the town is now a tourist destination, during the time the women of the Best Friends joined the faculty, it was truly an isolated place. Friendships among the faculty were important.

I was able to conduct interviews with three of the four members during the pilot study and completed the group with the fourth interview later. In each case, I met with the participants in their campus offices. The members are white, in their mid-forties to early fifties, and have been together at the same university for more than 16 years. They are by profession Professor W, a social scientist; Dr. S, a student affairs administrator; Professor J, a sociologist; and Professor T, a mathematician. Two of the members are now married and two are single. Two dyads actually form this group. The married women are best friends. They share leisure time together and even vacation together with their spouses. The two single women are also best friends and spend a lot of personal time together. All four rarely meet between designated group events.

Membership and group identity. As in any story or legend, time has a way of blending events together in undistinguishable pattern and the Best Friends are no different. The four members of Best Friends, often fondly referred to by their initials as the BFs, have only a hazy recollection of their actual beginnings. They do recall an earlier time with other women who later dropped out or moved away. All four members agree on this, but how long ago and who

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those others were changes from member to member. They are very clear, however, on the present composition of the group and how they feel it to be:

It's not something we set out to do …to bond. It just happened. The really interesting thing is that [Professor J] is the only one I ever see. None of us are feminists in the militant sense of that word. It's just that we came together and that we like one another and that we are together in that—I compare it to the theatre and an ensemble. You are greater than you are independently. There's something in the group dynamics that makes us expressive and creative and caring and nurturing.

Over the years, there have been opportunities to include others in the group. After a while, the women realized that adding others would be difficult because of the level of confidentiality and trust they had already established.

We have decided that we don't want to include other members in the group because we have such a history and such rapport and mutual trust that we don't want to bring someone else in and change that mix and worry about what we say.

All members agree the group has become very special to them. Dr. S commented about her experience of being away for a year on academic leave by saying, "I really missed it. You don't realize how much you value it and depend on that support and getting together and not [have to] worry about what you say." Another member added, "It really bothers me when we don't get together; I'm disappointed. I really miss it."

To all the women in this group, the quilt stands as a metaphor for their relationships with one another. Previously, the group had celebrated the Christmas holidays with a dinner and gift exchange at someone's home. One year they exchanged CDs of holiday music, sharing the recordings around the group. Another year, they all gave one another leg warmers (a popular clothing item at the time). More recently, they had contributed to a needy family, burned out of their home at Christmas time. However, for the past five years, their gift has been the quilt. It is a Christmas quilt, started as a Christmas exchange project at the urging of Professor T and Dr. S, who were already quilters. After much persuasion, the others, not especially interested in

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domestic efforts like sewing, agreed to the project. Each year, the women make four new squares in the pattern of their choice and exchange them at their annual Christmas dinner party. By the fifth year, each person had 20 squares to piece together for identical quilts. The plan is that they will all work together to piece and quilt each quilt. The effect of this project was greater than any of the members had anticipated. It created a "kind of bond I'm not sure could be bridged [by any person new to the group]."

> I'm not sure when I started out that I saw the emotional significance of the quilt, the quilters in the group may have because they have been quilting a lot longer than the others of us have. Once we got into the quilt, as we laid out the quilt over the last five years last Christmas, you could see the growth. Two hundred years from now there will be four quilts exactly the same in the world [made by Best Friends members].

Dr. W eloquently put it this way:

> Maybe it's like Adrian and Rocky, we fill in each other's gaps. "You got gaps, I got gaps, we fill in each other's gaps." It's like this wonderful puzzle that we've all got these little feelers that go out in the particular direction and someone else has this little hole and when we fit together we fit together in this wonderful way and our quilt is a symbol of that. It is a metaphor for what we are. Each year we started with little individual pieces and we put them together and we find that we complete the puzzle and then everybody brings their puzzle piece and we put them together and it keeps getting bigger…

Communicating. The need for their friendship group to serve as a confidential place where discussion can be open and free is a constant theme repeated by all the Best Friends. The members are very careful about sharing their private selves. Because they are all well known in this tight knit university community in which they live and work, having a private place to do so is very important. Dr. S particularly made frequent reference to her appreciation of the confidentiality afforded her by the group.

> I almost think that if I didn't have this group, I would have another. It fulfills a

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need to share and [to] support and be supported. If I didn't have it from them I
would have it from another group. If you didn't have any group like this you
would feel lonely or isolated or it's just nice to have that support where you can
just talk and know that whatever you say is confidential and you won't be judged
on it and that tomorrow 15 people will know what you've said. Without it you
would have a tendency to get so much into yourself and not have an outlet.

The trust and talk within this group are familiar and "sacred" rituals shared by all.
Another ritual is the "business meeting"—a short time at the end of each Best Friends evening
where all members get out their calendars and set the time and place for the next meeting. They
all joke about this part of the Best Friends saying it is the only thing they do that is anything like
a club and that they only do this because they have learned through experience that scheduling
the date and time of the next meeting while they are all together is easier in the long run.
Normally the Best Friends meet once a month on the same day of the same week, but with four
busy professional women, it has proven wise to double check calendars. Most of the Best
Friends "meetings," if they can be called that, take place in restaurants and usually center around
a meal. "That's the nurturing part," according to one member.

Location had an effect on friendship group sharing. Occasionally the group will gather at
the home of a member for a special celebration. I asked how this change affected the interchange
and sharing. The Best Friends told me the location did influence the type of member exchange.
One member said that sometimes she would "save" things from month to month until there was
an appropriate place to discuss them. Although verbal support is important to the Best Friends,
non-verbal support is satisfactory in situations where verbal support is not as available.

Our talking is ritualistic depending on who is most needy, who is most driven,
who sets the tone of what we talk about and sometimes we talk about fluff and
sometimes our talk is very personal to one or the other of us…Women have a
tendency, I think, to talk a whole lot but we don't have that tendency as a group.
We have a tendency not to talk about things but to be there and it's better than

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talk. There are things that we don't have to say—whoever needs it, gets it [the

support].

Support and trust. Professional support, perceived as a positive result of group
membership, is a major advantage of being a Best Friend. It is not of greater importance than the
personal support the group affords. Best Friend members regard the fact that they are in different
academic and administrative areas as an opportunity to provide increased accessibility to
networking and information resources in the university community. All the members regard
these connections as increasing their overall knowledge and comfort in using the university
system to their advantage. At various times, equity issues such as promotion or tenure become
the topic of Best Friends conversation. Professor T. says she values the group for being a place
where she can "try out" ideas in a safe environment. Professional sharing among Best Friends
members also provides an opportunity for perspective.

> I sometimes don't know if what I experience in my department between
>
> colleagues or with my chair, or the way we hire new people or promote people, or
>
> the classes we teach or students we get…I have no idea if that's common to the
>
> rest of the university. By talking to people in other departments, you know if
>
> that's common to the rest of the university.

Here is an example of the Best Friends experience with non-verbal support shared by one
of the group in the form of a story about a Best Friends meeting following the unexpected death
of a member's brother.

> that was a hard time for her and that was a hard time for us because we knew that
>
> their relationship hadn't been all that close—we sat through a whole evening of
>
> dinner without talking about her brother and what she'd gone through but we
>
> didn't want to leave. So—we decided to go see Beaches together [pausing for
>
> tears as they welled up and choked her words]. Ooh! [deep breath before going
>
> on—the emotion of the moment has caught me too, for the pain all of them share]
>
> And after the movie the four of us stood in the bathroom and held each other and
>
> cried. [pause to gain control] And it was transcendental—it was beyond having

to talk about it. Talk is very important and we do a lot of talking but in that

instance…

The poignancy of the moment and the words filled the air and neither of us spoke for
several seconds. This is what my nurturing group means to me, what I long to share with others
via these interviews. I felt humbled to share the intimacy of this moment with a woman who was
almost a stranger to me.

Two of the members of the group label their closeness as that akin to having sisters. The
fact that most of the group members do not see one another except on Best Friends nights
reminds them of close, intense, and yet unfettered relationships they might have with a sister.
Like sisters, the relationship between Best Friend members is such that it does not require
constant testing. A certainty of knowledge requires that these women know they can count on
one another. "I just know that they are there." "I know that they are as close as the phone—it's
like in a family."

The support Best Friend members provide for one another is like a family without some
of the complicating ties that occur in natural families. As a group, the Best Friends meet
personal and professional needs and find nurturing and non-judgmental support without risk
through their friendship. In a world where many of us do not have the luxury of our family of
origin nearby, this group provides a wonderful substitute for the women of the Best Friends.

The Wednesday Club

At the time I conducted interviews for this study, there were six active members. All of
them are white, hold a Ph.D., and are upper-level administrators or teaching faculty except the
newest member. She is the wife of a new college administrator but also an academic in her own
right. In fact, more members of the Wednesday Club hold faculty rank than any of the other
groups interviewed for this research project. Only four of the active members were able to
participate in this study; they ranged in age from 45-60. Members interviewed were: Dr. C, a

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science professor and founding member; Dr. S, an upper-level academic administrator at the college and a member for six years; Dr. A, an upper-level student affairs administrator and member for over eight years; and Dr. E, a department head and faculty member and a member for about six years. Two members were unavailable to interview for this study. Dr. D was in Europe on sabbatical during the interviews and the newest member was unavailable due to other commitments.

Effect of context. In the 1970s, there were few women faculty or administrators at this small church-related liberal arts college located in the rural Midwest. As times changed during the latter part of that decade and the early 1980s, more women joined the faculty. Among the first was a woman science professor, Dr. C. Throughout her academic training, Dr. C became accustomed to being the only woman in a male-dominated environment and learned to cope with it quite well. Therefore, being one of very few women faculty at the college seemed normal to her, although she did miss having collegial friendships with other women. Several years later, a younger woman about to go up for tenure called Dr. C to invite her to lunch. She wanted help with the tenure process. Over lunch, they addressed the younger colleague's fears and feelings of isolation. It felt good to connect and have someone to talk to who could understand. They continued to meet until the younger woman had successfully completed the tenure review. With this milestone behind them, the women decided to continue getting together. They identified other women faculty and invited them to join them in what has become a weekly lunch meeting now known as the Wednesday Club. Dr. C recalls that time as inviting "a few other women who were sort of in our same age bracket and experience" at the college. None of them ever expected the group to go on over 14 years! In the intervening years, membership in the group changed as women have come and gone at the college.

As articulate and verbal communicators, the four participants provided valuable insight into the meaningful role the Wednesday Club plays in their lives.

Membership and group identity. According to Dr. A, the process of inviting new members happens via a group decision process.

As newcomers have come on campus …we have kind of talked about them and

decided to invite or not to invite…there is an interesting assortment of women…as new people come and as we feel they might need or benefit from the support [group], we would ask them [to join us]. At first, even this process seemed unnecessary until a woman who had been brought to lunch as a guest was not invited to join the group. It got very tense because she assumed that she was part of it and we had already decided that we had enough people and weren't inviting anybody else. One of our members was named to let her know that she wasn't invited...From then on we decided that we better talk about when new people were to be added on and how that would go.

Dr. S added another dimension to the process of including new members by indicating she felt the final decision was actually Dr. C's (although it had never been openly discussed in the group):

Although it has never been stated we all kind of know that if anybody is ever invited to join the group, it's her [Dr. C's] decision. Now she has never said that; none of us have ever asked her that but I would never say, "I want to invite so and so into the group" and just go do it. So just because she has been there the longest, I think we kind of see her as Dr. C, "the leader."

Dr. C talked about the effect of group history and developmental stage on new members in saying, "We have, in more recent years, intentionally not gone after new young faculty because they just don't have the history and don't understand. You spend all your time explaining what you're talking about." The longer members of the group have been together, the more difficult it becomes to bring someone in and "catch them up." Although different members have left for sabbaticals or positions at other colleges, the core group has remained relatively stable for long periods.

Each member articulated the concept of choosing new members because "she needed us" rather than the group needing the new person. It was quite apparent from all the interviews that women of the Wednesday Club uniformly feel a compulsion to provide a supportive environment

for women at their college and for women to help other women. At the same time, they acknowledged that their college environment is generally supportive to women.

This friendship group is one of the richest in terms of traditions and rituals of any group I interviewed. Over the long duration of their friendship (more than 14 years), members have developed many wonderful traditions and rituals. The Wednesday Club began to take on a life of its own through its rituals. Not only is the group "named," it has its own table each Wednesday noon at a local restaurant complete with a personal "reserved" sign placed by the staff. The group even receives mail in its name, addressed simply to: The Wednesday Club, ___'s Restaurant, City, State. The restaurant cashier's desk holds the incoming mail until the group retrieves it at the next meeting.

Another ritual of the group is the exchange of postcards between members on the home campus and members or former members away on leave or sabbatical. During lunch meetings, members often write, receive, and read postcards. When away on sabbaticals or trips, members recall taking special pains to select small tokens to bring back to the group. At the next luncheon meeting following her return, there is a presentation ritual of the giver sharing the token gifts. The giver tells each recipient, in turn, what is special about this gift selected especially for her.

Dr. C plays an essential role in maintaining the history of the group. The founding professor is responsible for keeping the "archives," scrapbooks of postcards, letters, and pictures of events involving Wednesday Club members over the years. I felt fortunate to receive and send a postcard to add to their archives. Dr. C also has the title of "transportation director." Each Wednesday, she provides rides to lunch in her van. Finally, this group has what they refer to as a "beer fund"—it is for a "rainy day" when a shared pitcher of beer would help heal the ravages of college life. They assure me that it has only been used a couple of times over the years! Occasionally, the Wednesday Club has planned shopping outings or day trips to a cottage or cabin. However, these are infrequent; most of their activities center on the Wednesday lunch hour meetings.

All Wednesday Club members classify the group as being in a maintenance phase. Dr. A said:

I have felt sometimes that it was kind of winding down and it's about then that
something or someone new will come into the picture or somebody will change
jobs and really have some needs or someone will come back so there seems to be
some kind of constant renewal.

Club members recognize that, at various times, they feel less personal need for the group but remain involved anyway in acknowledgement of the long term commitment they have made.

Over time, the needs of this group of women have begun to change and with it the needs of the friendship group. Dr. C observed: "in the beginning concerns were often issues of the classroom, tenure and promotion…[they have] now moved to more global sorts of issues in terms of the institution instead of being so much 'me.' The interest has really shifted, I think."

According to the women of the Wednesday Club, half the campus and town perceive the club as an entity in its own right! Family and friends are generally supportive of the club. Perceptions by members of the college community vary. A few males seem threatened by what they think of as a "woman's power lunch," especially in recent years as the group members have advanced into administrative positions. Dr. C reported that her all male faculty colleagues offer some pointed teasing about her lunch meetings and one of Dr. S's colleagues was overheard to say rather vindictively, "You better meet with your Wednesday lunch group and make decisions for the college today!" Says Dr. C, "There are a group of people who think we run the institution and think that every decision that gets made in certain places gets run by us. But that's not true."

For the most part, the college views the Wednesday Club as a positive influence for women new to the college. At one point, a male dean became fond of offering its membership to new women faculty, erroneously believing the group was open to all women.

Support. Support on professional issues is strong within this group. The atmosphere of a small campus and college town in which they live and work often blurs personal and professional issues. Members acknowledge feeling support from the group regarding such things as recommendations for professional conferences to present research or for college committee appointments that allow the member to learn more about faculty governance. Dr. C feels the support of the group is important. "It is a way for me to test my ideas and get some really honest

feedback. With minor exceptions, [there are] no political axes to grind. It is just an honest place to get real feedback." Although they did not intentionally seek solidarity on campus issues, several of the women can recall going into faculty meetings and presenting a united front about proposals previously hashed out during Wednesday Club meetings. They are less apt to challenge the proposal of a friendship group member since they have heard her rationale at a previous lunch meeting and wish to be supportive if they can.

To Dr. C, the image of the group as its own entity is a strong and vital one. When she thinks of the Wednesday Club she sees the members in intense conversation at lunch in the restaurant/bar where they meet weekly.

> [I see the] whole group sitting at the table talking back and forth, writing on postcards, again not wanting to leave. Again the lunch hour is over and you just take five more minutes and five more minutes. It is just this comfortable feeling of "where did this hour go?"

Dr. A spoke at length about the group being a lifeline for her when she first came to the college.

> This group was really important to me my first couple of years here. It was a lifeline that I don't know what I could have done without…Every week I just thought, I can get thorough until Wednesday and then I know I can connect with these women.

Dr. E feels sure the group will continue because it still has meaning for the members.

> …it still meets a need, and the people are witty and wise—neat. It is a place that everyone feels that they have a regular part of their lives and it is something that they wouldn't be willing to give up. That's why those that have left are still involved in postcards and mailings.

Communicating. Talk plays a big part in the communication of this group. Dr. A succinctly categorizes their talk as:

> I would divide our conversations into three general types of things we talk about…One of them is not work related, two of them are work related. First is just ordinary bitching about work, complaints about what happened in a faculty

meeting, and talking about people we have all agreed aren't real effective. Just

kind of generally negative stuff about work. The second category would be asking

for advice: something like, "This was going on—give me some advice on what to

do here." and usually it isn't anything real confidential, like confidential personnel

problems I would never bring to this group. The third category is just personal or

family stuff that we will share...There are some days when we do a lot of venting,

other days when people are doing fine and there's not so much of that.

There is a uniform feeling from all members that, if needed, group time would willingly be
devoted to issues stemming from individual need.

There are four topics rarely, if ever, discussed in this group: national politics; intimate
details of a marriage or relationship; confidential issues from their work; and confrontation of
another member's actions or behaviors. Usually members feel supported in the talk of the group
but, occasionally, there are topics the women cannot discuss due to confidentiality within the
college (such as personnel issues) or issues that are out of the purview of the majority of the
group. Dr. A acknowledges picking and choosing things from her work area to bring to the
group that, as faculty, the others may not see as important. However, the faculty members
recognize that the items she occasionally brings to the table have increased their understanding of
student affairs issues.

Unlike some groups interviewed for this dissertation, members of the Wednesday Club
are not comfortable confronting less than desirable behavior of one of their own. When one
member monopolized luncheon conversation about her own issues for many months, the group
unanimously allowed her to do so. Although each member made a negative comment about the
situation, as a group they feel her need was so great that it was their obligation to be supportive.
"There was a sort of understanding that she was dealing with a lot of things, that we sort of had
to help her through that." Together they admit to an almost uniform sigh of relief, if
occasionally, she is unable to attend for one reason or another. Dr. C defined their reluctance to
confront by relating it to an effect of culture or the context in which the group existed. "We are

[from] an ethnic culture where issues like that are very rarely dealt with head-on...I think dealing with it has been more indirect and implied. You just can't say it in a group like this."

The public location of the group's lunch meetings seems to have some, though limited, effect on the topics discussed. With a table at the back of the restaurant and out of earshot, almost any topic of discussion feels safe. Drs. E and S both recall many times spent huddling around their table at the back of the restaurant, speaking in low tones so as not to be overheard, deep in serious conversation about a topic brought to the table by one of them.

Talk is not the only means of communication utilized by this group. The women use email for quick notes, reminders, or support. Members send written notes or cards when someone needs a little special attention or lift. In moments of very critical need, a group member might make a personal visit to another's office. The size of a small campus allows easy access to other office and academic areas. All four members interviewed agreed it is always possible to immediately find someone within the group to talk to if the need arises.

Trust (both group and individual) is an essential component of friendship groups. Dr. C is very clear about the group trust and confidentiality exhibited in the Wednesday Club.

> It really has been a place where one can go and unload. Go and talk about all of
> your frustrations. And the only rule is that nothing that is said at the table leaves
> the table…I do not know of any instances where that rule has been broken. It
> really is that what goes on there, stays there. You hear about something
> somewhere else, that's another issue. But whatever you hear there, stays there.
> And so it's been probably one of the reasons many of us are still there.

Dr. S added that, "You don't have to explain a lot. In some ways it is like a marriage 'cause you get to the point where you don't have to do a lot of explaining to catch people up."

The Wednesday Club is called a "lifeline" by its members, a "place to let your hair down" and be yourself in front of "supportive peers"—even with all of the problems of human communication, it is a place still seen as positive and worthy of investment for these women in higher education.

<u>Southern Stars</u>

Since the summer of 1994 I have been part of an informal friendship group that

includes four other women. We are employed in different departments within the

Division of Student Affairs. I forwarded your request to the rest of the group and

all have agreed that we think we fit your description. We would be happy to

participate in and support your research efforts (Email communication, 2/21/97,

L, Southern Stars)

<u>Effect of context</u>. The Southern Stars was the second group responding to my email call

for participants on the WISA-SA listserv. They are a group of five white women working in a

large southwestern research university in various areas of student affairs. The first contact came

from L, a student in the university Ph.D. program, who emailed me after seeing the notice on the

list. The others all had administrative roles within student affairs and residential life with the

exception of one member, Z who works in another administrative area. L and K are the only

single women in this group. The other members of the group are J, a residence life administrator;

C, residence life administrator; K, a student life administrator, and R, a financial aid

administrator.

The women came together out of their mutual involvement in similar jobs and university

life. They are in similar life stages. "Somebody understands what you are going through without

having to really explain a lot of things." L is very active in professional organizations and is

preparing to be a faculty member or vice president of student affairs someday. I found out later

she is the perceived as one of the leaders or "gatekeepers," as one member called it, of this group,

doing most of the organizing and creating of mutual experiences for group activities.

Ms. L, as leader, uses the group to "lighten up" her self-acknowledged tendency to be

"very J." ("J" or "Judging" indicates a strong need for life planning and structure in Myers-

Briggs terminology) (Myers & Myers, 1995). I was able to experience a good example of her

strong organizational qualities when she came to our interview at 7:30 A.M. the first day of a

very large joint convention of two professional organizations in student affairs. When we met in

the hotel lobby, L showed me her pre-prepared hourly agenda for the convention (including time

built in to work on her dissertation) created even before registering or viewing the complete program! L needs the Stars to create a "normal" life. With them, she can talk, joke, discuss children and family issues, and focus on things other than her career or dissertation.

There are different opinions among the members about whether the Stars should be a closed group. Members L and K do not seem as concerned as J about the Stars being a closed group. J feels strongly that the group is large enough at this time. L, as unofficial "leader" of the Stars, has continued her reputation for inviting others to join in the Stars' gatherings by extending an initial invitation to KS, a newcomer. After first checking with the other members via email and receiving their implicit acceptance, she invited KS to attend a birthday event. This action did not sit well with J and a couple of the other members. However, they are unclear if the invitation is permanent or given on a one-time-only status. The issue of an open or closed group and who offers invitations is a potentially divisive one for the Southern Stars.

The Southern Stars are one of the more loosely organized but intensely enmeshed (multi-level relationships) groups I interviewed. They are also the group composed of the most dyadic relationships. In addition, this group of women seemed to have more complicated ties to other professionals on their campus than other groups participating in this study.

Z and J are married to spouses who work on campus in student affairs who also work with R. In fact, Z's husband is J's boss, a situation creating many complicated issues for two women who are good friends. K works for J's husband and J and K are good friends. Both K and L are single, however, K is the only one who seems to lead the lifestyle of a single woman, dating and going out. The others use her as relief for their more mundane existence as working, married women with children. Z and J spend a lot of time together especially in the evening when they walk for exercise. Z, who confronts a weight problem, depends on J for both personal and marital support. J often feels placed in an uncomfortable position by these confidences since they are about her boss and colleague with whom she gets along very well. To draw what she considers a fair boundary, J told Z that she would listen but would not criticize her spouse along with her. That seems to be enough for Z to want to continue to spend a lot of time with J. J also feels some discomfort in being around L who is finishing her dissertation full-time while

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working under the chief student affairs officer. J has completed her doctoral coursework but seems unable to move forward with her dissertation. She regrets her inability to focus on her Ph.D. but acknowledges that her children, spouse, and job demand her primary attention at this stage in her life. L, being single, has no other distractions. As a result, J finds the constant comparisons between the two uncomfortable. Well-meaning friends ask her, "Well, when are you going to get your Ph.D. finished?" J became so uncomfortable being around L for a period of time that she could not interact with her any longer. She has steeled herself to completely ignore questions or references to doctoral work when they are together. However, inside she feels resentful and jealous although she has tried to resign herself to her situation. It is difficult to avoid situations where they are together as many of the members tend to use J for support and J's home is often the site of group gatherings.

  <u>Support</u>. The Southern Stars tend to socialize in the same circles in which they work. They all know one another at the work environment and feel they have a lot in common both personally and professionally. Additionally, since many members have spouses also employed at the university, the propensity for social as well as professional interaction increases. Though the Southern Stars do not gather often as a group, they see one another frequently at work and on social occasions outside of it. They communicate outside of group events by email, a common practice of most of the groups interviewed for this project. They often send articles, jokes, and other notes to one another. A note may pertain to a personal life event such as, "Know your parents are visiting this week, how's it going?" The Southern Stars do not discuss personal issues at birthday meetings or other gatherings but they may resort to calling the next day to say, "you said something yesterday, and I wanted to ask you more about it."

  Each of the Southern Stars mention the professional support they receive from one another as being extremely valuable to them. The member's trust in a high level of confidentiality is implied within that level of professional sharing: the grouching, griping, gossiping, trying to figure out what to do about work-related and people-at-work problems. They agreed early on that anything discussed in the group is to stay in the group, not even shared with spouses (for obvious reasons with the professional linkages of these women).

Nevertheless, there is consensus about the amount of support provided for work related and some personal issues by the group. R, in particular, recalled at length how the group helped her during the previous summer when some personnel issues made her normally positive workplace extremely stressful.

I used them a lot as a sounding board because I just didn't know what to do. And I was losing it to some extent because I was so frustrated. And they were real supportive and real helpful. And some of them gave me some good suggestions…Some of them just let me rattle on because I just…they also said, "well, you are off base with that one," or "no, I think you're on target with that one." And that was extremely helpful.

Communicating. Getting this group together is an ordeal! They all seem so busy with work, home, family, and church activities that even an hour means taking precious time away from themselves or their families. Consequently, the Stars meet less often than some of the other groups interviewed for this project, usually only for birthdays of group members. When L suggested a day of movies and dinner as a birthday celebration for one member, several of the women were very uncomfortable with this time commitment. After discussing it in dyads, they finally agreed to tell L that this was impossible. Eventually, the women agreed upon meeting just for dinner. The dyadic discussion of personal issues is par for the course for this group. They discuss work and university issues during times they are together, but rarely do they share really personal aspects of their lives with the group as a whole, although they might very well share this information with several members of the group in various dyadic relationships. Therefore, almost everyone knows most things about the other members but not from direct group discussion. The real liability of this non-confrontive discussion pattern is visible in issues like the inclusion of KS.

In their way of dealing with issues in dyads instead of within whole group, the Stars act in a way typical of several friendship groups interviewed for this study. Although appropriate behavior varies from one cultural context to another or even between individuals, in general, middle class white women have been acculturated in a pattern of non-assertive behavior

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(Johnson & Arneson, 1991). This pattern is especially notable among middle class southern white women. In the South, particularly, women may adopt a self-effacing interaction style that does not allow them to confront one another openly about negative behaviors (King, 1975). Instead, they tend to discuss such issues in dyads or keep negative feelings to themselves. As Lerner (1985, p. 7) posits, "nice ladies" are rewarded by society.

With varying degrees of anxiety and distrust, group members discussed the issue of KS, a possible new member. KS had recently returned to the university as a professional in their area and "sort of invited" herself to one of the birthday celebrations for a mutual friend. This seemed acceptable on a one-time-only basis, but now questions arose about KS's eventual inclusion in the group. There is great variance in stance from group member to group member. One of the most recent members seems unconcerned. She does not see the group as closed, nor does she see it as a place where a great deal of interpersonal sharing occurs. This member also stated that as a younger single woman she feels KS will probably "find very little in common with the group anyway" and consequently is not worried about her impact on group cohesiveness. Other members with greater longevity reacted more strongly. Several others expressed concern during my interviews that, coming into the group, KS will be unable to bridge their group history and will jeopardize group trust. J has an interpersonal problem with KS due to KS's alliance with a colleague in J's office with whom J neither gets along well nor respects. J seems the most concerned about KS's possible membership in the group. She is also the most vocal about the commitment of the group to showing up when group events are scheduled. "We had an agreement with this group that this [birthday group activities] was to be the priority of the day." KS has already broken that trust by not showing up for two events. J went on to say,

> there are lots of other women in our division who would be almost more qualified
> to join this group and none of the rest of us have encouraged or thought about
> extending the membership. Although again there are other women who would be
> qualified more and for whom I might have less concern about the trust issue
> becoming an issue.

There was a lot of dissension in the Southern Stars at the time I conducted the interviews for this study. Their interaction patterns, loose structure, and professional commitments may prevent them from mending the rift that seems about to develop within the group. There is general agreement that they are in the maintenance stage of their group's development, with some curiosity about the impact of KS's potential membership on group process.

However, as a group enmeshed within their work and friendship activities, they may have a natural buffer that will allow them to weather the coming storm. Over a period of several years, the Southern Stars have depended upon one another to "be there" to fulfill a variety of roles: mentor, friend, social companion, and sounding board. The loose but enmeshed structure of this group provides a safety net in the culture of a very large public university.

<u>The Sandpipers</u>

> Two issues that I want to be sure to remember again (about this group) are the
> idea that of "they needed us and that's why we invited them to join our group,"
> and the playfulness and laughter and the theme of tolerance and helping for the
> other members of the group. Compensation for their strengths and weaknesses, as
> an individual or their areas of problem and concern. The elasticity of their
> relationships, as a whole, that seemed to permeate the group. The trust that they
> will [be] ongoing in some form or another. The age versus stage issue with stage
> seeming to be the common denominator. The common denominator of offering
> money or financial support to members of the group when other members deemed
> it of benefit, or needed it. Paying bills, offering not only in-kind contributions,
> but financial monetary contributions as well. (Interview notes, 4/97, K. Sack)

<u>Effect of context</u>. The Sandpipers was the first of the friendship groups I was able to spend the day with while conducting on-site interviews at their home campus in a southeastern city. It was high spring and the campus was lovely with trees and flowers in full bloom, as springs in the south are apt to be. The campus is compact and F, my contact, had given me wonderful directions and a typed schedule of appointments. This type of gracious attention to detail was but a glimpse into the person who plays a major force in shaping this interesting group

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of women. The Sandpipers is one of the smallest groups (along with Best Friends), and one of the most fascinating I was fortunate enough to interview for this study.

The Sandpipers were white women who work at the community and technical college in various non-teaching administrative and support roles. F, better known as the "Saint," a campus staff administrator, was the energizer, caretaker, and leader of the Sandpipers. The other members were SM, the "Mascot," a unit director; P, dubbed the "Bohemian," a staff member in graphics; and S, "Queen," a support technician. These women represented the only community college group in the study. Their educational level ranged from some college to the bachelor's degree. The structure of this group was very informal; they often included others in their time together, although they all seemed very aware of their special relationship as part of the Sandpipers. The interaction patterns of the Sandpipers are unique in two ways. First is their ability to be very direct when dealing with one another. These women are very verbally confrontive with one another. However, they base interactions upon a foundation of love, respect, and personal care. Second, they are very instrumental in their support for one another. The Sandpipers provide physical, financial, and social support for members of their group and other persons in their community. These unique qualities in their interaction style caused me to look for similar traits in other groups I interviewed later. Only one other, the Valley Women, an African American group from a large southeastern research university, used this same interaction style within their friendship group.

Membership and group identity. When I met the Sandpipers, the members were in their late 30s and early 40s. All of them had been at the community college and technical school for several years. Initially they came together as part of a committee that published a campus newsletter. As they began to know one another well through the work of this committee, they liked and shared personal parts of their lives with one another. At the end of their time on the committee, the women decided to reward their work and continue their friendship with a beach trip. In the southeast, a beach trip is justifiable for just about any time of year, problem, or idea. The women invited others on the committee to go for a long weekend at the beach. Although a few others did accompany them, the Sandpipers jokingly relate that they have a reputation for

being "bad" and how that reputation drives others away. After the beach trip, the four women continued to meet and see one another on campus where they have become a well-known entity to the college community. Each of them gleefully related her own version of practical jokes played on another Sandpiper or members of the college community. The Sandpipers accept all the playfulness as well-meant because recipients are aware of the humorous intent and good fun in these jokes. Bohemian relates:

> We do things like, we'll take the organizational chart and rewrite it. One year we
> had a poster contest of everybody we didn't like on campus. And we have the
> "Castration Committee," which we chose. And we'll discuss whether we'll hire
> somebody to have a paint ball gun on top of the buildings—just a joke thing.
> We're kind of a practical joke group; I mean we do play jokes on each other, but
> that's all in fun. It just makes things funny.

The Sandpiper women acknowledge that there are some interpersonal conflicts at various times among the members. Saint is often the recipient of women's gripes and issues about one another. She has a reputation as the "Saint," the one who always listens without judgment to whatever others have to say. She helps them work it out and pushes them to deal with the other friend directly. It is she who encouraged Queen and Mascot to use insightful but direct styles of interaction with problem solving. Saint is trusted, respected, and appreciated by all of the Sandpipers.

At the end of each interview, I asked about the stage of the group and what they thought its future might be. The Sandpipers all agree that as long as they are all in jobs at the technical college, this group will continue to exist. They do have some question about their ability to maintain its present form if any members move away. Queen sums it up this way:

> I personally believe this a lot—that two things I've always known I can count on
> are the love of God and my mother's love regardless of what I do. They're going
> to love me. And I would say I feel that towards the Sandpipers. That regardless
> of what I do and what happens, they're going to be there. That's not to say there
> won't be some ripples along the way or some times where we call each other and

question each other because that certainly happens. Sometimes maybe they thought I'd done something or I thought they have, but we have that freedom to pick up the phone and say, "Did you say this? What's happening here?" But there are a lot of people that you couldn't do that with. They would feel attacked or whatever and they'd just… I guess that is what's the value to me. Maybe that they're a constant for me. I've had a lot of things that have been lost in my life. But the Sandpipers—it's kind of just nice to know you're walking around on campus but there's some other people that love and care about you.

Communicating. The jokes became part of the communication repertoire of the Sandpipers: out-front, outrageous, confrontive, and caring. Here is an example of an interchange typical of the group's banter when Mascot briefly dropped by Saint's office during my interview.

Mascot: Did she tell you I couldn't answer none of her questions? [coming into the room where Kathy is interviewing Saint]. I'm just a dirt bag I guess.

Saint: You lie. You blabbed. You spilled your guts.

Mascot: I told her all the dirty stuff I could find.

Saint: And I'm still spilling mine so I'd say the first hour is just about you. I wish we could get on to somebody else.

Mascot: Me too, I'm kind of bored.

Saint: We are too, she [Kathy] was dozing a minute ago.

Mascot: So what she's doing is sending you a blank piece of paper [interview transcript].

Saint: That's right. That's how important this stuff was.

Kathy: Now I wish I'd been with all of you together!

Saint. It's like that all the time.

Mascot: All the time. [Really?] Yes.

Saint: It's important to harass each other on a regular basis.

Mascot: Well, see, it's good to play. It's good to play. We play all the time. We

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get a little bit of work done and we play. We lie to everybody, don't we?

Saint: Keeps people on their toes, right?

Mascot: <u>Leaves</u>

Saint: That little bit of [exchange], that's what it's like. We

challenge each other. We tease each other unmercifully.

Kathy: It's very un-Southern sometimes.

Saint: I would think so too.

The women collectively acknowledge that they always try to be straight with one another. They are one of two groups I interviewed for this study whose mutual communications are usually complete and aboveboard. During my interviews with this group, each of the women acknowledged a history of co-dependent behavior that has been a challenge for her in adulthood. Either life's hard-won lessons have enabled them to practice appropriate communication skills with one another or they have found a unique island of security among the four friends. An example of this direct communication style is shown in the following remarks made by Saint about Mascot:

Saint: Mascot is not a game player. If you're mad at her, or whatever, go tell her.

"I'm mad at you because _____." That's her approach and how she does it.

There's a lot of logic to using that, instead of this tendency we have to [soften

things].

And Mascot doesn't deal with any of that, at all. She has no tolerance for it

[southern female game playing] and she'll say, "I'll go tell her for you if you

want." Saint: "No, No, No, don't do that."

Kathy: She uses more of a [direct] male style.

Saint: She does; she's direct.

This group is not hesitant to point out an action by one of the members that they do not like. That they do this in a caring way makes it a healthy rather than a destructive experience. Queen and Mascot both provided examples of how they had learned from these situations.

Queen: Well, I think the main thing is that we can agree to disagree. Our

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personalities, even though there are a lot of characteristics about our personalities that are alike, then there are some things in which we're not alike. I guess our viewpoints on moral issues, ethics—all those kinds of things sometimes are different, but we can voice those and have a freedom to voice them, and with a confidence that the relationship is not going to be damaged. And even specifically, like Mascot, there are times when we're together and she says things that I know I disagree with, but I have a freedom to let her know. Just kind of, "Now wait a minute. Let's think about this." That kind of thing. And those kind of relationships—they don't just happen overnight. I think you have to work at friendships. It's really easy, especially in today's world, I could sit over here and if I don't hear from them, I could feel sorry for myself or think "OK, the relationship is going to die." Or either, "they're out doing things together and they're not including me." It's real easy to do that kind of thing. But when you feel those things, we have the freedom to voice it. Sometimes Saint will pick up the phone and she'll say, "OK, you're awfully quiet. What's going on?" So she can tell sometimes that there's something going on in my life. Maybe nothing with the group, it may just be something like home-life. I work two jobs. You know, that kind of thing. So somehow or another we have been able to bond together.

Support. The fact that this level of candor could happen in their group increases the trust they have in their friendship, makes it more valuable to them, and makes them very sure that their friendship as a group will continue to go on. As I heard the members talking about this phenomenon, I wondered where it had come from. It seemed to be what I would call the ability to be "real" with one another. This group deals with what is "real" more than any of the other groups I interviewed with the exception of the Valley Women. The Sandpipers have the most loving confrontations about behaviors of group members and provide some of the strongest instrumental support. For example, when their former colleague and member battled cancer, they organized a food fund, collected donations, and arranged accounts with several restaurants to deliver food to the house for the woman and her teenage son. They took time to decorate the

gravesite of their friend after she died. They were instrumental in gearing up a committee that organized a very successful March of Dimes fund at their college. They loaned money to colleagues so that they could participate in the beach trips and arranged it so the loans could be re-paid over a number of months because they had decided that these individuals "needed to be with us—to get away for a long weekend to play and think of something beside the daily grind of life."

> Queen: Sometimes they joke at me and tell me I'm the mother, the fixer. Now <u>all</u> of us are fixers. Bohemian and I have laughed for we've read all those co-dependency books. And so we see a lot of tendencies there.
>
> K: By fixer you mean what?
>
> Queen: When there's a problem, we're going to fix it. Even if we're fixing it for someone else, rather than letting them do it themselves. So we've been able to talk about those things. And I guess earlier when I was talking about our relationship, when we talk about problems, if they see that I'm getting ready to take on something that I really don't need to be doing, then they feel free to talk about it and say, "you might want to think about this." And then, I'd have the same thing with them.

The First Ladies

> After I had been here for six years, we had several new single female women joining the faculty. I was determined that I didn't want these new faculty women to experience the same adjustment problems I did. I teamed up with a couple of other female faculty and we invited a few women to a type of a "dinner club." We got together every other Friday evening for dinner at someone's home. It turned into a support/mentoring/friendship group fairly quickly. Since all of us were involved in education (I'm now an administrator)…we discussed the academic culture, gender issues, etc. One of the social work faculty members asked one of the new female faculty if she had found any persons to relate to. The new faculty

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person told her of this group of women that were getting together pretty
frequently. The social work Professor remarked "Oh, that would be a nice "first"
group for you! Thus our group name "The First Ladies." Over the past five years
we have continued to meet, but have faced some dilemmas along the way…should
we remain exclusive? What about other new faculty coming? A few have gotten
married (and are now "secondaries"☺ etc.) (Email communication, 2/22/97, Ms
P)

Membership and group identity. My first contact with the group whom I later designated
as the First Ladies was from a woman administrator at a small, southern, church-related college.
After several exchanges of information including the intriguing story above, we arranged for me
to visit the campus and interview this group. There were eight members in all; however only six
of them were available to meet for interviews. Most of the members worked at the college in
some capacity except two who were teachers in the public schools. One of the teachers and one
of the on-campus members were busy during the time I could be on campus. Of the six women I
interviewed, three were teaching faculty (Professor M, Professor C, Professor K); Ms. P was an
administrator; Ms. D was an upper level support person; and the final member, Teacher S, was
with the public schools. All of the women, with the exception of Professor K, had been at the
college for several years at the time of the interviews and had joined the group at its inception
five years before. All of the First Ladies were white women. The inclusion of the newest
member of the group, Professor K, had a decided impact on the status of the friendship group that
I will discuss in more depth later in the case study.

When Ms. P, the administrator, came to the college, her adjustment was difficult due to
her status as a young, single female and complicated by the culture of the institution. She was
one of a very few single women faculty or administrators and, in her early twenties, clearly one
of the youngest. To tell the story of the First Ladies, I must explain the institutional culture that I
found at this college that made it unique and had such great impact on the lives of the women I
interviewed. The college was on a picturesque and well-maintained campus ringed by mountains

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in an idyllic rural setting. I visited the campus in late March, a period when students were about to begin Easter break.

Effect of context. I had never visited the campus before the interviews and was clearly unprepared for the impact the campus environment had upon me. My field notes reflected this awareness as I went about conducting my interviews. The culture views academic titles as elitist and non-egalitarian. Use of first names is common by everyone across the campus regardless of rank; this includes administrators and teachers. There are strong messages in much of the literature and visuals I encountered, for example on bulletin boards, about personal ecumenical responsibilities, peace and justice (a major at the college), and giving to others before oneself. Signs and posters described work groups to third world countries and opportunities for community service. There is also a strong emphasis on the cultural arts, especially music, as a gift that serves God. Buildings, grounds, and décor are clean, neat, and well maintained with an emphasis on serviceable quality or handmade items by local artisans. It is obvious, from what I saw, and conversations I overheard, that religious and ethnic tradition is strongly adhered to on this campus.

The campus also seems to be a happy place. People were pleasant and greeted me warmly. At the close of our interview, Ms.P, introduced me to the President of the College, whom I addressed by his first name in accordance with the culture.

The religious and ethnic affiliation of the college places strong emphasis on family values, community, and an ethic of shared world responsibility. When she came to the college, Ms. P did not espouse their faith nor was she especially against any of the values for which it stood. What Ms. P struggled to find was place*:* where was her place in an organizational culture that did not recognize unmarried professional women? Her colleagues were kind, caring individuals who made assumptions that as a single woman her main goal in life was to have a husband, children, and provide service to the community. They did not have a place for her as a single woman in their social circles focused on campus life. The social life of the community, as well as the expected participation in religious life, centers closely on the church and its doctrine. While Ms. P supported most of the philosophy of the church and later actually became a member,

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initially she found little place for herself as a single woman—not engaged, dating, or married with a family who had no intentions in that direction. After spending several rather isolated years on campus, Ms. P received a promotion to an upper level administrative post. Other single women began to be hired; thus began the dinner group.

At first they met every other week or so for dinner as a social outlet. However, as time passed, their friendships deepened and the women began to share more of their personal situations within the group. The First Ladies came together out of circumstance: all being at the same place, time, and situation rather than women naturally drawn or attracted to one another initially as friends. They were convenient and available and they helped make up for the lack of social life open to single women within their institutional culture.

During the interviews, the members at the college repeatedly expressed their singular experience of isolation for women. I was curious about it and questioned how this culture could have such an encompassing impact that reached so deeply into the personal lives of the First Ladies. An impact on their professional activities was understandable. However, this was my first introduction to such a deep impact of an academic culture on the personal lives of women whom I interviewed. The private college sits on the edge of a small city that is also the home of one of the state's larger universities. I questioned why the women did not seek out colleagues and friendships in that academic community. Professor K expressed her frustration by saying:

It's another world…And I wouldn't know where the first place would be to <u>go</u>. I know two people on the _____faculty and that is it. And with the drinking policy…It used to be that students would tell on faculty if they'd see them in a bar…[K: What was the drinking policy?] …Non-use. You just did not. Faculty, staff…You had to sign something that said that you will not drink alcohol, you will not gamble, you will not smoke, and you will not use drugs. Very, very strict. [K: Even in your own home?]

Professor K: Oh, it didn't matter because it's a community and your home is open and all of that…But it makes it very difficult to go to social places like bars. And that's just not my style either…And in this town, <u>you know</u>. People in the past

were reprimanded and I didn't want to risk it. So, where does that leave you—the church. Everyone in church is married. And they all have families. There are two divorced faculty members in the entire school. Everybody's married and has kids. That's the way it is.

Professor K talked at length about the lack of separation between the lives of the faculty and the church at this small college. Although she had worked at another Christian college, she found this situation unique and described it as: "something weird about this place…there is no space in-between here [church and personal life and college]."

The lack of "space" expressed by Professor K is also attributable to one of the more unfortunate events that plagued the women of the First Ladies. During the early years of the group, those on campus who knew about its existence seemed pleased or non-committal and perhaps this was the result of a fundamental difference in understanding of the construction and purpose of the group by members of the community. The President or Dean would often recommend it to new women faculty. It became a problem for the women to maintain their own friendship group and meet the expectations of the college community.

then it became as other young, single faculty women were hired, the dean or whomever would tell them, "Oh, well there's a group here called the [name of friendship group] and you'll feel right at home." And it was like, well, wait a minute. We're kind of in this place where we all finally know and understand each other. We're not perfect, we don't get along all the time, but adding another one or two personalities this to this dynamic might—is that what we want? Do we…maybe we should disband. We had a meeting about that and I think Professor C was very upset about it and left. I think some of us saw it as we wanted to keep it loose and unstructured and other ones wanted a monthly meeting time at certain people's houses—which is the way I think it had been when I got here. The clique thing was tough because then there are also single— not necessarily faculty women—but single staff who weren't in The First Ladies. And it never occurred to us that maybe they didn't want to be in The First Ladies,

but should we ask them? It was getting too big, I think.

In about the fourth year in the history of the First Ladies, the group decided to host a party. The question became whom should they invite? In the culture of their religious practice, the community is the church, which in this case, meant the entire college. The question of whom to invite and whom to leave out almost destroyed the First Ladies. First, it brought the group's existence to the full attention of the college community as word spread around the community about the planned event and second, cast a label of elitism on the closed membership of the group. In this culture, an organization accused of elitism broke a fundamental doctrine of the college community and therefore, the church. After this, the First Ladies curtailed their activities to an occasional dinner or birthday gathering, always with others invited.

However, accusations of elitism were not the only hurdle facing the First Ladies in their five years together. Due to the egalitarian doctrine of the college/religious culture, the First Ladies tried very hard to convert their group into a truly open social group for the families of members and invited guests. In doing so, the group lost much of its original focus and strength. Members acknowledged this loss was taking place, however, the burden of guilt from the charge of elitism became so strong that it took precedence over the needs of the group or any individual.

An important result of the effort to expand was the "secondaries." The secondaries is a term used by the First Ladies to describe spouses or significant others of members who had married. The term coined by Professor K, correlates with some strong feelings of jealousy and hurt within the group. Professor K had come to the group from another region of the country with a reputation for being much more liberal than the south and especially, the church-related context of this college community. Members of the religious group that supported the university also represented an ethnic identity populated by this religious sect. Women in the group frequently volunteered information regarding their status as an "ethnic" member of this culture by birth. It seemed to be an important distinction within the context of the campus environment.

Although Professor K is an ethnic member of the church's religious affiliation and spent early years on the campus as a child of faculty parents, she expressed shock when she came to the campus as a single female and experienced the conservatism and isolation of women faculty.

She joined the group at the invitation of Professor C, another member who was a family friend. Furthermore, as a new member of the First Ladies and not part of the original group, Professor K's investment in the First Ladies was different from the others. She tended to guard her position in the group in a way unlike her friends. Professor K was a very attractive woman used to being a presence on her previous campus and probably in life. She was an artist and performer and she liked attention. She missed the attention of males and chafed at the restriction and lack of urbanity in the college community. She tended to exhibit behaviors that were less like the ethnic community of the campus and was more assertive and perhaps, jealous of her role in the First Ladies. In her way, Professor K brought the outside world to the campus and to the First Ladies. Some of what she brought was good—serving as a role model of an assertive woman professional for her students. Conversely, she also brought an ethic that was destructive to a much gentler approach to living and was often painful to those around her.

Support. Despite the problems the First Ladies encountered during the six years of their existence, members maintained overall positive feelings about the group. Much of the essential interaction of the members occurred in dyads. Members share almost all confidential information in dyads instead of the entire group. This was especially true in recent years as more and more group get-togethers included Secondaries and other invited guests. However, when asked how they would characterize the developmental stage of the group, members place the group in a maintenance rather than dissolution mode and feel that perhaps rejuvenation is possible in a new form. The group is part of the fabric of their lives and many of the members are still committed to it because of the history it holds for them. The group uniformly acknowledged that Ms. P is the group "leader" and a person most members mention as part of their trusted dyadic relationships.

In the spirit of the ethnic community of the college, the First Ladies perform many instrumental acts of support for one another. Professor M received support when she was on a tight deadline during the final moments of her dissertation. The women stayed up until the wee hours of the morning to help her with the proofreading, formatting, and printing of her research. They also cleaned her apartment, packed her for a move, and provided support for her wedding

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reception. Several group members jokingly acknowledge that Professor M is apt to get herself in tight corners, time-wise, and often needs the group to rescue her from disaster. In addition to the help they provided Professor M, members report donating time to help paint each other's homes and provide assistance with home landscaping and household repairs. In addition, they collected contributions for the "Woodbore Fund" to help Ms. P prepare her house for sale and pay for a costly insect infestation treatment.

> I had never had that type of support outside of my family—from any type of
> group. And that really meant a lot to me. Not the money as much as just that they
> would—yeah, the thoughtfulness. I think that there are those types of things that
> have kind of bonded us together.

As in other friendship groups interviewed for this project, the First Ladies shared ideas about their professional experiences on campus and some of the personal aspects of their lives that influenced it. While this group is not as free in sharing deeply personal feelings in the total group, they do use the group as a forum for trying out ideas they might then take back to the whole community. An example of one such item is Ms. P's trying on the idea of having a child by artificial insemination. She wanted to explore how the college community would respond to her, a single woman, in making this choice.

> we talked about whether this community would be supportive of me getting
> pregnant—artificial insemination and having a child. And what would that mean
> to this community…And I think gave me enough of the support that I could say
> something to the president about it. And this community still has a very, very
> hard time dealing with divorce, much less something like artificial insemination
> as a single person. So, it gives us a forum to talk about things that we might not
> feel real comfortable talking about in the larger faculty.

The group tried a beach trip one year and, although they claim to have had a good time, that too was fraught with divisive issues relating to their ethnic and religious culture. One member of the trip was Professor C, an idealist who has very strong feelings and speaks very vocally about the environment and the style in which their community should live (i.e., frugal,

environmentally active, helping others less fortunate than themselves, etc.). Professor C has great difficulty with what she views as the waste of resources that occurred during the beach trip. She was not only bothered by the expenditure of what seemed like an extreme amount for cottage rental, but also the use of air conditioning at the cottage seemed, to her, an exorbitant waste of scarce resources. The others, tending to have a more liberal interpretation of their faith, had difficulty with her abhorrence to its use in blistering mid-summer beach temperatures. Tempers flared. Professor C's comment about the event was that, "sometimes I still feel like these are not my closest friends in life because they don't understand some of my basic values." The group has not tried to repeat the trip again.

The beach debacle is not the only example of dichotomies of this type involving group members. For example, when Ms. P decided to build a home, there was unspoken criticism of her in the community for building such a large house (approximately 2000 square feet) in which only one person would live.

Communicating. An example of the impact of one new person on an established group illustrates Professor K's perception of the relationship of the early members. To Professor K, the membership of Teacher S in the First Ladies was questionable. Teacher S had left the college and moved to another state for almost two years before returning as a married woman. Professor K saw herself as taking Teacher S's place in the group and felt that S was no longer a bona-fide member. Upon Teacher S's return, Professor K said "Well, S---, I took your place in the group and now you're a secondary because you are married!" a statement that hurt the teacher immensely. The First Ladies had been very meaningful to her as she mourned the unexpected death of her first husband and adjusted to being a widow. She did not view herself as a "secondary." "It felt really bad when she said that because I didn't want to be a Secondary, and maybe I really wasn't considered a close friend anymore because I had been gone." In the way of the church and ethnic culture where one avoids confrontation at almost all costs, Teacher S did not express this hurt directly to Professor K. In the words of Ms P:

> [They] are so big into conflict analysis and peacemaking, they can't confront one
> another. They let things go and they let little things go…until they become huge

issues.

However, other members were aware of the pain caused by this statement; it became one more issue leaving a scar on the beleaguered group.

A second incident involved Professor K and Professor C and a man with whom they were both spending time. Professor K called her relationship with the man a "friendship." Professor C, with whom the man had a more intimate relationship, became very jealous of K to the extent that both of them could not attend gatherings of the First Ladies if the other planned to be there. Others in the group at first tried to handle the situation with the utmost care by inviting one and then the other to group activities. Later, they tired of playing the game of whom should be included and invited both women to events, leaving K and C to figure the problem out for themselves. Eventually the two women made a truce. Again, the group suffered because of the discord.

Members of the First Ladies appreciate the unique friendship shared within the group. They are also are keenly aware of the personal differences which rub together a group of personalities so strongly affected by their ethnicity and culture. While they might wish for a group having greater internal harmony, they also acknowledge that what they have is who they are. The First Ladies, flawed although the group may be, have made some lasting contributions to the lives of women in their college community. Professor C said:

> I think that's the interesting thing about having a group of friends like this. It's
> something new for me. I really haven't related to a large group of people since
> college, I guess. So it's been interesting to see how things change. …There's
> something exciting about relating to women—relating to a group of women. That
> was also like really a first for me, to realize that you can have fun on a Friday
> night without being with a man, or being with men.
>
> I feel like I have support from people there for who I am, and so even with the
> things that I've struggles with, or areas that I don't feel good about myself—I
> have people in the First Ladies who are supporting me, who believe in me. And I
> feel that very strongly…one thing about the First Ladies for me that's been

different about other friendships is that in the past I think I tended to become

friends with people who are like me…. In this group, we have similarities, but we

have differences too…[while] in some areas I have felt really lonely… maybe

being part of the First Ladies has helped me find happiness within myself.

Merry Moms

Effect of context. The Merry Moms are a group of women working at a large mid-Atlantic university medical center. Their leader contacted me about the group after reading my call for participants on the campus woman's listserv. Because their affiliation is with the university hospital more than the university itself, this is a unique group in relation to the six other groups participating in the study. The group is also unique due to the shared life stage that precipitated their coming together. As their name implies, The Merry Moms are all mothers. They became friends in the course of using what they refer to as the "pump room" of the university hospital where they work. The pump room is a space set aside for breast-feeding women who have returned to work. The mothers go there to use the electric pump to store breast milk for their children's use while with a caregiver. The room is little more than a closet; in fact, I believe they told me it was a linen closet at one time. Now filled with breast pumping equipment, pictures of infants on a bulletin board, and women reading, doing needlework, and talking, it is the hub of the Merry Moms' activity.

Membership and group identity. The Merry Moms started as a large group who have gradually whittled down to six to eight members eating lunch together on any given last day of the month. That is their time to come together to share mutual experiences as new moms: day care, family-career balance, toilet training, and terrible twos. It is now two years since some of them have given birth; a few members are beginning to think about adding another child to the family and share that dilemma with the group. They have chosen to meet on the last day of the month so that all members will be able to attend at least some of the time. The medical center is located in an urban setting and many of the women commute great distances and are part of dual career couples. They have little time in their lives for personal needs but have made a

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commitment to the Merry Moms because it gives them something they cannot get elsewhere—connection to women who understand and share their career and parenting concerns. I coordinated my interview trip so that I could attend one of the monthly lunch gatherings at the hospital cafeteria.

The Merry Moms themselves are an impressive group of white professional women. They are a mix of highly educated medical professionals, professional staff, and technical medical assistants. Mrs. J is in medical education, Mrs. S is an administrative assistant; Mrs. BS is a financial administrator, Dr. C is a pharmacist, Mrs. M is a systems analyst, Dr M is Clinical Coordinator, and Mrs. B is a nurse manager. Another of their group planned to meet with me during my visit but her workload prevented it. Some are dedicated workaholics; some would rather be home with their children. The busy schedules under which the Moms operate make one wonder how any of them found time to work me into their schedules for an hour-long interview, but they did—and were very open about talking about how the group has meaning for each of them.

I met with Mrs. S first. She is the current newsletter coordinator for the group, affectionately known as "the cow" by her friends because she was able, with little effort, to produce great quantities of milk for her baby. She has a Master's degree in Medieval History and her husband is a university professor. This is her first child.

> It's been support as new mothers but it's been useful….We became friends. The first couple of times we met down here [cafeteria] for lunch, people would be looking around and it's like, "We're over here—you don't know us with our shirts on!"
>
> I guess one of the interesting things is that we've got people who are double-doctorates. We've got people with Master's degrees. It's a very small room, it's not any bigger than this [holds her arms out to indicate her small office space] and sometimes there would be four of us in there at one time, or were waiting or whatever. And you don't have a whole lot of other things to do while you re sitting there pumping milk for your baby. But it was definitely a place where

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people kind of stepped out of their traditional roles, and everybody there had

something very much in common and that was you were a nursing mother and you

were committed to that in terms of also working.

Her colleague, Mrs. B, an MBA/BSN who works in an administrative position, talked

about how they keep the group organized with everyone on such a tight schedule.

I really think it was probably Mrs. S or Mrs. J within the group who said, why

don't we meet once a month for lunch. It was kind of their idea. And we were

like, "Oh yeah, that would be neat!" And we've kind of got this informal network

through email with sending out letters. Someone actually does kind of officially

take on the role of notifying or setting up those meetings.

Mrs. B herself does not attend all the luncheons or most of the other events held in the

evenings because she commutes almost an hour one way to work. "I'm not a social animal by

nature. And once I go home, I'd much rather stay there. I have an hour commute, so I drive 80

miles a day (40 miles each way), work full time, have 2 children, involved in church…." She has

arranged her work schedule to work from home part of every day, trading off with her husband

who is an accountant with his office in their home. Time is a precious commodity for her but she

values the opportunity to meet with the Merry Moms when she can. "There's a bond; there's a

very strong bond within that group."

When she thinks about the group structure, she sees several people in leadership roles

taking time to manage the email list and send out the "newsletter." These women are Mrs. J, the

medical educator, and Mrs. S, mentioned in the previous paragraphs, or Dr. C, the pharmacist.

Mrs. B feels that the group has an inner and outer core, those who can or choose to get together

more frequently than those who do not. "I think there's a core group that's probably a little

closer and socializes a little more than the larger group, so I think we have like a group within a

group, which probably most organizations do." Others in the group agreed with her assumptions

on group structure.

Several smaller groups of closer friends actually make up the larger structure. They are

Dr. C, Mrs. J, and Mrs. BS in one group; Mrs. M, Mrs. J, and a member I did not interview in a

second; and Mrs. S and Mrs. J in a third. Some of these women meet occasionally after work for "Mom's night out" dinners or on weekends for gatherings that include children and spouses. No one seemed to have a problem with a member, like Mrs. B, who chose not to attend as many of the activities. All of the members recognize the struggle Merry Moms have just keeping the juggling act going and are accepting of whatever time a friend has to offer.

Mrs. J is the common denominator for the Merry Moms and the person contacting me about participating in the study. All the members recognize her as a lead person for the group. She and her husband are expecting their second child. When this happens she plans to cut back to half time. The hospital and medical school are family friendly about policies for working mothers to adjust their schedules for working at home, parental leave, and cutting back hours. Unfortunately, she is the person whose interview was "lost" on tape. I was very discouraged to realize that I would not have the tape of her interview to use in my data analysis.

Dr. M, who is the clinical pharmacist with one child, told me that as far as she is concerned, the Merry Moms are definitely a recognized group. Others in the pump room know about it and are curious about it.

> The group does have its own living, breathing, entity kind of a thing. We have certain people that are there all the time and go to most things. It's those people that kind of keep it going, and then we have a few stragglers that for one reason or another maybe can't make it to the lunch, or can't make it because of another obligation. But we try to keep them active and involved.

Discussion has come up among some of the members regarding inviting new members to join the group. Some of the women, Dr. M included, have mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, they understand the significance this support group has had for them during a stressful time. On the other hand, they also see that the group has moved beyond just breast-feeding and newborn issues to later developmental stages of child rearing. Most importantly, however, the women have formed trusted relationships with one another that they are reluctant to try to extend to a more inclusive group. Dr. M describes her ambivalence on new members:

> [with the support of the group] I was able to nurse for twice as long as what I had

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hoped to try to do. Plus, also being able to help another woman who's just coming back, kind of assimilate herself back into the workplace and be able to feel a little bit more comfortable about it because you already know all of her insecurities and the problems she's going to face, so you're right there ready to go ahead and help them, as well as to get different viewpoints and different thoughts of raising children and how someone else perceives their role and what they need to be doing. But at the same time, you develop such a close relationship in this working group that we can actually sit down and discuss the real issues and the real problems and really what's going on. I've certainly probably have discussed things with this group of ladies that I haven't discussed with my other coworkers. But also fortunately I guess for me, I have several coworkers in the department of pharmacy who also use the room, so that just kind of automatically forms a close bond…and from my experiences with that group I've felt that…there's some kind of an automatic bond that I feel with another mother who may be nursing, just because of the closeness that I've gotten from that group. It's kind of like I automatically feel it with someone else who may or may not be using the room.

Support. Mrs. M is a dedicated professional woman climbing the career ladder. Currently she is a systems analyst at the hospital after having managed a DNA lab for many years. She is very driven about being successful in her career. She also has doubts about the perceptions her superiors have of her work and struggles with the phenomenon, common to women, of the imposter who does not really know how to do her job. She worries that people may see her as having bitten off more than she can chew in trying to balance a stressful career, small children, and home. Yet, she is very proud of what she has achieved in her move from the lab to systems analyst.

I was the first one in my local group that had a baby and I was juggling the work time and I didn't want to talk to anyone else about it because I was afraid someone would say, "Oh well, you're not doing a good job at juggling the demands of work; maybe you should just take some time off."

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In order to keep both her family and work on high priority, Mrs. M keeps to a demanding schedule of three-quarter work time at the office and one quarter at home in the evening after her children are in bed. Of all the Merry Moms, Mrs. M reminds me of the juggler valiantly trying to keep all the balls in the air at a faster and faster pace while running forward at top speed. She, in particular, expresses the value she finds in her relationships with the Merry Moms. It is obvious from her schedule that she has very little free time. However, Mrs. M makes time for this group:

> But what I see is taking the time out to have lunch with my friends provides a different kind of resource and energy for me. It really does. Having that common bond really kind of revitalizes why I'm doing what I'm doing. It's very hard to do what you're doing and not have anybody to talk to about the difficulties that you fall into and having a sense that everyone is expecting you to be the highest of professionals, whatever that means. Here, seeing that other women are doing it too; other women are struggling too and they kind of figure out what isn't important. You do have to kind of put things in [perspective] and say, "this isn't important right now; this is what's important. Today it may change; tomorrow it may change. It doesn't matter right now at this point in time." And that's kind of been a help.

One of her colleagues has similar thoughts about the group support the pump room has given to her in her breast feeding and being able to be a successful employee.

> I really would have to say that the room helps in more ways than you can even say. Just your emotional outlook. I think I'm able to my job better because, one, I'm satisfying this strong need for me to do this for my child, and, two, I'm able to do this even though I'm at work and I know just the medical antibody that kind of protection that I'm offering my child, so I'm still able to do that. So, it's helping me to do my job better.

Communicating. Talk is the essence of the Merry Moms as it is with most friendship groups. Discussions are free and open to whatever topic is important for that day. Various members acknowledged that some very personal sharing is conducted within dyads or small

groups and not in the large lunch gatherings. Partially the limitation is due to the effect of a noisy cafeteria with others very close by and a long table. Partially responsible also is the depth of relationship each member has with all of the others and the amount of consistent attendance a woman may have been able to manage. A lot of sharing does go on, however. The intimacy of the pump room, a small space with a small group of regular members, undoubtedly contributes to the level of confidential exchanges taking place.

> We talk about everything from child rearing to what happens to your sex life or does not happen to your sex life while you're working full time and nursing and have older children at home and all of that. We discuss our family issues, several women have discussed things regarding their husbands, which are very private and personal, psychological kinds of things too, and other kinds of things. We will sit down just because we've spent so much time, I mean most women will pump two, maybe three times a day. And that's every day, so you spend quite a bit of your time, relatively, with this group of women.

The group has also developed enough confidence in one another and group trust that one member felt comfortable sharing an ethical issue while they were still in the pump room.

> There was a major ethical thing that went on with one of the people. Well we were actually still in the pump room and she brought that into the room because she was so concerned about it, asked our opinions and got some input and just kind of bounced it off us, like, "Am I nuts thinking this?" Or "what do you guys think of this?" "What is your reaction to this scenario to this sort of thing?" So in that sense, probably the neat thing that happened in that group is regardless of what your position was we had [people] from secretaries to M.D.s and nobody was shunned out of that group. Whereas when you go outside of those walls kind of, you get more segregated.

The group now uses their friendship as a basis for collegial networking within the hospital. When issues arise that require inter-departmental or interdisciplinary input, the women feel free to consult with one another to solve problems or take care of business. They also share

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their professional expertise with one another as consultants for medical issues faced by individual members. For example, Mrs. S experienced post part-partum fatigue and Mrs. B recommended increasing dosages of Vitamin B-12. Mrs. B recounts how she has personally used some of the group network to aid in her clinical practice for input on patient care issues.

> if I have some major sort of thing with pharmacy or really want to know what the inside scoop is, I can call Dr. C and get that sort of information. She's more than willing to share that with me and help me. Actually two of the people from pharmacy do that. And definitely dietary—we're able to do that with them because Mrs. S is from nutrition. For example, to work some performance improvement sort of things that maybe I wouldn't have been able to do had I not already had a relationship there.

The Merry Moms are an unstructured but committed group of women trying to support one another through a series of important life stage events in today's world where their own moms and other women support systems are not available or no longer exist. Although this group is quite different from the others in the study, similar elements of identifying women who "need us" or will benefit from the support of being together are prevalent in this group. Dr. C shared a longitudinal view and rather poignant statement about her evolution with friendships.

> Since I've gotten out of college, it's been harder to make friends. I don't have that ready-made group like I used to and I'm finding that as I'm getting older. When I was single and everybody that works in my [unit] everybody was single, we would go out together. We had our group like you were talking about with your group. We had a group where we would go out and be there. Now we've gotten married and have kids and gone our separate ways, it just seems to be harder to meet people because you're just busy all the time now. So it's nice that I do have this group. I said I need that. I'm a people person and I need to have people. And I still have my friends from college and all those different stages, but it's nice to have people now, right here.

<u>Valley Women</u>

The Valley Women constituted the final set of interviews for this dissertation project. They agreed to meet with me on their home campus during the summer when their schedules were slightly less chaotic than during the academic year. They are a group of six black administrators and faculty at a large land grant university located in a rural southern town. The six members of the Valley Women interviewed for this project include Dr. J., an academic department head; Dr. B, senior student affairs administrator; Dr. D, a senior academic administrator; Ms. C, an entry level student affairs administrator; Ms. K, a mid-level student affairs administrator; and Ms. M, a human resources administrator.

<u>Effect of context</u>. The location and local demographics surrounding the university have a lot to do with the impact of being black on a predominately white campus and the effect on integration and retention of black faculty and administrators in this university community. Although the university is large, accessible by interstate, and near a medium-sized city, it is not in an area where there are large African American populations. This is even truer for populations of highly educated blacks. Although the university has placed an emphasis on minority hiring, the university climate can be a cold one for black members of the community. Dr. D discussed this issue at length during her interview.

> We had a lot of issues in terms of the environment, issues in terms of racism,
> issues in terms of professionalism, the absence of a core group of African-
> Americans in the community, and family issues…and there's really a need to have
> support in this environment…this environment drives you to need and build those
> kinds of relationships with someone, and you're willing to do it and there are
> other people willing to do it. I think if I was in higher education in a[n]
> historically black college or university, I'm not sure that I would have formed
> these kinds of groups because there would have been a different kinds of support
> at those institutions. There would have been people who looked like me; who
> understood me; who appreciated me—before I proved that I was capable of doing
> something. So I think at an HBCU [historically black college or university], my

core friendship group that I already had would have been who I went to when I had issues. But I think in this environment, you have to have—you've got to have someone you can go to and who you can talk to, and who has experienced some of the same kinds of things that you have in order that you—so you can be validated.

Dr. J was even more vehement about the climate issues:

people are so crazy you don't want to stay. You start doubting <u>your</u> sanity after a while…When you start to doubt that self and look around you, it's not worth it. And that keeps me going and keeps us going…When you are isolated and there was nobody there to experience it but you, you do start thinking that you are paranoid and you're crazy. And then I act out. It's bad and I feel bad for the students, that's why I have always said if I had a child I would want them to go to a historically black school first to be grounded in who they are because probably my lifestyle would put them in a lot of different realms but coming here could kill 'em. If they were not really grounded in who they are and what they had to do and how to get through it. 'Cause it almost killed me!!

To combat the hostile environment, the university has supported various campus networks for women and for blacks. For the most part, the members of the Valley Women have been at the university for 10 to 15 years. They have participated actively in the Black Caucus, and formed additional smaller friendship and mentoring groups among women in the university community. Consequently, these women know most of the other blacks on campus, both males and females. The circles within circles outline the layers of their friendships that begin with the Black Caucus as the largest group. The next level constitutes the "Sisterhood" luncheons started by Dr. B to bring black women together. A third layer is the sorority (three of the six belong to a black women's sorority). The fourth level of intimacy is the mentor group, a campus group of professional, black women friends and last, a "core group" of five women who comprise the Valley Women. The Valley Women do not have a name for the latter group although they all acknowledge its existence and membership. "We've kind of just helped each other in this environment—hostile environment for African American women. We confirm each other."

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Membership and group identity. I questioned various members at length about the dyads and triads of the core group. The relationships are very interwoven and complicated to follow. Most of the divisions depend upon activity and interest of the core group members. If it is shopping, Dr. C and Dr. B are sure to be involved. If the activity is eating at someone's house, it is probably everyone. If it is going away for a weekend, then it is probably not the married members. More important by far (than who was a member of which dyad) were two facts: Dr. B and Dr. J are members of all the dyads. Each of them claimed the other for the role of "pivot person" or leader. They are the ones who get everyone together for activities (more often spur-of-the-moment for Dr. J versus Dr. B's preference for hosting large preplanned gatherings). They are also the two members with the most longevity, meeting and becoming friends while in their graduate programs at the university. The other members joined after an interesting process of evaluation of the "spirit" that I will discuss later. The concept of a loose federation of women, offered by Dr. B, stems from the flowing nature of the interactions in this core group. They are not officially together often, however, they see one another frequently at university events, black caucus meetings, sorority meetings, church meetings, and other official programs to which their professional interests take them. Several members commented on the unique quality of their group construction by emphasizing that they were there for one another at absolutely any time day or night if need be. They sometimes talk by telephone, often by email, or in "sidebars" at the university events they attend. When they come together as a group it is because a member needs to have them do so. Otherwise, they are much too busy serving as minority representatives on campus committees, teaching, meeting with students, and conducting the myriad of other administrative duties that their positions require.

Members seem to have no jealousy if some of the friends spend more time together than others ("we don't have time to play that [game]"), and no need to monopolize one another's time or claim exclusive relationships. They give each other unique space in their togetherness without seeming to sacrifice intimacy. "I think the neat thing about this friendship group is that we are all individuals. We're a group but at the same time we're individuals and we respect that about each other."

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"How do you know when you find someone whom you might ask to join your group"? I asked. The women admitted to a subtle selection process that involves assessing the "spirit, the feel" of a potential member. I asked Dr. J to tell me more about the feeling of "spirit."

> When I said there is a spirit, I meant that there's a sense you get of a person and you can, I can, you can get a sense of whether you would want to know them or if who they are or what they represent is something that you would want to be associated or affiliated with. So it's not necessarily religious but is this essence— a goodness of heart, a kindness, someone who contributes to…I guess you have to deal with so much crap outside that having that little comfort zone, you don't need animosity and dissension there because you have that for support for any time that that might be disrupted. Some are more vocal about it than others and I'm probably one of the vocal ones. Dr. B. is a lot more tolerant than I am (laughs).

I found these interviews some of the most challenging and fascinating of any I conducted for this project. The friendship network in which the Valley Women are involved consists of circles within circles and layer upon layer of relationships. One of the members said that they were not really a group—that they were a "loose federation of women." This is true. However, after interviewing all six women and beginning to peel back layers, the foundation revealed an amazing core group of five women who define their friendships on their own terms. What, initially, seemed like a pattern unique to this group led me to identify similar dynamics occurring in the groups I had previously interviewed.

Even the core group of the Valley Women is unique in terms of the other groups interviewed for this project. Although constructed of more dyads and triads than most of the other groups, members seem to weave seamlessly from level to level in their friendship affiliations. Dr. B tried to explain the difference between the different groups in this way:

> The first tier (core) group I get more support from them. I get more nurturing. I get more advice and counseling from them. Encouragement, comfort from them. The second tier (mentor) group I provide more support, more nurturing. And so that group leans on me; this group I lean on. It's a difference; it's a major

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difference.

To Dr. D one of the most important things about being a member of the Valley Women is that they are there, day or night, should she need them. In fact, other members indicated that this group was at its very best when facing a crisis with one member or another.

Dr. D describes her experience with the group support:

> Being able to pick up the phone in the middle of the night, "hey, I have this really
> bad problem and I'm not sure what to do with it." And giving them all the facts
> and they being able to say—if they want to, say to me honestly and frankly—"get
> a grip; get a life." And I don't become insulted or I'm not offended. Those kinds
> of things. Lots of support. Honesty. Lots of honesty—painful honesty.

Dr. D goes on to talk about the kind of tough love she has heard exchanged between members of this group.

> [It's] more than get a grip: Things like, "You really need to stop doing this." Or
> things like, "This is what I heard and this is what's out there and this is how you
> ought to handle it." Things like, "you need to sit down and listen to what I'm
> saying. I don't want you to say anything—just listen to what I'm saying and then
> you do what you want with it." And then to follow all that up, not being judged
> after you go through that painful piece if you don't do what they say to.
> And I think of something else that's very painful I think is the honesty with which
> these women approach me, and the ability for us to question each other on things
> we may have done that maybe weren't appropriate or that may have caused
> pain….and then even when things go really bad, and things that may have to be
> fundamentally related to trust, you can put that bond back together after you talk
> about it. And you can shed tears for each other, with each other, and be OK. It is.
> It is.

This kind of confrontive unconditional acceptance and positive regard from friends known, deeply trusted, and given in one's best interests is extremely rare. That profile fits only one other friendship group in this study, the Sandpipers. In both cases, the women in their

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friendship groups are unique entities on their campuses and maintain themselves with a loose organization, maintain a trusted support system, use humor as a mode of expression, and are able to handle conflict openly. Additionally both groups also provide significant instrumental support for one another without a second thought.

>It's like one of the things I always say to people, I know that these women have my back—if the chips are down, say you've got my back, you've got me covered. That's the one thing that I always say about [them]. You know, they will tear me to shreds—one to one—but I know that when they're away from me that they definitely have my back.

Through crisis, this group has been tested and strengthened because they met adversity head on. A crisis of trust in the group made them come together even more closely in the year before the interviews for this study. Although none of the members would acknowledge the reason for the crisis, several repeated that they felt a strengthened friendship because of what they had proven they meant to one another. I asked how they show appreciation differently because of their recent experience. They told me that they have called more often recently to specifically thank one another for their friendship.

Communicating. The Valley Women might not see one another frequently but they consider essential the ability to trust one another and the talking they do together. As black women they agree that they are much more independent but also more vocal about the actions and activities of other members than they find typical in groups of Caucasian friends. Members of this group had participated in an intra-campus race discussion group with White women just before our interviews. Dr. D describes their group talk in this way:

>We talk about shoes, money, the state of society, racism—I was going to say feminism but we talk about feminism in the context of racism. Who's sick at home. How's your mom doing. Those peaches you brought me were really good. What my mate or my spouse or my significant other did to really tick me off….We were talking in the mixed group—the race group one day, and one of the things we talked about, the black women were saying that once you've

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developed this kind of relationship—the kind we have—that it's like family and there's no bounds. What is a problem for me then becomes your problem if I should choose to share it with you. And I think that's pretty much—probably stuff we wouldn't even talk to family about, we talk to each other about. For different reasons. Sometimes the reason is that family won't understand. Sometimes you don't want to burden family. Sometimes you just don't want to deal with family on a particular issue…[The white group was] really surprised when we talked about the kind of friendships we had. And I think the example that Dr. J used was, "If I called Dr. D today and asked for $1,000, she'd help me get it and there wouldn't be any question."…and how we talked about how we had all been in each other's homes and how we had shared meals together—things like that. The White women in the group were very surprised at all of those things. They talked about there being boundaries for do's and don'ts with friendships.

The ability to treat one other like family, to be straight with one another, to have expectations of one another and to voice them sums up the unique quality of this friendship group. Even when there is a need for confrontation, this group does not hold back. There are rules, however. According to Dr. B, the cardinal rule is never to "double-team" one another. The friends confront behavior privately on a one-to-one basis.

When we get to a point when we need to confront each other; we have learned to listen to each other. And we know each other's weaknesses or Achilles heel. Because some of us don't take it as well as others, but we deal with it…you get someone who needs support for a while; they do that too. We give them that time. We tease a lot but we get—when we all get together, we tease a lot….We never do it like the kids use the term "double team." We never double up on someone, so usually if someone needs to talk with someone we do it one-on-one. And we don't talk about each other behind each other's back. We usually will, if we're concerned about someone, we may say "Hmm, I'm concerned," but we don't plot,

so everyone is one kind of [on an] equal footing.

Palmer (1987) describes community as a place where conflict is an integral part of the interaction process, not just a place where everyone always gets along. Open rather than hidden conflict becomes a natural part of communion and interaction with others when offered in an honest, and respectful way. I was curious about the confrontation style used in the group and questioned one of the members about its relationship to ethnicity. Ms. K considered my question for a while before replying that although it is a style perhaps more predominant in black culture, in her experience it is not typical of all black cultural units. This open style makes the Valley Women a very strong "loose federation of women" in an otherwise alien community.

Conclusion

This chapter has been devoted to a description of each of the seven friendship groups participating in this phenomenological case study. In this chapter, I have introduced the members of each group and attempted to describe my impressions of each campus environment as I saw or heard about it when I conducted personal interviews. I have also tried to describe as fully as possible the factors in that environment that influenced group formation and later life. Additionally, I have traced patterns of interaction between individual needs of members and the campus environment that brought them together and in which they worked.

Friendship groups in this study represented a cross section of public and private, 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities throughout the country. Members of groups had attained educational levels ranging from associate to the doctorate degree. The stories of each of the participating groups were significant in their own way. The following chapter will provide an analysis of the overall findings based on the theoretical framework provided by Adams and Blieszner (1994).

Chapter 5: Findings

During this study, I was able to interview 36 women members of seven informal friendship groups. They worked at small and large college campuses throughout the Mid-Atlantic, South, Southwest, and Mid-West. These 36 women graciously helped me arrange appointments and provided me with background information. Several of their groups allowed me to journey to meet them on their own campuses, provided directions to their worksites, invited me to share lunch with their friendship groups, and gave me time during their workday. Those with whom I was unable to visit in person arranged access for me to conduct interviews by telephone—often for as long as two hours during their precious day or evening time. As we emailed back and forth setting up appointments, I felt that I was coming to know a little about the participants as individuals. I began to construct identities for these women through the information on their data sheets and voices on the telephone, to imagine and wonder what they really looked and acted like. By the time of the actual interviews, it was relatively easy for me to feel comfortable with them and, I think, for them with me.

I interviewed women in hotel rooms at conferences, in restaurants, in their campus offices, at my campus office, and via telephone in their homes. I conducted interviews over lunch, dessert, coffee, and breakfast. The oddest interview I conducted was in the mezzanine of a large Chicago Loop hotel at 7:30 in the morning. We shouted to hear one another while a player piano loudly banged out show tunes in the lobby below. One of the nicest interviews was with a member of the Valley Women over great steaming cups of cappuccino at a local coffee bar. As soon as I met her, I knew instantly she was a woman with whom I was going to have an enjoyable conversation. The biggest disappointment around an interview came after the final interview of the Merry Moms. In my last interview, I met with a wonderful, articulate woman who was the leader of that group. She shared a great many insights during the last hour of a two-day interview trip. Miles away on the return trip, I realized that the tape had not recorded any of the interview. All I had left of that wonderful interview was my field notes.

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Overall, the participants shared far more of themselves and their perceptions of others in their groups than I had dreamed possible. Perhaps it was due to their curiosity that I would make so much effort to find and discover their stories or in their interest in the existence of other women's groups. In truth, however, most of the women welcomed an opportunity to share what had become an important lifeline. It was through this introduction that I began to gain insights into what really made women's friendship groups a living entity for the women within them.

The women in my friendship groups patiently answered my questions with more candor than I, or probably any of them, expected. This surprised me, too, for although I was prepared for reticence and formality, the majority of the participants were extremely comfortable, even eager, to talk about their experience of being in a friendship group. Clearly, for some it was the first time they had stopped to think about the group in any abstract way.

In the following pages, I will weave findings from the data into the framework set by my research questions and describe the findings of the study in relation to the effect of academic context on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes that take place in women's friendship groups while they are engaged in the formation, maintenance, or dissolution phases of group development. The strength of the influence of academic context on the processes and phases of friendship groups was unanticipated. Its prominence suggested that it should become the lens through which all findings in this study were viewed. I will comment on these findings in light of current literature and theory as I outline the overarching themes (major findings) identified through this study. Table 3 describes the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes identified in this study.

In order to address the findings of this study in a logical way, I made an adjustment in the format of the research questions for purposes of writing the results of this study. In their original form, support was a separate question. However, as it became very apparent during the collection of data for the study that support is a function of behavior, my dissertation co-chairs recommended that I include the aspect of support with the other behavioral processes identified for participating groups. This done, the research questions around which this chapter is organized are as follows:

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Table 3

Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Processes of Friendship Groups

Friendship Interaction Processes	Expressions of Processes
Cognitive	1. Criteria for group membership 2. Perceptions of identity and membership 3. Creating identity through stories 4. Perceptions of individual members 5. The meaning of trust
Affective	1. Feelings of sisterhood 2. Feelings of loyalty 3. Feelings of comfort
Behavioral	1. Taking risks 2. Providing and receiving support 3. Enacting a role in the group 4. Communicating

1. In general, what interaction processes (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) occur within informal friendship groups of women in higher education?
2. Specifically with respect to behavioral processes, how do informal friendship groups provide support for women in higher education? What types of support do they offer? What are the consequences of such support?
3. How do informal friendship groups move through phases of development (formation, maintenance, and dissolution)?

All aspects of the original research questions are fully addressed in this chapter and finally in Chapter 6; only the order has been revised.

Cognitive Processes

The cognitive, as well as affective and behavioral processes, occur within the framework created by the phases of group formation, maintenance, and dissolution discussed later in this chapter. Cognitive processes in friendship develop around constructions friends have of the quality of their friendships with others, how they think of themselves as a friend, or what is going on inside the friendship.

Five overall themes depicting cognitive processes emerged from the data:
1. Criteria for group membership.
2. Perceptions of identity and membership.
3. Creating identity through stories.
4. Perceptions of individual members.
5. The meaning of trust.

Criteria for Group Membership

This theme describes the selection process groups used to choose members, and

determined who would be a member based on criteria of fit, group size, and need. It also addresses circumstances in which members mistakenly issued invitations not acceptable to the group.

Friendship quotient. Friendship groups operate under membership constraints similar to all small process groups. Counseling and interpersonal communication research on small group process shows that groups no larger than seven to eight persons generally allow the highest level of interaction and group cohesiveness. Larger size groups or networks configure themselves from many active dyads or clusters (Adams & Blieszner, 1994). This is also true for the women's friendship groups in this study, which contained a range of four to seven members. Members, who come together at a time when the group is in the formation stage or when it is regenerating itself because some members have left, configure a friendship group. Often, there is an unspoken process of nomination and selection when the group considers new members for addition to the group. Although this is supposedly a democratic process, many women spoke of the role of the perceived group leader as the person who offers invitations to join a group. Frequently, decisions to add new members can also create some dissonance within friendship groups as members consider issues of group history, trust, and involvement as factors for or against inclusion of a new friend.

What is a member? Important concepts to discuss in this portion of the study are group membership, fluidity, and temporary inclusion. Marks (1998) studied friendships in context by examining the Relay Assembly Test Room (RATR) women's group from the Hawthorne studies that took place in the early twentieth century. He contrasts the open and fluid character of inclusive intimacy he identified in this group with the exclusive intimacy of dyadic relationships which rely on purely interpersonal interaction to maintain the friendship. Marks asserted that a key factor of inclusive intimacy is "the tacit notion that the fulfillment of friendship is in the gatherings themselves" (Marks, 1998, p. 43). Many of the friendship groups in this study support this idea of inclusive intimacy with a well-defined group entity and amorphous boundaries that are able to envelope or include additional persons into group activities on occasion. In the Valley Women and Sandpipers, other people flowed constantly in and out of their activities. Group

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structure did not seem to affect the fluidity of group boundaries. Members of a closely structured group such as the Wednesday Club as well as the loosely structured Merry Moms would occasionally include visitors at their lunch meetings. In fact, the only group who chose not to do this is the Best Friends. This group of women held several internal discussions regarding the addition of new members and rejected the idea because of their long tenure together. I found that friendship groups in this study maintained not only the inclusive but also the exclusive intimacies that Marks identified in the Hawthorne studies.

Temporary inclusion does not mean a permanent entrée into group membership, however. This is confusing to some visitors and outsiders who mistake what they see as fluidity to mean that the group is <u>open</u> when it is very bounded indeed. As a member of the First Ladies put it, "We were encouraged to incorporate them [visiting women] into our group by [college] administration people....That didn't feel really good because we didn't want to be exclusive, but we had already had these several years of history together."

<u>Needing or benefiting from the group</u>. An interesting theme developing from the decision to ask a woman to join a friendship group is the discovery of the almost universal evaluation of personal need or benefit as important criteria for membership. Groups in this study open to adding additional members at various times in their history used these qualities as primary criteria for evaluating the person suggested for membership. In addition to obvious questions of liking or other compatibility factors such as background, value system, and lifestyle, friendship groups want to know that the time and effort it will take to acclimate this person into their group will be worth the effort in providing her support in ways that they anticipate she may need. In order to do so, a group discussion may include the following questions: Does the woman have needs that the group can effectively address? Will she benefit from what the group has to offer her? The following excerpt from an interview with one of the Wednesday Club members provides insight into their group's handling of this process:

> when one member is on sabbatical or gone for an extended period, she is not
> "replaced". However, when a "new" woman comes on the scene who we think
> needs such a support group and is compatible with us, she is invited. It's a bit

odd--we actually have a discussion about inviting someone new and seem to have
to come to consensus...but never has someone suggested someone and others
disagreed. That must mean we know ourselves pretty well…

And it didn't come up again for another couple of years until we got a new
[administrator] this summer and his wife is about our same age. We were very
concerned that she be a part of the institution. She's a professional woman who
has always worked and now is not working and we assumed that she would have
tough times and we were correct. One of the members of the group said, "What do
you think about inviting ____"? and we did talk about it and basically, as I think
back, it was, "Does she need us"? And the answer was "yes" and then, "Will it
put any of us in a bad or tense place with other people or with her"? We all knew
her a little bit by then and decided that it was worth the chance that we figured it
would work out and it has.

In this study, the larger groups with a loose structure made up of many dyads contained
members who disagreed about the friendship quotient within their groups. Not every group has
been together long enough to have worked out their "system" for inviting new members. The
Wednesday Club with the invitational system noted above has been in existence for over 14
years. The Merry Moms have been meeting together about three years and are still trying to
establish group norms. Although they are one of the largest groups, have the shortest group
history and maintain certain fluidity about membership, they too have a point beyond which there
is discomfort in considering the addition of new members.

Mistake to invite. A group's ability to meet a perceived need for a new member does not
always override the established history and trust that might be jeopardized with a new addition.
For example, the issue of new members came early and created some dissention within the First
Ladies group:

And the question also arose about new people in the group, so we started having
conflicts about why this group really met, and that's probably maybe why it isn't a
very strong group anymore. It became kind of confusing. Like, after the first year

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a new woman faculty member came and I don't know if it was me, but I sort of

assumed that she could be a part of this and I invited her and stuff, and then I

found out, well, that was maybe a mistake.

Dr. K, a member of the First Ladies, made the previous statement as she recalled how they struggled with membership issues and the press of the campus culture. The statement below is from the Merry Moms, illustrating that although the environment is vastly different for the two groups, the issues remain the same.

K: Had the person already invited them in?

Ms.C: Yes.

K: That made it hard, then what happened?

Ms.C: She didn't come to any more lunches.

K: The person who actually made the invitation?

Ms.C: No, the one who had been invited. And I think she didn't feel like she fit

in either. We were very polite, but I just think since we were there... and it's hard

to fit into a group [as a newcomer]. The history, and the things that we have

together—two years or three years of being together, the experience that you have.

 And I can see both sides of it because there are people I can think of…"Well

she'd really like our group and she could <u>benefit</u> from it. And she gets along well,

and she would really enjoy our group." And I can bring her, but then I think that

if there was somebody else on the other side bringing in somebody—"hey, this is

<u>my</u> group and what are you doing bringing that person"? I can see both sides of it.

Still, groups continue to make decisions about their direction regarding the addition of new members. Several of the Merry Moms expressed ambivalence over membership decisions. They want to be able to offer others what they so value having in their own group. At the same time they question the impact of new members on the trust and cohesiveness they have already come to enjoy.

Well, I've actually done a little bit of both. I've gone ahead and invited some

people because they were people, like I was saying, who were having some

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particular problems--that this is the perfect group to go and discuss it with because we've all been through it. And I knew that all this person would have to do was to go up and say, "This is my last day; I'm not pumping any more." That's all they would have to do and the whole group would just take them in and comfort them and talk about it, and so I knew that they would be more than open to do that. At the same time, I'm back up in the [pump] room and there's a lot of people there. And a lot of people I do, or I don't know yet. And I also feel that this is kind of our special group, you know. And when something gets too big or too extraneous, it kind of loses that specialness. So at the same time, I kind of would like to keep our original group. But I also want to invite some other people in.

Other Merry Moms are emphatically against changing the configuration of the group.

People have already said, "Oh, really? So-and-so wants to bring this person, but I just don't think that's right. We have our group and if they want to form their group, they can have their group." So, it's already been said. Because I think we're already at the same stage and it would be hard for somebody new to come into the group, I think.

Fit. The evaluation of group fit is a cognitive process that encompasses external qualities of the potential new member, the way the group thinks of itself as an entity, and an evaluation of the new member's intrinsic character. In several of the groups, the leader does some of the evaluation as part of a pre-screening process before presenting it to the members or before initiating the invitation as in the following example from the Wednesday Club.

And so there isn't, there's never been very much of a period of, when it took somebody a long time to feel like they fit, to act like they fit. Just, and maybe, that that probably has to do with the way we've invited members in which really has been, if it seemed like someone we wanted in, and it just all seemed to click with everybody, we did. And so, I think the fit is there before we start.

The members of the African American Valley Women group are much more vocal about

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this and every issue. When it comes to adding a member to their "loose federation," they continue to express their opinions with candor.

> Well, some of us may say, "well, if so and so comes back I'm not coming. I don't trust them, I don't like them—I don't like the spirit, the feel--cause most of us are religious too…When I said there is a spirit, I meant that there's a sense you get of a person and you can, I can, you can get a sense of whether you would <u>want</u> to know them or if who they are or what they represent is something that you would want to be associated or affiliated with. So it's not necessarily religious but is this essence—that sounds so terrible, doesn't it?

<u>Group size: A pragmatic view</u>. Here we can contrast the Valley Women's process of evaluation with the next statement by Mrs. J, member of the Southern Stars. When given an opportunity to voice opposition to a potential choice to the whole group, she chose not to express her negative thinking about inviting a new member.

> …some of it is pragmatic. Everybody you add on you just add one more calendaring to the formula. We may find we can <u>never</u> get together and I would be very sorry if we began to play the trade-off of "well, most of us can get together" so we would have to choose...it would almost become like a business meeting..."well, I can get the majority of the committee together so we are just going to have to go ahead and hold it anyway even though we're sorry that the two of you—it doesn't fit." So I'm assuming the more numbers we would add the harder and harder and harder....maybe it kind of dilutes it.

The friendship quotient and decisions that the group makes to offer membership are important in preserving group identity, maintaining solidarity, and building continued group trust. Many of the groups participating in this study are split in their willingness to accept new members and integrate them into the group.

<u>Perceptions of Identity and Membership</u>

The second cognitive process theme found in friendship groups is the perception of group identity or "we-ness" established by groups over time. The women in this study shared a variety

of recollections about what their friendship groups had come to mean to them. Themes emerging from these recollections cluster in three areas of meaning for group members: (a) the ability of the group to act as a "lifeline" in the early years, (b) how the group enabled members to experience close relationships with other women, and (c) the group becoming a place of acceptance, trust and support. Dr. A's metaphor of the group as a lifeline was mirrored by so many of the participants in this study that I decided to use it in the title of this dissertation.

> I guess the only thing I could say is that this group was <u>really</u> important to me my first couple of years here. It was a lifeline that I don't know what I would have done without because I take goodbyes/moves really hard. This move was a really tough one for me and my husband was also very unhappy that first year and so they were my lifeline.

> <u>Discovering women as friends</u>. Curiously, Dr. C, a member of the First Ladies, a group on the wane at the time of my interviews, articulated most clearly the meaning of her group in terms of her exploration of friendships with other women. She talked at length during her interview of never having experienced or valuing friendships with women before her membership in this group—although she had value conflicts within the group. After her interview, I wrote in my notes that, in my opinion, her conflict resulted in a state of emotional "whiplash" (undoubtedly negative to group solidarity) that created an impact on group entity as well as on individual members. In addition, Dr. C seemed to be very insecure in her overall friend relationships—able only to define them through her relationships with men. It is curious that it was she who shared the following thoughts:

> There's something exciting about relating to women, relating to a group of women. That was also like really a first for me, to realize that you can have fun on a Friday night without being with a man, or being with men.

> Being in a friendship group broke new ground for many of the women in this study. Those who had not been in women's groups of one sort or another before commented upon the special quality of their relationship with group members. "This is my first involvement in a supportive women's group. I've been involved in other church groups and modules, and I was

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part of one that was much more shallow. This was much more meaningful, more honest." For others it was the repeat of a continuing life pattern of making meaningful relationships with others, especially women, wherever they went. As women who were instrumental in initiating their friendship groups, Ms. P from the First Ladies, Saint from the Sandpipers, Dr. L from the Best Friends, and Dr. C from the Wednesday Club acknowledged that their groups were not their first nor would they be their last—that in fact they would always seek out and value women friends wherever they might go.

       <u>Acceptance, trust, and support</u>.

       Why is it that I so look forward to that every week? I might be redundant here, but I really do feel like it's a place where I can go and verbalize misgivings about things or talk aloud about things when I am not sure about what the answer is. Where I don't fear and I don't think anybody is going to walk away from the table and say, "Boy, <u>that</u> sounded dumb". People will really give me some good feedback whether it is about professional or whether it is about my kids. Whether it's about personal or professional things, people will just give you an honest answer. And they will laugh…They know the school so well and they know the town so well, they know us so well, they can do that pretty quickly. You don't have to explain a lot. In some ways it is almost like a marriage. 'Cause you get to the point to where you don't have to do a lot of explaining to catch people up. Then heck, they will sit and talk to you. I think that is one of the things that ____ has the hardest time with, she has to explain things and the rest of us can just jump right in with things, say what we need to say in very few words and we don't spend endless hours explaining something because we just know each other so well. There's a comfort level...there's a real feeling of comfortableness just because of length of time.

       Due to the longevity (over 14 years) of the Wednesday Club, Dr. M feels that she can have the complete trust, focus, and comfort of her friends. She also articulates the shared humor within the group, a factor important to the highest functioning groups in this study, and the

difficulty of being patient with a member who does not use the truncated interaction style normalized in the group after many years of group history.

Ms. S from the Sandpipers refers to her group's friendship as support for "working hard just to keep our head[s] above water."

> And I think maybe that's the good thing in our group, we support one another. The things that I'm good at, they encourage me; and the things that they are good at and there's a sense of accomplishment, like even in my case. Saint got her degree. Well, we feel like we helped her to get that degree by being there for her when things were getting hectic. And they have been there for me. And I'm back in school now. So they are constantly reaffirming. You know some friends are jealous when you do things and we don't have that. I guess because we all know that we're working hard just to keep our head[s] above water….that's a good way to put it.

The issue of support given by the friendship group is independent of the type, time, or origin of a group.

> I can pick up the phone and talk to <u>any</u> of them here and tell them exactly what happened. And it's like they're just on your side; they're listening; they'll rant and rave with you about this person, and then you feel better and you get on with your day. And you're fine. And I can't imagine <u>not</u> having them, but I know there's a lot of people who don't. And I think carrying that around with you must be awful. It must be awful to not have somewhere where you can vent it without looking for solutions.

The Sandpipers, who plan an annual beach trip, share an open invitation to others at their school to join them. For them, the beach trip is so central to their experience as friendship group members that at times the reactions of others to their invitations surprises them. They told a story about a woman who said that she would not go if they went to the same place again. Her strong reaction to the place they would be staying astounded the Sandpipers who talked about what the trip means to the group:

You know, the thought about where we were going never entered it for me. It was more important to be with them…As Ms. P put it, she didn't care who went, when the van got ready to pull out, she was going to be on it. I think that's the way the four of us feel.

Another group talked about what their group means in providing support and balance between the intensity of their everyday professional and personal lives. Competition between women in friendship groups in this study is usually not a factor and enables them to share their various perspectives on the workplace environment openly and respond without acrimony. Although some groups meet weekly, many meet only once a month or on a demand basis—whatever their style, the most successful groups acknowledge that when they are together, it is quality time, looked forward to and valued.

What we give to each other is what we give the times we are together. The irony is that we hardly ever see each other between those meetings. We go from these relatively intense evenings, depending on where we are, to hardly seeing each other for the next month. We aren't in the same circles, we aren't in the same building, we don't go to the same churches, we don't shop at the same stores. It is really interesting that we can but then again there are some people who you can do that with.

Creating Identity through Stories

Storytelling is a third cognitive process that offers a way of making meaning from shared reality by sharing group history with new members and outsiders and reinforcing group traditions and culture. The most developed friendship groups in this study were able, like families, to relate story after story about people or events, both positive and negative, woven through the period since the first members began meeting. Even the groups experiencing more traumas have stories about themselves that they shared during our interviews. These stories represent some of a friendship group's most poignant, humorous, or difficult moments. They are essential tools used to communicate group memory and establish group identity.

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Two of the most poignant stories already shared in the case studies are the Sandpipers' story of the death of their friend, Mary, and the Best Friends' story about the death of Dr. L's brother. Here are some stories various groups shared about themselves.

Support stories: Woodbore story. (as told be a member of the First Ladies).
I was getting ready to sell my house and I found out that I had woodbore. I don't know if you know what woodbore is but you have to spray and do these different things. They're not like termites, but they can be; they can do a lot of damage to your structure. And I was concerned about it because I didn't really know how much it was going to cost and if I could afford to do it. And it might have put a stop to the progress of selling my house because I had a contract on it. And the First Ladies got together and made me a card. I can't remember the exact quote on it, but it said something like, "Because you're you, we established a woodbore fund." And they had gone together and put in money, helped me pay to have my woodbore taken care of.…I'd never had that type of support outside of my family from <u>any</u> type of group. And that really meant a lot to me. Not the money as much as just that they would [show] the thoughtfulness. I think that there are those types of things that have kind of bonded us together.

Humorous stories: Queen of the universe. (as told by a member of the Sandpipers).
When Queen came here she had been in a marriage and had just separated from her husband. Queen, in my opinion, is co-dependent in a lot of ways. She's real efficient; she takes care of everything; and she wants to run the world. And we tell her that if she could be queen of the universe and change the world, that would be fine, but she's never going to be queen of the universe. Now she's decided that she would like to be [our]queen of the universe so we had a crown painted on the board for her and we're going to try to get her a T-shirt and [a real] crown so she can be [our]queen of the universe.

Humorous stories: Pile control (as told by a member of the Merry Moms).

I can remember one time we were out to dinner and I was talking about, "What do you do with pile control"? I mean I have piles everywhere. I can't get past this pile. I can't rid of that pile stuck in the box. To heck with the pile! But what do you do at home? [In my job as a systems analyst, I am] bringing home a lot of information. Our husbands are bringing home a lot of information. And I guess I was at a point where it was just getting beyond me. My piles are getting beyond me. It was becoming (not that I made a joke out of it that night), but it was becoming very stressful. Well, Mrs. J., who had the same rubbish said, "So what? So what's wrong with your piles? So what? If you don't look at it for three months, it's probably garbage anyway" ….Well, I laughed so hard it was just—everybody joined in this laugh because everyone knew what I was talking about. The mail comes in fast and you only pay the bills. And the other stuff is kind of like in a pile that says read me on Friday. It's not important for a Monday. But it became such a joke, I had a belly-aching laugh and I realized I had tears down my cheeks. Why am I worried about this? This is ridiculous. This is silly in the whole general scheme of things. So it's kind of having a group help you let go of the things that are just ridiculous in life.

Conflict Stories: A simple life. (as told by a member of the First Ladies).

I have a need to live in simplicity, and I feel like nobody in the First Ladies can relate to that. Like they don't know what I'm talking about. And we went to the beach for a week one summer and we had this discussion about air conditioning. For me, it was a really big issue and they were all like, "We want to understand what you're saying but we don't. We want to listen." [I said]"Why are we turning up the air conditioning and overusing energy, and there are people who don't have the basic needs in life"? And that's kind of my struggle, [some]thing that I think about a lot. And I would say that most of the First Ladies are very materialistic,

and I'm not saying that I'm not, but it seems like a lot of what we talk about, if it's not [our university], it's our houses or our lawns, or what we're doing [house projects] and that kind of thing. And that's not the primary focus of my life at all. And it's been really good for me to grow to love some people who are different than I am, because I used to be very judgmental. Like Ms. P has a big, beautiful house and it's very extravagant and it's all very unnecessary in my opinion. And I would have never been a friend with somebody who had a house like that in the past. But now, I see that friendship is about something else, and you share support and care and love for people, and then you let them be who they are. Like giving up the need to judge has been wonderful for me and it's helped me to become less judgmental of people in general. Sometimes I still feel like these are not my closest friends in life because they don't understand some of my basic values. But, just to know that I can still feel like I really care about a number of the First Ladies even though we're different has really been good for me.

Perceptions of Individual Members

During our interviews, I asked members of each friendship group to describe the other women in their group. I wanted to know how they saw one another, what was unique or different about the women with whom they had chosen to bond. Some of the answers were surprisingly poignant, usually articulate, and often candid. Although the women in friendship groups had often not really chosen one another, their relationships had come to represent something important. This importance was great enough to put up with behaviors that were sometimes wonderful or at other times, selfish.

Ms. S, from the Sandpipers, acknowledged Saint as group leader and commented on the quality of her relationships with others:

Saint means a lot to me. She is, I don't know, she's just a special individual. And I say that with all honesty because she is...I guess you could call her the backbone of the whole entire group.

Another member of the Sandpipers shared her ideas about Ms. P and her helpful role as a

friend.

> I believe that everyone is put into your life for a specific reason. When I came to
> our community college, I fully believed that God gave me Ms. P, because in
> essence she was a fixer. You know, somebody that was a doer. And she helped
> me get through a really difficult time.

Ms. PK of the Merry Moms described one of her group colleagues at length, talking about how much she admired the other woman and her ability to bring anything on any topic to the group. She thought that this was wonderful and wished that she also could learn to be conversationally free enough to bring up witty, scandalous topics for discussion with the aplomb of her colleague. Ms. PK admires her and likes the fact that she can make the group laugh.

Not all of the descriptions of other members are happy ones however. Ms. J of the Southern Stars describes a situation with another woman in her group who she feels is trying to emulate her and put her up on a pedestal. The hero worship of her friend makes Ms. J feel very uncomfortable and she wishes her friend would not do this.

> Ms. S often asks me to be her counseling support, but her manner of raising things
> is this little bit of competition. It's like a competition they've created that I didn't
> know existed. I don't know that it is really there from Ms. S other than I think
> when she is feeling at her lowest about herself she wishes she was me and she
> doesn't have any reason to wish she was me.

The Meaning of Trust

"You can say what you think. Nothing goes outside of there." This statement from Saint of the Sandpipers epitomizes the important role played by trust in the building of a friendship group. It is fair to say that, without the high level of trust shown by members in the groups participating in this study, not one would be in existence today. While friendship groups may ebb and flow in member commitment, interest, and other critical maintenance areas, the concept of absolute trust within the friendship group is bedrock. Trust manifested in friendship groups throughout the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes experienced by women members. Trust was also a major factor in the ability of a group to benefit from "strength through

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confrontation," a phenomenon I found existing in the strongest groups. An example of trust as a cognitive process is explained here by a member of the Sandpipers.

> And I think this is where this bond here is so tight because the trust is there. One thing we always think we can do is solve the problems of the college. And, actually we probably could if they'd just pay attention to us. You know there's a lot of problems that could be resolved if they'd just listen to us. But they're administrators and they think their own ways. But the things that we say, I have known for the last, I don't know how long we've been together, stays right within the group. I've never heard outside. And I'm out, being [in] the job that I'm in, I see everybody. I hear everything—good, bad or indifferent; it doesn't matter. But nothing that we've ever discussed has ever gotten out. That shows me that there's a lot of trust. And we can say a lot of stuff and some of it is not to be repeated. The trust is there and I think it's strong. I think it's very strong. That to me makes that friendship. Trust means anything to me. You know trust [is] everything to me. I guess the two most powerful things that I strive for the most: I like to be trusted; I like to know people know that they can trust in me, and I learn a lot how to respect people in this line of business.

Groups build trust over time. Little by little through an assessment process rarely discussed among members, old members model an unspoken ethic of confidentiality through their actions both inside and outside of group activities.

> And none of that was ever spoken about. No one said that there are rules. It's sort of the unspoken rule.…when you interface with people so much at certain, about certain things, then you find out what goes around, or what doesn't get around, or who knows what. You know who's talking and who's not talking a lot of times. And plus, when you work with them you see their ethics and actions and you know what their values are and things like that. Plus, everybody in that group has to deal with confidentiality based on the nature of our jobs. And so, I never really thought about it. I mean, I just knew in watching and observing, and the

more I interacted increased my level of trust.

Lack of trust. In instances where friendship group members begin to feel a lack of trust due to actions of a group member, an atmosphere is created where the only comfortable conversation is restricted to a few select topics where there is no risk of loss of confidence. For example, Ms. D, a member of the First Ladies, feels a need to restrict the information she shares with the group about her relationships and sexual issues. The culture of the institution in which her group operates has created a restricted atmosphere for women's roles on the campus. Given the group history and external environmental presses, Ms. D's reticence seems well founded.

> Yeah, there are certain things I don't feel safe to share in that group. But there are things that I do share. We've talked about family issues, frustrations on the job that's helpful and relationship issues. Some have felt very safe to share that and talk about where they are and where it's going into the relationship. I tend to be more guarded, to need to feel very safe to take a risk. Some things I've felt are just too private; I didn't know that I trusted the group to hold the confidence, so I have withheld that. And in some reasons that's sort of why I think I've pulled back the last year or so that there are some things that would have been nice to share with the group, but I really didn't trust the [group].

When a new person enters a group, members run an internal trust scan to see if they feel safe sharing at the level of group trust. Unfortunately, the scan can sometimes reveal places where the prospect of gaining full trust does not seem possible. Dr. M, as well as another member, acknowledged during our interviews "just a little bit of regret" at feeling uncomfortable about the presence of a new member in the Wednesday Club. "It is not the same trust and the same feeling of going there and absolutely knowing that what you say is okay and private and confidential. There's just that little bit of regret." The Wednesday Club, unlike the Valley Women, is not a group where members feel it appropriate to bring this lack of confidence out in the open. In a similar situation, Ms. J of the Southern Stars spoke about a situation in which she feels anxious about a new member invited to join their group. "I can trust all the others but I don't know that I can trust her. So if she enters the group there will be a new dynamic."

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Dr. D of the Valley Women summed up her reliance on absolute group trust quite articulately in saying, "It's like of like one of the things I always say to people, I know that these women have my back—if the chips are down, say you've got my back."

Confrontation strengthens group. It takes even greater time and energy to rebuild a trust that has been jeopardized. For the seven groups in this study, none faced a situation where a breech of trust has broken the group. However, the Valleys Girls did face a crisis of trust in the previous year. Several months before the interviews, there was a crisis within the group due to a possible breech of trust by a member. The Valley Women possess an open interaction style. When it comes to group communication—they don't mince words. Although members declined to share the focal point of the crisis, they acknowledged that they were committed as a group to confronting the person responsible, finding out what actually occurred, and moving to corrective action because:

> We care so much for this person and I think that you didn't want to believe the
> situation. We care so much for each other and for the person, you want to believe.
> You want to keep the person and help them and want them to stay a part of the
> group.

In spite of this, Dr. J acknowledged that not only has this incident been difficult for the group, it has also brought them closer together. They have faced and conquered adversity.

> There is a very high level of trust. Because we talk about our personal lives, our
> families, our faith, our loves, our dislikes, our pain—you are baring yourself and
> you make yourself vulnerable. And you know, you can't do that with a lot of
> people.

Positive confrontation strengthens the entity of the group and solidifies trust between members.

Group membership and non-confrontation. Two members of the First Ladies offered insight into interactions of their group by describing dyadic friendships and the workings of their group process. In both interviews, the women commented on the withdrawal of Ms. D from a full participating member to a role of lesser involvement. Both friends felt sad that this had occurred but also felt at a loss to do something to bring Ms. D back into the group. No one

actually approached Ms. D in a group session and offered her a way to discuss her withdrawal and so they let her slip further and further away. In doing so, the First Ladies maintained a non-confrontive interaction style consistent with the culture of the community in which the group exists.

> What happens in groups of friends with big numbers like that, is that people form not really subgroups, but you end up becoming closer to a few people within that group and then spending a lot more time with one or two people outside of your whole group activities. And so I think that's part of what was going on. Dr. M and I became very close. Ms. P and I are close. Ms. P and and Ms. K became close. Ms. D, who you're going to talk to, has intrigued all of us because she seems to have a need to have some source of support outside of our group. And so, she has a close friend that she lives with now. And for a while she wouldn't come to anything that we planned, or we would tell her to bring [her friend] and she almost never did. So there's something in Ms. D that needs more than the First Ladies. And there have been hard feelings at different times between different people because of some of the dynamics going in the relationships. In the case of Ms. D, I think some of us just felt maybe rejected or wondered why she didn't need us anymore. And for me, she had been one of the people—I guess Dr. M and Ms. D and Ms. P are the people that I talk to the most, but Ms. D would come over to my house every couple of weeks, just for a short talk or an evening together just the two of us and then all of a sudden, that was never happening any more. So, I think a number of us wondered why Ms. D had changed. Ms. P and I, I think, both tried to talk to her. I think Ms. P and I are more, maybe intense, and need to analyze everything. And some of the others don't. I don't think Ms. D. ever really wanted to tell us exactly what was going on. So I came to the place where I accepted that Ms. D wanted other friends and that's fine. There's nothing wrong with that and that I'm not going to be as close to her as I was at one time. I'm not going to spend as much time with her, but it doesn't

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mean that the friendship is over. I mean, she came on Sunday night and we had a good time. We're not her primary group any more, because she has that in another person.

One of the most explosive trouble spots regarding a single member in any of the friendship groups in this study occurred with Dr. E, a member of the Wednesday Club. Several members commented on the difficulty they had in being around her at lunch meetings but saw it as something they must do in order to support her in a time of great need. None of the members of this group talked to Dr. E directly about the group's reaction to her behavior. The non-confrontational culture of this group resulted in increased difficulty with Dr. E's presence in the group and contributed to her eventual withdrawal after the interviews for this project were complete. Below Dr. A gives her view of the situation.

> One of the members of the group drives the rest of us crazy. We all know that she needs us and we all put up with whatever she brings to the table...we just put up with it! She doesn't come as often as the other four of us do and so it is not a big deal. When she was on leave, I noticed that the rest of us, every now and then, talked about how nice it was to not have her there.

Another group member added:

> Her husband is very ill and just a lot of problems in her life right now. I think if people are really honest, people have the hardest time dealing with [her]. She needs such tremendous support that it would be easy to let her dominate every lunch if we didn't work at getting her to listen better and not just dominate with her talking.

The "leader" of the Wednesday Club provided her view of another member of the group, an administrator. In reading her statement, it will be appropriate to remember that the leader is a woman scientist who has often been the lone female in her professional area of study and academic department. During her interview, she stated that she herself rarely doubts her own ability and tends to forge ahead to meet new situations. The behavior presented by her friend is quite the opposite.

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She is one of the newer members. I suppose she's been here quite a while now. I don't know, she seems to me to be more—how would I say this?—needing more support than many of us in terms of self-confidence, I think. Just not, it seems to me anyway, that she's just not as self-confident as I think a person in her position would be. And I think it is sort of a typical woman issue. That's my instinct, she just doesn't have the nerve to do it, or whatever. And I've never had that problem, so it shocks me to see that in other people.

A difference in the confrontational style of various friendship groups emerged clearly from the participant data in this study. The Valley Women and the Sandpipers maintained a very outspoken and highly confrontational interaction style while the Wednesday Club, Southern Stars, and First Ladies did not. The Merry Moms and Best Friends chose a moderated style somewhere in between. Clearly, the difference in confrontation style is not solely attributable to ethnicity because the groups utilizing the most confrontational group interaction patterns are of different cultural backgrounds. However, a participant in the Valley Women acknowledged their use of this interaction style as a cultural effect of black women. Ting-Tomey (1984) identified a cultural difference in confrontational patterns of black and white females dealing with relationship conflicts. She found that black females tended to use slightly more confrontational interaction styles than white females who used more solution oriented strategies.

Dr. C of the Wednesday Club and Ms. P of the First Ladies identified cultural patterns affecting the confrontation styles used by their groups as stemming from the regional mores of their geographic location and the cultural mores of the religious groups with whom the colleges are affiliated. I would like to suggest that further studies to identify and isolate affects of ethnicity and cultural impact on friendship will be of benefit in exploring this area.

Summary

This section has discussed the way women in friendship groups think about the friendship group and their women friends. Major findings for cognitive processes include the initial attractiveness of groups as a lifeline for newcomers to a university or college setting, how groups decide to offer membership and decide that a potential member may need or benefit from being

in the group, and the effect of group size on group solidarity and trust. Trust is a large factor in the way women members think about their friendship group experience. The actions of current members as well as the inclusion of new members can affect trust levels within a friendship group.

Women in friendship groups in this study are affected by their ethnic/religious and geographic environments in the way they think about dealing with negative events within their groups. The ability to confront each other affects the level of trust and solidarity achieved by a group.

<div align="center">Affective Processes</div>

Women participating in friendship groups in this study have strong feelings about their friends and what their friendship group means to them. These feelings or affective values cluster around three major categories that emerged from the data. Questions that these themes explore are:

1. Feelings of sisterhood.
2. Feelings of loyalty.
3. Feelings of comfort.

Feelings of Sisterhood

Feelings of familial connection shared between members of a friendship group are common in this study. Participants often identify ways that their groups feel like family relationships or to be more exact, like "sisters." Becker (1991) describes the closeness of what she refers to as friendship families in her phenomenological work on close relationships. In some cases, women without a biological sister ascribe feelings to their friend relationships that they would hope to experience with a real-life sister. Valley Women member, Dr. D says, "to me they are like full sisters…so my friendship was kind of the sisters that I didn't have." In most cases, groups with greater longevity, (e.g., Best Friends and Valley Women) have closer feelings of sisterhood and family. However, members of the Wednesday Club, one of the longest-lived groups interviewed for the study, seem to make little claim to sisterhood. Perhaps this is because their strongest focus tends to be on professional and workplace issues rather than personal issues.

Some of the positive feelings of women participants toward one another in this study are elasticity, acceptance, stability, and support (Becker, 1991, pp. 178-179; see also Lindsay, 1981, pp. 113-115 and Rubin, 1985, p. 18). These feelings are also a reflection of the feelings of trust group members have in the longevity and depth of their relationships over time—"it's like family and there's no bounds." In traditional families, family members may not like or approve of certain behaviors or personality quirks of other members, but the fact that they are connected to one another for the long term gives them a special safety net for making demands on one another. Becker (1991, p. 178) says that similar feelings are created in friendship families and calls this "reciprocal generosity." The Valley Women's, Dr. D, spoke strongly about the trust she feels from her group of friends.

> And then even when things go really bad, and things that may have to be
> fundamentally related to trust, you can put that bond back together after you talk
> about it. And you can shed tears for each other, with each other, and be okay. It
> is. It is.

Feelings of Loyalty

A second characteristic displayed among the women in the friendship groups of this study are feelings of loyalty to the group as well as toward other members. A key component under-girding the structure of a friendship group is the feeling of loyalty. Yalom cites group loyalty as a primary component of group cohesion (Yalom, 1985, p. 66). The groups and the members must mean enough to each other that they are willing to bear the discomfort of working through a conflict. Cohesive groups are, in a sense, like families who may experience internecine warfare but nonetheless, maintain a powerful sense of loyalty.

There are two kinds of loyalty felt by members of friendship groups participating in this study. First, there is loyalty to other members of the friendship group who maintain confidentiality, care, protect, and support one another. Second, there is the feeling of loyalty to the group. It is difficult to sort out where member loyalty ends and group loyalty begins as they intertwine within the process of developing group solidarity.

Friendship group members repeatedly talk about "that connection and that history" members have developed with one another over time. It is important to remember that in many instances these women have spent years together. Even the newest friendship group in this study is over two years old and some of the groups have been together over 14 years. I would assert that in today's world, these group friendships may be among the longest continuing professional, non-kin relationships a woman has experienced with another person, let alone other group of women, at any other time in her life since college. The academic lifestyle is one of mobility as faculty and administrators move up within the academy. Such geographic diversity creates the opportunity for friendships across the world but also the problem of stress and isolation to establish new relationships with each move (Hersi, 1993). Creating friendships as support systems for distant family or creating "fictive kin" in a new post is well documented in the literature (e.g., Allan, 1998; Becker, 1991; Lindsay, 1981).

A few women in this study admitted that they remain in friendship groups long after having personally outgrown the need for them. They stay out of loyalty to their friends and for what their connections to group history mean to them. The Sandpipers go even farther by trying to maintain the group memory of a member who died of cancer…"we go out there sometimes and visit her grave and that type of thing, just so she's not left out of the group." Another friendship group member from the Best Friends talked about how "it's been nice to celebrate rites of passage with each other" over their years of being together.

> So I think it's significant that four people are equally willing to make that effort to make it happen. It's not like I'm meeting somebody else who's calling and it's not like our lives are so empty that we have nothing else to do. There are plenty of things demanding on our lives, all of our lives for different reasons.

Another member, Dr. S, agreed about feelings of importance and commitment the Best Friends place on the group:

> Well, I just think it fills a need for something important for us. I think we have a chance to support and a chance to share. I think it is a real high priority. Part of that I touched on earlier, we realize that sometimes you can't make it but most of

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the time the four of us make it even if you have a meeting and you only come by
and get a drink and don't eat or you come by after everybody has eaten. [There is]
just a real commitment to it.

Feelings of Comfort

Comfort or lack of it is shown in friendship groups through the positive and
negative feelings of group members toward one another noted through a sort of barometer
of feelings by which members gauge their closeness to one another. Feelings of comfort
have a direct relationship to group solidarity and quality.

Unconditional positive regard: Mutual values and respect. A hallmark of the friendship
groups in this study is a phenomenon I describe as unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1980),
a feeling of supportive, non-judgmental, and value-free sharing. Members of the most effective
of the groups in this study demonstrated an unconditional positive regard for other group
members most of the time.

that's probably a key thing in the group everybody is allowed to be
themselves….We want each other to be the person they are. And that's what adds
value to the group. I've always known I can count on the love of God and my
mother's love regardless of what I do. They're going to love me. And I would say
I feel that towards the Sandpipers. That regardless of what I do and what happens,
they're going to be there.

A member of another group describes it as a supportive role played by her group.

It's certainly been a supportive role and they can understand your feelings about it,
it's okay to cry or get mad or whatever you need to do in dealing with it. They can
accept it or if you need somebody to help you process it they can do it. If all you
need is for somebody to just to say "it's okay" or give you a hug or something like
that then you can [get it].

Either way, the phenomenon of unconditional positive regard creates a protected, special
place for group members to try out new behaviors such as expressing anger, or showing

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vulnerability. Clearly, the mutuality of members' relationships enhances the phenomenon through a base of mutual values and respect.

> I'm proud of all of us and what we have achieved and so to me, these are women that I respect a great deal. In addition to loving them on just a very sister level, I respect them.

A member of the Valley Women says, "We don't abuse each other's friendships; we have respect. We know what kinds of things are important to each other so we try to be mindful of those things."

Having mutual values does not mean, however, that women in friendship groups think alike. As noted in the quotation below from a member of the Sandpipers, there is definitely space in their togetherness—space for independent thought and action with the common value of positive regard.

> I guess our viewpoints on moral issues, ethics—all those kinds of things, sometimes are different, but we can voice those and have a freedom to voice them, and with a confidence that the relationship is not going to be damaged. I think we have a mutual respect for what each person contributes to the division. I think we probably admire qualities in each other that we wish we each had or had more of or it is hard to explain—we just like being together.

Some groups are not able to extend positive regard on a consistent basis for all members. For example, the First Ladies experienced problems in supporting a member who had very different values from the rest of the group. They acknowledge trying hard to understand Dr. C's values and allow space for them. However, for Dr. C it was not enough that others provided her space within the group. She felt that they should see the world through her eyes and accept her values as their own. This they were unable to do—a fact that created tension within the group.

Closeness. The effect of shared positive regard, mutual values, and mutual respect in friendship groups is to create feelings of closeness that bind women together, which in turn leads to creating a group entity.

> It's just that we came together and we realized that we liked one another, and that

what we are together—I compare to what I find in the theater with an ensemble.

You're greater than you are independently. And there's something about the group

dynamic that makes us expressive and creative and caring and nurturing.

Whether the members are new to the group or the group has experienced trauma, members draw close together as feelings of solidarity increase. "They were just so warm and supportive and caring—reached out. And they kind of looked out for me and took me under their wing." Feelings of group solidarity increased significantly for the Sandpipers after the death of one of their members from cancer.

When Mary died it was just like we just kind of went this way, you know. And

just tightly drew together and it's been like that ever since. I've been so close to

them that if I were to lose them, it would about kill me. It would hurt me like I'd

lose my baby sister.

Women also described the difference in a relationship with a significant other and the closeness of the special relationships they feel with their women friends in their friendship group.

there's a different type of friendship I can share with other women. And I've had

to come to some terms with that, because my husband is absolutely my best

friend, but there's some things that as a man, and as good a guy as he is, he just

doesn't quite get it.

Appreciation and valuing of friendship. Factors of unconditional positive regard, mutual respect, mutual values, and feelings of closeness interact to contribute to deep feelings of appreciation from members for the opportunity to be in a friendship group and for each of the members. Even the First Ladies Dr. C acknowledges that she has learned to be more accepting of others' differences through her group experience. Overall, members of friendship groups value the opportunity to come together. They express those feelings by taking time away from busy personal and professional schedules to meet together and share themselves with their friends. They do it because they are able to experience reciprocity within the group relationship some, if not all, of the time. The giving and receiving in their relationships allow personal

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growth and support in a known environment. They can mentor, nurture, learn, laugh, and cry with their friends.

Members of friendship groups are very aware of what they would miss if they were not in a friendship group. All around they see other women who do not have such a support group and watch the toll it takes. Even close family members cannot be as understanding as a friend in certain situations.

> My sister can call me on the phone and we can talk for hours and hours, and I can
> bitch about the department chair or whatever. She can be very supportive and all
> that but it's not the same kind of support I can get from the BFs. I can say, "I just
> got the letter that says that I did not get promoted." They know what that feels
> like and my sister doesn't. She can relate as my sister but not...[as a colleague].
> One of the advantages of this group is for me personally is like with police
> officers, it's a group of people who know what I am talking about and see it from
> the inside perspective and not just from the outside. "Oh, well, that's too bad and
> maybe next time you'll do better."

Discomfort. Discomfort in friendship groups centers on members' jealousy and hurt feelings as well as general feelings of uneasiness with the quality of group interaction and lack of ability to confront negative behaviors. Several groups experienced bouts of jealousy between members. "There's a lot of jealousy. At least I experienced it from my end…There was a point in time, where I didn't really speak with one of them for a while." The most prominent jealousies stemmed from the actions of First Ladies member Ms. K, the speaker above. There was also some discomfort due to jealousy in the Southern Stars. Other feelings of discomfort may begin with the feeling of a broken trust.

> I think a couple of times (this didn't happen to me) but a couple of times some
> people's confidences were broken. Like someone talked to somebody else on a
> one-to-one situation and that person told someone else in the group about it, and
> they didn't want them to.

The statement below by Dr. M of the Wednesday Club indicates a change in group comfort level for her. Here she comments on situations in which previously open lines of communication are now restricted.

> I think it's only fair for me to say to you that I am more careful about what I say now. Part of it is because I know that she has religious beliefs that I don't have and is very willing to speak up about her religious beliefs and I am a person who doesn't express that openly….from my point of view and one of the other members of this group…[it] feels very much the same way...feels very uncomfortable…there is no open hostility. Nothing like that but at least in my mind and in one of the other group member's mind you just know there are things that you are going to disagree about so we just don't talk about them.

Finally, the most frequently mentioned reason for feelings of group discomfort is one that has troubled all but the strongest of the friendship groups in this study. Rather than appear unsupportive, members often choose not to confront negative behaviors. The groups affected by this syndrome are: the Southern Stars, the Wednesday Club, the First Ladies, and Merry Moms. When asked what they might do about it, the answer came back, "I suspect that we all just kind of back off and not go for a while or something [rather] than have any sort of confrontation like that." Another colleague in the same group said, "I think dealing with it has been more indirect and implied. You just can't say it in a group like this."

Negative feelings like those described in the previous paragraphs sow seeds toward the insidious breakdown of the friendship groups in this study. As the effects of these feelings swirl and grow, they decrease unconditional positive regard and mutual respect while also diminishing mutually felt values and closeness. In turn, this may reduce group appreciation and value of the friendship for its members.

> One thing about The First Ladies for me that's been different about other friendships is that in the past I think I tended to become friends with people who are like me. And that's probably natural. In this group, we have similarities, but we have differences too. And so in some areas I have felt really lonely. I am the

only one in this group who had this value...

<u>Summary</u>

Members of friendship groups in this study placed high value on the quality of friendship received within their groups. Although groups in this study may be at different stages in the phases of group development or denouement, members recognize that they are or have been part of a unique phenomenon. Each of the 36 participants of this study acknowledged receiving and valuing a high quality of friendship from their friendship group. This is true of highly functioning groups as well as groups (currently functioning at less cohesive levels) looking back at a time when they experienced stronger group identity.

<div align="center">Behavioral Processes</div>

Behavioral processes in friendship groups involve the activities, talk, and support behaviors in which members of friendship groups engage. I identified group behaviors in four major areas after analyzing the contents of the 36 interviews conducted for this study. These major areas are activities involving risk-taking such as disclosure and confidentiality, personal and professional support activities, behaviors relating to a member's group role, and communication types and modes. Themes related to behavioral processes include:

1. Taking risks.
2. Providing and receiving support.
3. Enacting a role in the group.
4. Communicating.

<u>Taking Risks</u>

In other parts of this chapter, I have described group members' feelings regarding the trust they have in other members as an essential component of a friendship group. Member to member trust is necessary for the formation of group cohesiveness and for members to engage in risk-taking behaviors. One of the risk-taking behaviors in which group members engage is disclosure of very personal issues or information in the form of group talk. However, there are certain criteria for disclosure within groups beyond the factor of trust. First, the environment in

which the group is meeting influences the type and kind of disclosure. Some groups like the Wednesday Club, Best Friends, and sometimes, the Southern Stars, meet in restaurants or other public places. Group members are careful about what they say in such situations and may hold things back until the next time they meet in a more private setting. "Again it also depends on where we are. We tend to try to alternate between restaurants and people's houses and that affects what's said." This is true even of the Wednesday Club meeting regularly in the bar/restaurant setting. Dr. A mentions here:

> It obviously puts a damper on it. I think that there's more caution and I always wonder when voices turn down to mere whispers and we can't hear each other, what other people think we are talking about! (Laughter) I imagine they have their suspicions.

Second, beyond the effect of location there is also the effect of the topic of discussion. Various group members are more comfortable sharing their most intimate thoughts and feelings in dyads rather than with the whole group. A Southern Star puts it this way, "I think it will vary among individuals—between individuals and the level of intimacy. Some things I would share with one or two 'cause I would say each of us—we're not equally intimate with each other."

The third criterion for talk is finding acceptable topics. The usual repertoire for discussion varies from group to group. Some groups tend to center their talk on work issues; others include all types of discussion including marital issues. Whatever their focus, group talk is a time where the primary discourse centers on the friend and her views and feelings on a topic and not on the workplace or family arena that originated it.

Fourth, "strict confidentiality rules!" Confidentiality is the convention of friendship groups and it is rarely broken. "It's just nice to have that support and somewhere you feel like you can just talk and know that whatever you say is confidential and that you're not going to be judged or thought a horrible person."

In the seven groups participating in this study, only one group (First Ladies) had clear instances where confidentiality was broken. Several of the other groups had moments when they lost trust that another member would keep group talk confidential, but confidentiality was not

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actually broken. Even so, in some groups the fact that this convention comes into question begins a subtle process that can undermine group cohesiveness.

Accommodation. Members of friendship groups work very hard at accommodating the individual peculiarities of their members. They provide wide latitude for personal group time, space, and activities. Some groups may choose not to discuss certain topics if they make a member uncomfortable or to engage in activities that the whole group cannot enjoy together. Taboo discussion topics may be politics, religion, or personal marital issues. Allowable talk is also sensitive to members' personal marital status.

> We tend not to talk a lot about our spouses because the other two don't have a
> spouse to talk about and we….just don't do that 'cause we just sort of don't really
> have all that in common. So we just kind of leave that out.

In addition, group members may avoid confronting certain member behaviors by not commenting on them in group conversation as shown in this example below. A member of the First Ladies' had a habit of being insensitive to others by not contributing on an equal level with food or gifts at group events.

> Sometimes if there's a potluck, she'll forget to bring something or we've had gift
> exchanges where we all bought nice things and she obviously brought something
> from home that she didn't want.

Domination of group talk time. As it sometimes happens, there is a problem when a friendship group faces one person's total domination of group energy. Group energy entails taking turns and sharing. One person may receive a lot of group attention and support over an important issue; however, the expectation is that she will also allow others to have their time. Friendship groups seem able to accommodate group domination by an individual for long periods. Women feel that if they give a friend time to get through her issues, she will reassume a mutual role in the group. Unfortunately, this does not always happen. The most difficult example of this occurred in the Wednesday Club when Dr. E required so much of the group's attention that there was definite resentment toward her. In spite of their feelings, the others were not able to confront her. "We are just hanging in there with her" was the way one member put it.

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The cultural context in which this group operates made confrontation inappropriate while it increased feelings of obligation to help a troubled fellow member.

> I guess there has been one issue with one person who just totally dominated everything. And then that was sort of solved itself when she had to quit coming for a while because of scheduling sorts of things, and it's gotten a lot better now that she's back. So, in that case, there was a sort of understanding that she was dealing with a lot of things, that we sort of had to help her through that. If she wasn't there, it was just a lot better sometimes.

Handling negative group behaviors. Friendship groups handle negative behaviors in one of three ways: they find a way around the uncomfortable behavior, ignore the behavior, or directly confront it. The former occurs often, the latter rarely. The previous quotation from the Wednesday Club describes a friendship group choosing to ignore the issue. Behaviors of this kind often lead to concealed resentment among group members. At various times, several other groups in this study (Southern Stars, First Ladies, and Merry Moms) also concealed resentment about domination of time by a single member. The following example describes an effective work-around used by the Sandpipers as a different approach—a loving but confrontive style.

> If she is going over the same problem that we have already discussed 5 million times and she wasn't going to listen to anything anybody had to say anyway, we'll cut her off. We'll just say, "We've talked about this before and we're not going to talk about this again." [And then what happens?] Well, she quits. We make a joke out of it. Everything's funny. But we laugh more together than anybody. [The four of you?] Yeah. We're always laughing and cutting up.

Confrontation. Confrontation of member behaviors by a group is very rare. More often, if any confrontation occurs it takes place outside of the group in a one-to-one situation. J (Southern Stars) confronted L in this way about her constant inquiries regarding her dissertation progress, a sensitive topic for J:

> In fact, for a while, I could hardly be around L because that is all she was thinking about and I was already—like guilt was up to here. Every time I'd see her she'd

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want to talk about her dissertation. I was like, I don't want to talk about the dissertation. I leave you, L, and my stomach is just churning again and I'm miserable for the next two days and I think she has learned, I never confronted her specifically…No, I take that back. One day she was going on and on about things and I said, "I am not working on it and you know I'm not working on it. The reality is when you ask me about it, you are just one more person, you're just like one more level of guilt on me and I can't take it right now. I'm guilty enough for myself, I don't need other people helping me feel even more guilty."…I had forgotten that I had done that...and then we kind of broke for a while, we didn't spend much time talking or seeing each other and now when we have come back together, she really stays off that topic.

Dr. C, of the First Ladies, confronted Ms. K in a similar fashion about her relationship with a male friend. In addition, Ms. D from the same group recalled a one-to-one experience when Ms. P confronted her:

She's very up front. She's so un-[naming their religious sect]. That's what's probably very helpful, because she just says it like it is—how she feels about. So you don't have to question where she's at on something. One time I pissed her off. I was housesitting for her and I had borrowed her car. She has this cute little antique car, the "dreamcycle," she calls it. It's orange and white. And I took it for a ride and I hadn't asked. And she found out about it. It was neat in that she confronted me with it, and how hurt she was. I apologized. I didn't realize it was as big a deal to her as it was. But that was a good process for her to be able to honestly say. We moved on and have OK [relations]. The [religious sect] way would have been to just seethe for a while—just distance your self from the person until it kind of blew over.

When I asked Ms. D what she had learned from the former scenario she said,

I learned a couple of things personally. That's a way to go when you do have conflict—just to tell somebody. And it doesn't end the friendship. It can go on

beyond it. And I learned that our friendship is very important to her. Had it not

been she wouldn't have even spent the energy, she would have just let go. It was

hard; it was painful, but it was helpful.

The latter is an example of using positive confrontation behaviors among group members.

Usually these confrontations do not involve the whole group. However, the very healthiest

groups in this study did have a group style of confrontation that was open, honest, face-to-face,

yet, at the same time loving. Groups presenting positive confrontation styles are the Sandpipers

and the Valley Women. By getting things out in the open within the group setting, these women

take risks, but also show how much they value their friendship by not letting a friend get away

with negative behaviors that would eventually be destructive. As Ms. D pointed out above, it

takes a great deal of invested energy to be a friend loving enough to demand better behavior of a

friend.

Dr J: And it makes the group stronger in one way and it makes you hold back; I

don't know if you'd hold back or not though--I think it has made the group

stronger by going through it.

K: Stronger by being able to work through and still be friends and value each

other and still trust? (Dr. J: and disagree!) So women tend not to confront one

another when there's issues?

Dr J: We do! This is the difference that we found in our group and the group

with the white women. Because we are very confrontational with each other and

somebody coming in could possibly think that we hate each other at some point.

Finally, Ms. K, from the same group, discusses how she equates the freedom to confront

as something that makes her group more like a family.

Ms. K:…So it is family. Because we argue, we do argue and disagree on things

and yet still know that doesn't mean you never want to see that person. That

doesn't mean that person is out of your life just because you have a disagreement

with them, to know that no matter what, that person is still going to be there. And

that is family. And that is how I would define family—is that yeah, you can mess

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up, you can do anything, but that group, that core group is still going to be there.

       <u>Competition among members</u>. Friendship group members did not compete with one another within their groups. Competition was rarely a factor within individual member dyads outside the groups. This simply was not a premise that friendship groups are built around. Women members faced enough of that kind of behavior within the academic culture of their college or university and therefore were specifically not competitive with one another. Their very reason for being was to act supportively toward one another. Only two members of a group, the First Ladies (Prof. K and Prof. C), seemed to have a competitive relationship; other women might have felt more or less close but these feelings did not manifest themselves in competitive acts between the women. In the case of the First Ladies, the members finally left them to figure things out for themselves and eventually the women came to a truce.

<u>Providing and Receiving Support</u>

       <u>Friendship groups as sources of support: Theoretical background</u>. Several key papers provide the background necessary to discuss social support mechanisms for members of women in friendship groups. Kahn and Antonucci (1980) proposed a model for social support through the lifespan that is determined by an interaction between the personality of the individual, the environment, and the individual's need for support due to life circumstance. This paper also related social support to attachment and life roles. The authors posit that an infant's need for attachment to the mother figure translates in later life to relational needs of adults seeking social support to cope with stressful life roles. Life roles are behaviors that involve "opportunities and resources as well as expectations and demands" (Kahn & Antonucci, p. 263). Persons undergoing role stress but receiving adequate social support are able to cope with changes throughout the lifespan through their changing convoy of support. Individuals receive support, provide it to others, or participate in a reciprocal interaction between friends. Social support, according to Kahn and Antonucci, can be particularly important to alleviate stress with work place roles and to deal with life transitions such as moving or divorce. Whatever the stressor, the quality of supportive interaction is seen as more valuable than the frequency of such interaction.

Convoy model for social support. Support is provided by a convoy or personal network within which support is given and received throughout the lifespan. Different people at different times may be part of a person's convoy containing more people at certain life span points than at others. Kahn and Antonucci (1980) also argue that individual quality of life can be determined, in part, by the adequacy of the social support available and the needs of the person and the environment. Finally, Kahn and Antonucci posit that the quality of a person's life in terms of performance and well-being is affected by the properties of the convoy and the quality of support it can provide.

Kahn and Antonucci (1980) assert that support may be considered from three points of view: substantive, spatial, or temporal. Substantive support involves (a) affect (e.g., liking, respect, love, or as I have previously referred to it "unconditional positive regard"), (b) affirmation (e.g., agreement, acknowledgement, and rightness of a person or act, and (c) aid (e.g., instrumental support in the form of household help, money, childcare, providing food, etc.). Spatial views require examination of interpersonal relationships as networks. Temporal quality of the support structure indicates changes in this structure through the life span. The convoy may be described in terms of four concentric circles of relationship. The center core represents the self while the first level is reserved for those with whom one has stable relationships over time (e.g., family or spouse and close friends). Level two depicts relationships that have greater role orientation, that is, they are tied to life or work roles that are deep and important but vulnerable to change. Level three involves relationships that are peripheral to one's life in that they are tied directly to a role relationship and are at the greatest risk to changes in those roles. Movement is expected in and out of the convoy since these circles reflect those persons important to an individual at a certain point in their lifespan. The convoy theory depicts one's individual convoy (each person providing individual support) and therefore does not represent the support provided by a group or network.

Groups as social support networks. Later articles by Felton and Berry (1992) and Felton and Shinn (1992) used Antonucci and Akiyama's (1987) concentric circle technique to identify older adults' convoy of group, rather than individual, social support relationships. This

represented an important distinction from the way researchers had looked at social support in previous studies. The authors wanted to recognize the role that groups play in the support systems of older adults and were aware that previous studies had often disallowed responses referring to groups as providers of support. Felton and Shinn view social networks and social support as systems. "That is, support predictably occurs within and between organized groups, social structures, and informal social systems as well as between individuals within such systems" (Felton & Shinn, 1992, p. 103). In making a case for groups as providers of social support, the authors contend that social support can stem from social integration or by being imbedded in social roles and social contexts.

However, social networks are frequently viewed as individual-level phenomenon resulting in "individual" views of their networks being incomplete or biased, interactions among network members other than the respondent tend to be ignored, membership in groups is reduced to contacts with individuals in them, and the content of social exchanges is often unclear" (Felton & Shinn, p. 107).

To avoid this, Felton and Shinn proposed that social support be expanded to include aspects of social integration. To do so they chose to imbed social support in various types of community: political, by locality or place, and relational. Shinn, Lehmann, and Wong (1984) had earlier described the person-environment interaction between individual demands and environmental support.

Relational communities are the appropriate choice for application to the current study of women's friendship groups. Relational communities are socially cohesive groups with close personal ties and are similar to the emotional support defined by the network or group. Because they are communities, their environment shapes them. Group support is measurable by many of the traditional forms of assessment used to identify individual support when appropriately revised to include group responses.

In summary, several arguments can now be made about social support: (a) it can be shaped by either the individual or the group, (b) it is relational, (c) it changes over time both in

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terms of people involved and quality of support rendered, (d) it is directly related to the environment in which it occurs, and (e) we can measure either group or individual support.

Support in friendship groups. To the women taking part in this study, I asked questions about the support offered by women in informal friendship groups within a higher education setting. Support or supportive actions are a cornerstone of behavioral activity within each group. Group members frequently offer both instrumental and emotional support inside and outside of (personal and professional) group activities. Supportive activities are one of the most highly valued behavioral exchanges occurring between members. Group members offer personal and professional supportive advice, counsel, and physical touching; they offer supportive actions in terms of food, money, work, and information sharing. The provision and reciprocal exchange of support is essential to the life of friendship groups. Desire for support is key to women coming together in friendship groups while desire to provide support or mentoring for others often makes them stay. While groups vary as to the amount of instrumental support provided, all groups provide large-scale emotional support for either personal or professional issues brought to the group. This finding concurs with the work of Stack (1974) and Denton (1990) who found that black professional women offer social companionship, instrumental support, and various types of support for validation and growth as coping mechanisms for environmental, gender, and racial issues.

The Kahn and Antonucci convoy model (1980) is an appropriate overlay to describe the function of professional support in women's informal friendships in this study if applied both as a group and as an individual concept. Women most often come to friendship groups as persons new to academic life in faculty or student affairs administrative roles. They face stressful situations without adequate social support systems in place due to recent geographic moves. The fact of moving itself is an extremely stressful life event not adequately acknowledged in our society (McCollum, 1990).

Lifeline as a function of support. Throughout the many interviews conducted for this study, women consistently talked about the feeling that being in a friendship group was a lifeline for them both professionally and personally. Being in a group got them through stages of

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adjustment to the academic culture and provided a strong personal and professional support system. It gave them a sense of belonging to the academic community in a way that little else seemed to do. Dr. A, for example, used her lifeline to hold on until the next group meeting when she could be with "someone who cared."

The women in this study feel extremely grateful for the support their groups offered to them at vulnerable times in their lives and careers. On this level, it is the group to whom they feel connected as much or more than individual members. They also feel a sense of unspoken obligation to the group for having received something so valuable. This obligation may make them choose to stay in the group after their initial need for support is over because they feel it is important to provide the same kind of support to others coming later to their group. In addition, after months or years of being together, the participants generally feel a high level of comfort and trust in their group relationships. These attitudes toward group support reflect the premise described by Felton and Shinn (1992) that relational groups are an active entity in the social support of group members.

> It was very significant at least for me as a new person and I think for the others
> that there were a lot of single women working here and it was an easy way to
> make friends and feel like I fit in or I belong here.

Although the initial lifeline deals with issues of being new, other lifeline items spiral through the friendship cycle so that a woman can address later issues relating to career, family, or personal relationships as they are experienced. Groups with the longest tenure (e.g., the Wednesday Club, Valley Women, and Best Friends) refer often to this feeling of recycling interest and group support. For example, Dr. A articulated her experience with her group, the Wednesday Club, as one in which she felt her group interest ebb and flow depending on concerns addressed at any particular time. New issues brought by others would renew her flagging interest, rekindling her desire to remain in the group.

Women helping women: Affirmation as support. Group support for individual affirmation and recognition as a person is an important by-product of support within women's

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friendship groups. Groups in this study affirmed their members as they negotiated hostile academic environments as shown in the extreme needs of black women in a white university and single white women who are in the minority within the faculty.

> I'd need a straight jacket without it...because things that happen to you in the environment make you think—people tell you you are over-sensitive, it really isn't happening or you are just seeing it some other kind of way and this group, because they experienced it also, can confirm you as a person. As a woman! It's very important. And see a lot of times, not so much now 'cause I am out of it, but we interacted with the same people in a lot of the same situations so we could get different perspectives not just our own. Each one of us has friends who are outside of the circle who will give us perspective, some white and some [black] so that helps. So that means our network is much broader.

Affective social support, also part of the Antonucci model, provides unconditional positive regard, respect, and love from fellow group members. Frequently this support is provided in conjunction with affirmation as a way of showing care and concern for friends bringing personal or professional issues to the group. Affective support of this kind provides a safety net that plays a large role in friends' on-going commitment to their relational group.

Affirmation and support as a single woman is of particular value to friendship group members. Again, the geographical distance from friends and biological kin pushes group members to seek others with whom they will establish quasi-kin relationships. To search for a personal community within the community of academe acknowledges the attachment and intimacy that women seek within their environments. Researchers on women's identity development (Josselson, 1996; Miller, 1986; & Surry, 1991) posit that an important part of women's identity comes from knowing who they are in relation to others—creating a sense of personal validation. Friendships assist women to gain insight, self-confidence, and develop courage to change and grow, confirming and strengthening their sense of self.

> I think part of it goes back to being a single woman. Just the enjoyment of other women for support for bouncing off ideas of things, somebody that knows you

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well enough that you can say things that might be embarrassing or to just
anybody...you can't talk to your colleagues about, somebody who knows your life
enough and your family enough or whatever that you can say something in the
group without having to do a lot of history.

Affirmation by fellow group members creates a feeling of support for minority women in
a majority white university, for working mothers juggling multiple roles of wife, mother, and
career woman, and for single women in a family oriented academic community. Support may
manifest itself outside of group meetings when women support one another in a show of group
solidarity on public issues in the academy. Such a scenario is described below by a member of
the Wednesday Club:

we all go to faculty meetings. That is one thing we do in common and they are
only once a month but I've noticed that a lot of us tend to sit together at the faculty
meetings and usually agree on whatever has happened or is coming forward. We
usually agree on who we think has made the best case and who didn't. So that is
kind of a unifying kind of thing I have noticed. If one of us has something to
present at this meeting you can pretty well count on the other people to be at least,
outwardly, supportive. If they do disagree they won't speak up, they will just vote
their part and just not comment.

Instrumental support. Some groups in this study provided more instrumental support than
others. Groups providing the highest levels of instrumental support are the Sandpipers, the
Valley Women, and the First Ladies. Whether because of the college environment, religious
community, or because the majority are single women, the First Ladies initially provided most of
their support through work parties.

We all tended to move around a lot from apartments. And then, we bought houses
and stuff. Moving was always a big feature, cleaning people's houses when they
moved and all of that. And that's still an occasion to get together to help
somebody. Ms. P twice has gotten big loads of mulch to save money. She built a
new house and her landscaping is—she's kind of run out of money and so she

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could save so much money if she spread the mulch herself. So [we pitched in]
and wheel-barrowed that stuff around and we have work parties like that.

The Sandpipers (as illustrated in their story about Mary, the friend who later died from cancer) provided huge amounts of instrumental support to friends and group members. They were instrumental in providing health care, food, collecting money for causes, loaning money for beach trips and providing transportation. Offering such acts of kindness illustrates the authenticity that is the essence of the Sandpipers as dedicated community members who are supportive of one another but also of others in the academic community. The Valley Women applied instrumental support in other ways: By being there for members, providing food, career coaching, help in the middle of the night, and if asked, money. According to Dr. D, she had no doubt that if she needed a thousand dollars, this group would get it for her. While they did not provide for the larger, non-African American community, they did take other blacks under their wings to support them in the transition to campus life. Exchanges of babysitting and help with entertaining were common among members of the Southern Stars while the Merry Moms depended upon one another for advice on medical and infant development issues.

Intellectual versus instrumental support. The Best Friends did not provide significant instrumental support for one another; their support was more cerebral as was the support among members of the Wednesday Club. Members of the latter group often listened to and provided advice on issues relating to children and family matters but never provided instrumental support off campus. Dr. A, quoted earlier in this chapter, said these were not the friends she would call in a crisis. The Best Friends provided books on dealing with loss when Dr. L's brother died but did not assist one another with physical work.

Context: Environment and support. Throughout this study, the influence of the environment or context on friendship groups has emerged as a major factor in their structure, phases, and processes. Certainly in terms of support, environmental factors affect behavioral processes of friendship groups. Some groups were able to use the environment as a catalyst to sustain intense and positive levels of support as seen in the open interactions of the Sandpipers, Valley Women, and Best Friends. However, all groups did not reach levels of intense self-

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disclosure in the process of offering support. In the quote below, First Ladies member, Professor K, describes her group as having "masks" that were never let down to share fears about such life stage events as having the opportunity to marry or bear children.

> But I think a time like that, that is just with First Ladies, instead of just meeting for dinner, you know, 45 minutes is like the most that we're all together there at the same time without someone coming late or leaving early, would be nice because it would open a time for us to talk about what hurts us. We don't talk about that very often. We do in small groups, but we don't all 5 or 6 of us tell what it feels like to be single or lonely. I think we bitch and moan about it, about how the rest of the institution perceives us, and those spouse and significant other letters, and all those kinds of things, and just say it in passing. But I think Ms. P and I talked about it for the first time at lunch a couple of weeks ago. And I think we build up this mask to just cope in this married, family-oriented environment. But to talk about how scared we are that it might never happen, that we might never have children. Well we never do that. And it seems to me that would be a good environment to do that in, but it's too painful. It is way too painful. And it would take a lot of work to build the mask back up to just come to work every day. At least that's what I'm figuring out. I kept thinking, you know why... I'm seeing a counselor and she was saying how important it was to celebrate important things and share things, because I tend to be kind of closed. And she said, "The First Ladies, do you ever [talk about that]"? No, never. And yet, we're all experiencing that. But just the thought of me sitting in that circle and saying, "I'm really scared that this is my life and I never imagined that I would be 33 and not have any prospect for a life with somebody. I can't imagine saying that, because I would lose it. And I've never seen how we all react to tears and real emotions, and just to make myself that vulnerable, I just can't see it. Because I don't know how supportive it would get or I'm afraid it wouldn't be supportive. But it is...I know it's safe with certain people at certain times….

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In situations such as these, individual member-to-member support is provided but group support is not, perhaps indicating that individual support via strong dyadic relationships must be present first to develop trust to support group vulnerability and disclosure.

Highly functioning groups. Women's friendship groups in this study seem to be influenced by an interaction between the type of environment in which a group operates, the level of group solidarity, and the group's ability to function as a family. The environment or context, from which a group forms and operates, stems from the culture of the college or university where the group has its origin. Group solidarity includes many factors. These factors are attraction, cohesion, interaction, awareness of membership or "we-ness," and mutual goals (Wilson, 1978, p. 46-49). The ability to function in ways similar to a family may be defined as the ability to depend upon other members, trust, share information, and maintain a "freedom to make demands" (Bates & Babchuk, 1961).

Groups like the Wednesday Club that are highly functioning but restricted in style by their cultural ethos cannot extend the highest level of support to members or have relationships with as much elasticity. Dr. A acknowledged in her interview that if she needed help with a family or personal situation, she would not call on these women to respond despite the fact that she considers them close friends. This statement surprised me because in many ways the Wednesday Club seems a highly functioning group. Within the group, the women maintained member trust, shared information freely, and over time, had developed themselves as a campus entity with their own rituals. However, this group also restricts themselves to the task of supporting the work life of a faculty woman in a small church-related college environment. Although members of the Wednesday Club know about, listen to, and support one another regarding family problems or difficulties, the support is based at the college and involves talk, not forms of instrumental support. In other groups operating from a more restrictive position (weaker or less developed, e.g., the Merry Moms or Southern Stars) there are also few assumptions of being "like family." The latter two groups function with a single polarity of focus—their work and being moms or colleagues. They do not move fluidly within their group environment with their interaction style.

On the other hand, Best Friends, a group offering greater professional support, seems to have developed a combination of interaction style and support that allows members to think of themselves as extended family. Dr. L from this group, summed up her feelings about her group by saying: "Well in many ways, they're sisters to me. Sisters that I don't see very often but I know that they're as close as the phone. I think that to me is indicative of a very strong relationship."

Enacting a Role in the Group

Members of friendship groups play different roles within the groups. The woman perceived as group leader often influences how members get to be in a friendship group. The voiced or unvoiced objectives of this person and the criteria she utilizes for selection shape the tenor of the group. In each interview, I asked women if there was one person who played the role of leader or pivot person for the group. In every case, there was a woman named by several others as the person who is in charge, who keeps them in contact and organized, or has the right to issue invitations to newcomers. In general, that person is the one responsible for initially drawing them together or the person who followed up on contacts with several others to originate the group. As far as the other members were concerned, the Valley Women have two leaders; Drs. J and B, who shared these honors although each of them named the other one as leader.

Within all of the friendship groups, there is an acknowledged person designated, by others or by herself, as the group "leader." Often, as in the case of the Wednesday Club, the person with the longest group history or the originator of the group takes the role. In other groups, one person takes on responsibilities for managing group meetings, keeping track of members, or initiating group contacts. The person in this role has an assumed power that enables her to initiate or even make decisions for the group including the offer of invitations to possible new members. Although the leader usually consults with other members before offering group membership, in certain groups there is an unspoken assumption that the final decision is in her hands. One of the members of the Southern Stars gives the following description of a leader role:

Ms. L has taken a kind of organizational role, she kind of reminds everybody that

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a birthday is coming up and are we going to get on it? So I really think she emailed us and said…she was thinking about how enjoyable it would be to have ___ join the group and how did we all feel about it? So she asked for feedback. In some ways, the manner in which she asked by the individual email, we had the opportunity to answer individually and not have to look at each other and question who was going to say something first or whatever. At the same time, I voted that it didn't matter to me whether ___ joined or not, it wasn't really a concern. I personally like her but at the same time, I'm not sure that any of us felt that we could <u>not</u> include her. I remember thinking specifically "gosh she's not what we are for me, why we gather" and I remember thinking 'specially that would add a new dynamic to the group.

Note that even though the member does not agree with the proposal to bring in a new member, she does not express a negative opinion even when, in her own words, she could do so "individually and without having to look at each other." Another example of actions of the leader in selecting group members is shared in a story by Dr. A, from the Wednesday Club, detailing the invitation she received to join the lunch group.

And so I just told her a little about the challenges of the position and she said, "well, you need to be part of our Wednesday group. We meet for lunch every Wednesday" and she named off a couple of the other people who were in the group… none of whom I really knew at that point. And said as soon as school started we'd be starting every Wednesday. So that was my introduction, I went ahead and went the first couple of times with her and so I have been part of it ever since. What I often reflect on is how that all came about and how she felt that she had the ability to invite me because since then other newcomers have come on campus and we have kind of talked as a group about them and decided to invite or not invite people. So I don't know how that happened for me…

Another member of the Wednesday Club shares her perception of the limitations the others have for making recommendations regarding additions to the group.

I would say that we all...although it has never been stated we all kind of know that if anybody is ever invited to join the group, it's her decision. Now she has never said that, none of us have ever asked her that, but I would never say, "I want to invite so and so into the group" and just go do it. So just because she has been there the longest, I think we kind of see her as—I don't know, the "leader."

Other activities of leaders. One of the most active friendship group leaders is Dr. C of the Wednesday Club. She invites new members, keeps the archives, drives the lunch van, and sets the tone of its meetings. Saint, of the Sandpipers, is the quintessential nurturer for all of her group but in a very healthy way. She provides a listening ear for all of their problems, teaches by example how to prioritize life goals, demands that they leave codependent behaviors at the doorstep, loans money, makes the beach reservations, and drives the van. Most importantly, she laughs. For the First Ladies, Ms. P has been the one to provide life examples for her group. She models a positive confrontational behavior style for the others and through her role as a top female administrator, she initiates policy changes directed toward single, female employees at the college.

The Merry Moms have Mrs. J as leader. She is the person with the most inter-connections within this group. Ms. L is the recognized leader of the Southern Stars. Ms. L is very organized and good at keeping everyone informed but perhaps not so attuned to group dynamics. Finally, in an important exception to this pattern, the Best Friends do not have one person who stands out as group leader. If a leader was designated for the group it would have to be the Drs. S and T, the married best friends of the group, who initiate activities such as the quilt project.

Communicating

Group and individual talk is the backbone of friendship whether at the dyadic or netgroup level. It is the common denominator for activities within all the groups participating in this study and the vehicle for other behaviors engaged in by members. Friendship groups' communication may be verbal or non-verbal, in person or via email notes, cards, or telephone. Whatever the mode, its presence is a requirement for group solidarity and cohesiveness.

This is not to say that all friendship groups interact alike. They do not. Some groups seem to speak less and do more; others talk over everything. Each group communicates often via email—the modern communication mode for university life. The Merry Moms and Southern Stars have developed a formal email list of members while the other groups keep group contact information in their personal address books.

Communication modes. Group members undoubtedly use email because it is easy to use and non-intrusive. Women in higher education are busy; they do not have time to play "phone tag" (repeatedly making calls back and forth in an effort to find the other person in) with even a close friend, or time to write many personal notes or cards. Email is a quick, immediate activity that allows women friends to take care of business, communicate care and concern, and return to their busy lives. It also feels more private than phone mail. The Valley Women said, "We acknowledge that we need the support system and we will send each other email messages and call some, but mostly email messages." Group members occasionally send notes or cards by regular mail or visit in person, although these events occur less often due to a factor of time rather than desire. Personal visits or phone calls may signal a crisis or a call for support.

> We send cards and notes to each other, stop by the office. Sometimes, if I'm
> having a tough day or just need to let of some steam, I'll go down to [name of
> group member] office for five minutes, close the door, and just go off about
> whomever.

The most unusual ritual that involved keeping in touch would have to be the postcards sent and received by the Wednesday Club to members on sabbatical or away from campus.

> one of the most important agenda items every week is what mail did we get, what
> mail are we sending out. Since we usually use postcards, we usually look for ones
> that have hidden innuendoes, meanings, and that are internal but not external and
> sometimes we have to mail the postcards in envelopes because we didn't want our
> comments to be too widely read.

Talk signals.

> There are days when people are really down, but it's more a source of sort of

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breaking the ice and letting everyone know that this has been a really bad week

and we need to talk about that. (Dr. C, Wednesday Club)

"What we actually do is bitch about things, ask advice, and share stories about our complicated lives." (Dr. A, Wednesday Club). Members of friendship groups talk about many different topics. They exchange local information and gossip about the campus environment. They talk about campus policies and politics and how they affect their lives and work. They talk about work issues and people—bitching about things when necessary. They seek advice from their friends on handling work and family related issues. They provide advice on marital issues and childrearing practices. They share personal values and social role dilemmas with one another in the group or in dyads made up of group members. At times, they tell things to their friends that they do not even share with their most significant family members. Why? Because they do not want to go into great depth to explain a situation, they do not want to worry a family member, or simply think their spouse or significant other will not be able to effectively hear what they have to say.

So, what do friendship groups not discuss? They do not discuss confidential personnel or other issues that are part of their work. Often they choose not to share issues of marital dysfunction or anything seen as being disloyal to a spouse or partner. Other than these topics, there are almost no holds barred.

"Largely, we talk a lot of campus politics." It is very important to women friendship group members to be able to talk about their work situations with colleagues who can empathize and understand without significant time being spent bringing the listener into an understanding of a situation. Since they share the same workplace, group members already share a basic knowledge of the environment.

I think the fact that we all can empathize with the different demands. Because in

this field that we are all in, you know, the demands regarding a lot of weekend

work, a lot of evening work, generally high stress times, we can all empathize if

somebody says, "I've got this and this going on this week. And I've got this and

this." Or, "I had this type of student problem." Or, "School's closed down, but

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we've got to work." You know, different things like that. I mean, it's nice to know that somebody's been there, done that. Or just the fact that somebody understands what you are going through without having to really explain a lot of things. Because if you are not in this field, generally people don't understand what it's all about.

The important thing is having a place that is safe to discuss issues of concern without risk. By placing trust in the friendship group to help deal with an issue, a group member can process the problem and move on. If she takes it home to share with her family, it becomes larger than life and affects others.

Dr. J: But [with] my group I can tell them about it and not worry. I can talk about it and get over it and go back and deal with the person and go on. Whereas my husband can't do that.

K: And then you have to deal with him…

Dr. J: Yes!…I'm not going to deal with those people. So the group provides that kind of support. I think the same for those others of us who are married--even though their husbands may be a part of the university. But women are just different in [that] we will confront the problem, deal with it, acknowledge it and try to work through it and then you can move forward...move on. Men don't do that sometimes; I think they hold it.

The diversity of their roles within the workplace serves only to provide a variety of views and information on discussion topics that are work related. Dr. S from the Best Friends says:

In some ways I look to them for any information, feedback or just viewpoint from that perspective which is different from mine. You know we are all from different areas so I look to them for that. I think I look to all of them for a faculty viewpoint because I am an administrator and I learn a lot about how they do things that might be different from how an administrator would be doing it.

Mascot, of the Sandpipers, observed that even though a lot of their talk is about work related issues, what they are really talking about is their relationships with other people.

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A lot of it is work-talk, but then I guess what we're really talking about is our relationships with other people when it comes down to that. Like how somebody's done something that we just can't agree with and see how everybody feels about it type of thing. I guess we're kind of a sounding board for each other.

Career mobility. One of the topics I asked about was how much their talk centered on career-related issues, not just the workplace itself, but the goals and upward mobility of group members. Did that talk change over time and if so, how? General career talk occurred in the majority of the groups but more so in groups with larger percentages of faculty or higher-level administrators facing tenure or promotion issues. One interesting finding related to this topic is that career discussion shifted to more global university issues after the need to address promotion and tenure issues was no longer of paramount concern to group members.

In the beginning….the concerns were often responses to issues in the classroom, perhaps it was issues of tenure and promotion, and those aren't really [the focus] now, it's a group of really experienced teachers, so it's not so much what to do in the classroom sort of thing or worried about promotion and that kind of stuff that is not there. It has gone to others kinds of issues. I don't want to say more important issues, but perhaps more global sort of issues in terms of the institution instead of being so much "me." The interest has really shifted, I think.

Advice. Friendship group members freely ask for and provide advice on work and personal issues. Topics discussed can be anything from a potential meeting with a faculty member to children's teething or a teen's behavior. Here Ms. P relates how the First Ladies talk provides advice on various life issues.

[We] sometimes provide each other with some advice or some past experiences to share about how we dealt with the situation or you know, being in a meeting where there are all men and how you handle that. Or if you feel like you're being discriminated against gender-wise and what you're going to do about it. Personal things we talk about are different things we're buying for the house or fixing the house or doing the house or different things like that. Or, let's see, how

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we budget our money or how we spend or how we invest our money. Family type

issues or problems, whatever they may be whether it's dealing with school issues

or whether it's dealing with church issues, or whether it's dealing with just your

immediate family if someone is sick or if someone died.

This is true also of the interplay between married and single group members providing advice

from their own experience about relationship issues. Women in friendship groups seem to be

able to bridge the gap between partnered and non-partnered, parental and non-parental issues to

provide support to one another. As a rule, childless members of friendship groups freely provide

advice to parenting friends and married women feel free to support singles in their dating

progress. The Best Friends who had an unspoken agreement not to discuss such things in an

attempt to be sensitive to their two unmarried members were the only exception. Trust is strong

enough in friendship groups that making oneself vulnerable to possible criticism is not an issue.

Yeah, the issues may be different, but I think it's always good to have people that

are in different phases because it helps as you talk about relationships, in

particular to have a married opinion. You know, what have you done or what do

you all do alone. And it's nice. You hear stories of—it can get better or you

might want to leave it alone—that type of thing. So some of the issues that they

deal with on a married level, I guess, are different in that it's probably more

financial or home or long-term situation like investments—that kind of thing.

Talk as support mechanism. Talk becomes a mechanism for the support sought by

women in higher education that first instigated the beginning for each friendship group. Talk is a

vehicle to share experiences and express emotional support.

Somebody can share that emotion where you felt like there was no answer. There

was no one out there who knew how badly or as helpless as you felt. Maybe that's

it. And they're there. They've been through it or they've been close to it, that they

know of it and they can identify it. And if you're willing to let your guard down

enough with them to share this kind of thing, then the rewards are wonderful.

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Phases of the Friendship Cycle

Adams and Blieszner (1994, p. 172) emphasized that in order to understand friendship patterns one must understand that "friendships change over time." Previous researchers have not conducted extensive studies exploring the phases of bounded groups or networks. However, existing studies work under the assumption that the phases of group or network friendships act similarly to those of dyadic friendships. In this study, I began to explore the patterns existing in friendships of women in higher education by examining the phases of the friendship cycle using the existing tri-level framework for friendship development of formation, maintenance, and dissolution. Initially, the formation phase encompasses the development stages as individuals and dyads come together to form a group, evaluate persons as potential members, and establish group norms. Next, the maintenance phase involves a variety of activities conducted by the group or individuals to sustain, change, and support the group to increase solidarity. The final stage in this process occurs during dissolution when members may decide to disband or reconfigure the group in response to either internal or external presses. Figure 1 represents these phases of the friendship cycle: formation, maintenance, and dissolution. Formation consists of the individual characteristics such as life stage and age of group members as well as a discussion of the cultural context (university environment) that precipitated the formation of each friendship group. Maintenance factors discussed include strategies used to keep the groups going, the creation of group rituals as a strategy that influences group cohesion, and the cycle of cohesion which describes the constant evolution in and out of group "we-ness." Phases are also influenced by the changing expectations of group members a factor that effects group cohesion and is the pivotal factor in groups sustaining themselves or moving into dissolution. Over arching all, is the effect of context which influences processes and phases of friendship groups from inception to demise.

Context

Maintenance:
Strategies, Rituals,
Cycles of
Cohesion

Dissolution

Changing
Expectations

Formation:
Individual
Characteristics,
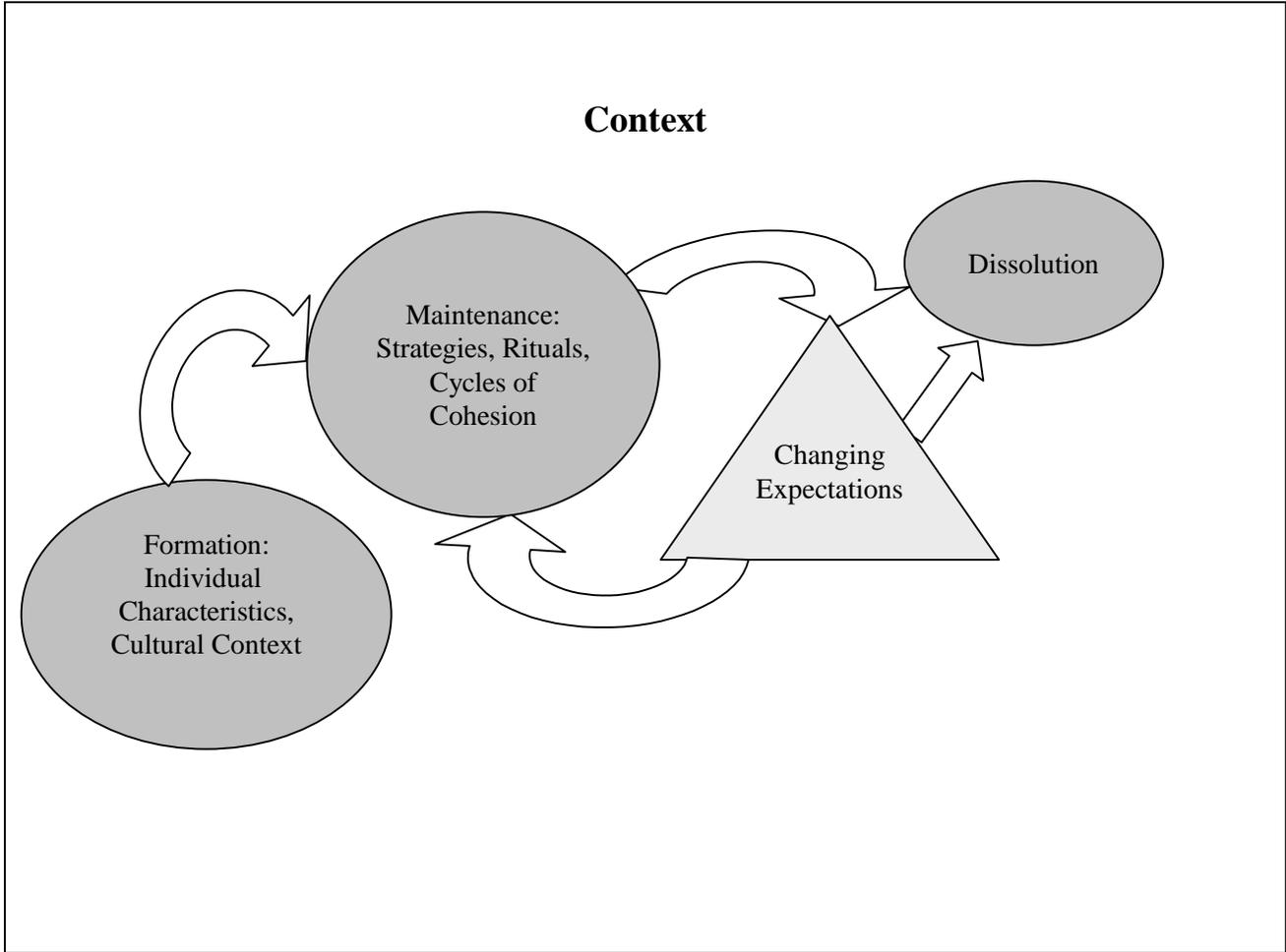Cultural Context

Figure 1. Phases of the friendship cycle

<u>Formation</u>

        Women come together for a variety of reasons before they solidify into what might be termed a friendship group. Most of the women participating in this study met one another through their common work settings as they began careers on college campuses. Several represented a gender or ethnic minority within their institutional culture but all initially expressed feelings of isolation or loneliness in their new roles. Professor J of the Best Friends recalled, "being a female was not all that common and being a single female was even less common. And there was a need, at least from my perception to know other people in similar circumstances." They wished to know others who shared their experience. To meet these needs for affiliation, the women in this study looked for a friend. It often started by forming a dyad with another woman, beginning an acquaintanceship and sharing mutual friend relationships as they began to know one another better until, almost by accident, they had formed an informal friendship group of their own. Ms. K, a member of the Valley Women, related her experience in forming friendships:

> In most groups what I find is that you connect with one person and they sort of introduce you to the group. At least that's been my context with groups, with people that have come together—that you normally have a connection with one individual and they say, "why don't you come," or "we're getting together" and that kind of thing. And then you meet the other people and you either click or you decide to move to a different group.

        This type of organic growth pattern was common to all the groups participating in my study. Women may have consciously set out to have a friend or friend network but they did not set out to have a <u>friendship group</u> as defined by this study.

> Again, I'm not sure you can plan a group like that. It would be nice to be in a group like that but if I was not in one and I wanted to be in one I don't know how I would go about creating it. In this case, it just happened. There were so many things that could have changed it. People having gotten married earlier, having kids...moving away. I know that none of us ever thought that in the beginning it

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would be around this long, it was just a casual starting from wanting to broaden your circle of friends…within the context of the university because they were people that you had something in common with. I guess that like any relationship whether it's a couple relationship or a group relationship, who you make friends with and who you are attracted to is a unique individual kind of thing.

As the groups grew organically, members recalled a similar script, "we invited a few other people, women, who were sort of in our same age bracket and experience at ____." Each group I interviewed practiced a similar pattern of identification and formation. A member of the Southern Stars recounted how her group formed and why she feels it has continued to stay together.

I would say that group just emerged out of a group of women who came to the university about the same time, within a few years of each other, at about the same points in their lives age-wise and family-wise and things like that and…we got to know each other because we worked together but we spend time together because we're friends.

Life course and stage of development. Looking at the friendship cycle through its phases is an area of research that is not extensively studied in close relationships. While is it acknowledged that friendship patterns change over time (Allan & Adams, 1989), few studies have examined the effect of stage of the life course and stage of development on friendship processes. During the interviews I conducted with the seven friendship groups participating in this study, several groups referred to the role of chronological age and developmental stage in the formation of these friendship groups. Age was an easy way for group members to distinguish as a characteristic in choosing friends for group formation. They had a more difficult time, however, in articulating a common developmental stage. It became obvious that, for these groups, chronological age was an important factor in the formation of each group. Developmental stage seemed more important in creating factors that helped the groups maintain their relationships.

I think we all in some way or another hit a certain age point or level, where maybe

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our children were growing up, maybe there were other problems. But we all

needed something else. I think at this age I've had a need for other women friends

that can identify with some of the things or feelings you go through.

Saint, a founding member of the Sandpipers, describes the interrelationship of chronological age and stage of development. While chronological age played a role, being in a similar place and time in their life stage provided a greater impetus for "needing something else."

<u>Friendship phases and life stage</u>. Whether it is the reality of being a single female on a campus of married folks, a black woman on a predominately white campus, or a woman grappling with early parenting years and a career, the identification of others in a similar life stage is important to the formation and on-going maintenance of friendship groups in this study. Ms. C, a member of the Southern Stars commented, "they are all professional, career women which is helpful. And everybody is trying to balance family lives and personal lives, and, you know, working lives. So that's all been real helpful." While there are no membership rules per se, women in these friendship groups draw together because of commonalities in life experience.

There's some very deep, common bond in this group…And right here, they're

highlighted. Our focus was coming back to work, keeping up our

competitiveness, keeping our positions, in our positions. Many of us speak about

the growth in our careers and making our family a priority. So you talk about

some very highly charged issues. (Ms. MK, Merry Moms)

<u>The effect of developmental stage</u>. Ms. K, a single and younger member of the Southern Stars, described how a woman at a different age but similar life stage might not feel as much of a link with the women of her group.

Someone who is sort of in our stage of life, our age level, I think that probably

[would] be an important thing. I don't know that we have membership rules, but I

don't think that someone who is much younger would be interested in sitting

around on a Saturday afternoon with a group of women in their 30s and 40s

thinking going to lunch is a big deal.

However, several groups contain an age range of 10 or more years. These groups are the Wednesday Club, Valley Women, Merry Moms, and Sandpipers. A Wednesday Club member commented, "The age range is about 20 years; most of us are between 50 and 60. I don't think the age range is a factor [in group development or cohesiveness]." Where there is a range of ages, issues directly related to age do have an effect on the talk of the group. Dyads often form within groups to address age-related issues not shared by the group as a whole. The oldest member of the Merry Moms is an older but new mom herself and recalls:

> Oh, I remember—talking about what makes me feel old. I remember saying to people at one of the lunches, "So, how far after [your baby was born] did you schedule your mammogram?" and they looked at me, "We're not old enough to have mammograms!" I sort of feel a little old. There is one woman who I sometimes meet for lunch by herself. I mentioned about her mother and her brother and some special needs, and she's my age, so she can relate to those kinds of things.

Being among the older members of a friendship group can have other effects such as offering members an opportunity to serve in a mentor role to younger women in the group. Doing so solidifies the group by offering shared support to new, younger colleagues helping them to address the lifeline issues that older members have already passed through.

Effect of Context on Group Phases

Dr T, a member of the Best Friends, comments below on the way her group has changed over time.

> Well, I think [our group] changed because initially we had a lot in common being single females in a university town and we weren't young single females, you know, we were all in our early 30s [and] mid-thirties and so we had similar interests and all being at the university. But now, I think it's sort of a tradition. It's almost sort of like family.

Women created friendship groups as an instrumental solution to deal with the cultural press of the institutional context in which they worked. Issues of gender and ethnicity provided a

catalyst for women coming into the academy in teaching or administrative roles to seek the support of friends. The oldest of the groups in this study (e.g., the Best Friends) were in effect early pioneer women holding significant faculty or administrative roles in a rural academic environment. As uncommon members of a culture by virtue of their status as single, professional women, they sought each other out and created friendships.

Sandler (1992) established that the climate of academe could be a chilly one for women. Her work opened discussions about the effect of culture and gender on women's success in the academy. Participants in the current study often face the impact of multiple presses from the academic culture in addition to the consequences of their gender. Foremost, they face an anticipated but, nevertheless, challenging environment as a minority gender. Second, ethnicity becomes an important factor. Third, they deal with the religious and moral doctrines of small church related colleges who hold firm beliefs about women's roles. At least two groups of women face difficulties in maintaining personal lives in the latter environment.

The Valley Women came to a campus environment in which there are few black professional women in either the university or adjacent communities. There are also few black churches and societies, not to mention hairdressers and stores carrying cosmetics or hair care items used by black women. Dr. D states:

> I think the friendship evolved in large part around the issue of us being very few
> African American women on campus. We had a lot of issues in terms of the
> environment, issues in terms of racism, issues in terms of professionalism, the
> absence of a core group of African Americans in the community, and family
> issues. So in some ways an extended family to engage with the women. I see
> people coming and going in the group, but I do think that the career is the impetus
> or the nucleus for how this particular group of women got together. I think what
> we do at [university] is the nucleus of what we've done, for how we got
> together…

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The First Ladies are not only part of an ethnic, but also a religious, culture that has no real role for single women within their family-oriented environment. Dr. M, a history teacher, remembers how she came to meet with the group of women later known as the First Ladies:

It was my first year here as a professor and I was single and I didn't know anyone in the area. I didn't have any family here and I didn't know anybody here when I moved to this area. There were a few other women on campus in that same situation. I had already made friends   I was already good friends with another woman on the faculty whom you'll be interviewing as well. So we were doing some things together, but I was mostly just teaching kind of a ridiculous load and trying to finish my dissertation, so I wasn't really seeking out social activity anyway, but I needed some friendship and support. At some point, Professor C and I were invited to Ms. P's house just for a potluck, I think, for a meal. And it was all other single women and it was somebody's idea to kind of get together and maybe meet on a regular basis. So I remember going to that meal and I had met a few of the other women there, but not all of them. I think there were about seven or eight at that initial meeting. My first reaction was that I didn't have a lot in common with them, with these people other than the fact that I was single and a woman. And most of us were from [the college] so, I remember thinking, "I don't feel like I have a lot in common with these women and I wish my close friends who were scattered around the country were living closer by." But we started doing things every two weeks—that was our system, every other Friday night we would go out for dinner somewhere or meet at somebody's house for a meal. And sometimes one person would cook it or we would bring stuff in for pot-luck. But we really did see it as a kind group for people …who somehow needed that for one reason or another, those who didn't have a lot of other ties or people their own age or something like that.

The Southern Stars came together to have some quality time with other professional women while simultaneously juggling family and career issues. While the impact of academic

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context on this group was not as threatening as some other groups in this study, they too felt a need to make time for relational activities with other women.

Women found one another and gathered in what later became friendship groups as a solution to the press of an (alien) culture. Through this means, they were able to share a social life not available to them through the mainstream academic environments in which they worked and lived. They created their own world for support and sharing with other women.

Maintenance

Queen from the Sandpipers reminisced about her group with these thoughts:

I don't guess I've ever thought about us not ever being together. So, I guess we'd probably be in the middle [maintenance]. [Do you think you would be together?] That makes me sad. [Tell me more about that feeling.] Well, I just can't imagine my life without them. They've always been there. But I mean on the positive side of that. Even though we may not get together and do as much, hopefully I'd still feel like I could pick up the phone and call them. We've thought about this too even if one of us were to leave, that always changes. If you go to a different place you develop different friends and may not have as much time. But hopefully not, hopefully I feel very strongly that our friendships are going to last forever. Maybe the amount of time that we get to spend with each other may not be as much, but I feel like they'll always be there.

Dr. J from the Valley Women places her group as most probably in a maintenance mode:

Maintenance. I don't know. There are things happening all around and some may be leaving. I don't know, just thinking about it. One of us we thought would be leaving for a job and we were happy for her but sad for her also and then another one, the same thing. But there was never the thought that we wouldn't continue. In fact, the one said that if she left there were two of us who would always know where she was and could get in contact. But it has been going so long...those of us who are here.

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Women members of the friendship groups in this study are easily able to offer an opinion as to whether their group is in the formation, maintenance, or dissolution stage. Members of each group, with the exception of the First Ladies, identify their groups in a maintenance stage of development. Even some members of the First Ladies insist that they have been effective in reconstructing their group in response to demands of institutional culture and are now in a new maintenance pattern. When questioned, most members can pinpoint specific events or periods in which the group faced a crisis and are able to identify how they moved through it. Members of several groups talk about experiencing a sort of spiral effect by moving from a plateau period where they seem to be going through the motions to a crisis event which brings the group close together again, revitalizing it. Dr. A, a member of the Wednesday Club, called this "constant renewal"—a concept that I found common to all groups in this study.

> I have felt sometimes it was kind of winding down and then it's about then that
> something or someone new will come into the picture or somebody will change
> jobs and really have some needs or someone will come back so there seems to be
> some kind of constant renewal with people just doing the usual…[some of us are]
> gone for a year at a time, for example.

The longer a group has been in existence, the more like a family it comes to be, thereby emerging after crisis, scarred and perhaps even reconfigured, but still intact. Cohesive groups have a high level of loyalty and are like families "embracing conflict and deriv[ing] constructive benefit therefrom" (Yalom, 1985, p. 66). The common history becomes stronger than recent events. All groups in this study experienced periods of strong group cohesiveness at various times during their existence—including those who did not profess to espouse familial feelings toward one another.

Strategies, rituals, and cycles. In this section I will discuss themes identified by the friendship groups in the maintenance stage in terms of the strategies, rituals, and cycles that occur during their times together. Friendship groups in this study utilize a number of different strategies to keep relationships vital. Often group members do not think of these activities as maintenance strategies, however, and seem puzzled about how to respond to specific questions

relating this topic. Most of the women do not see themselves as instrumental in maintaining their groups. Just as they have not intentionally formed a friendship group, the majority of group members do not do specific acts with the deliberate desire to maintain it. Rather, the actions that they initiate are in response to needs they perceive in the group, things they, themselves, want to happen, or needs identified with a particular member. Overall, members see their groups as being more organic than intentional in this way. Dr. M from the First Ladies recalls that:

> I remember a conversation—we actually had conversations about that, which
> seems kind of funny in retrospect. We had conversations about how organized we
> should be. I mean some people wanted to have it on the calendar every other
> week that we would do something, and then if it didn't work out we would cancel.
> But some people wanted to just get together more spontaneously which meant
> that we didn't do it as often really because people get so busy or don't take the
> initiative to organize anything.

The Southern Stars send around an email message to schedule birthday events far in advance and the BFs have their "business meeting" where they compare calendars and set the date for the next dinner. The Wednesday Club (noon every Wednesday), Sandpipers (Fridays at 5 p. m.), and the Merry Moms (last day of each month) have structured gathering times for lunches or other get-togethers.

> So what we started to do was meet once a month for lunch. So the last day of the
> month we meet in the cafeteria at noon and we bring new baby pictures and old
> baby pictures, as we talk about what's going on and what's happened and what's
> changed and that kind of stuff.
>
> Constant renewal and cycles.
>
> Dr. Q is gone now and when she gets back, we'll have sort of a renewal because
> we'll be welcoming her and hearing about some of the things she has been
> working on. I think we'd be in a maintaining mode with some kind of sparks
> every now and then with new people and new ideas. (Dr. A, Wednesday Club)

The coming and going of members into a group can have either a positive or a negative impact. Not all groups and members handle this process with as much acumen as Dr. A of the Wednesday Club indicates. Integrating members back into the group can create stress on the group and on the member returning. Dr. E, from the same group, expressed concerns about being able to successfully reintegrate into the Wednesday Club following what she considered the life-changing experience of living abroad for a year without her family.

> I am in the process of defining my own relationship with the group. With the
> sabbatical, with people coming and going, it was different to come back from
> overseas and re-enter the group…it felt like entering a new phase or a new growth
> of where we were or what our relations had been.

An extreme example of this phenomenon occurred when Ms. S left the First Ladies to attend graduate school. Her return as a married woman prompted Dr. K, who felt she had "taken Ms. S's place" in the group, to brand her a "secondary" (an adjunct member role) and cause all sorts of strife. Another example is the difference of opinion maintained by members of the Southern Stars about the effect their possible new member, Ms. K, will have on the group. Ms. CR feels optimistic saying: "Now, with Ms. K joining that may be another beginning;" although others are not so sure.

In several of the groups, a member commented that the group had had a down time, a time when she or others were less involved due to one circumstance or another. However, each person was optimistic about an upward swing in closeness or opportunity to spend time together. In an interesting display of optimism about group health and longevity, not one of the women said they thought their group was in its final or dissolution stages. Dr. T, a member of the Best Friends, noted this affect:

> All relationships go through times when you are close and times when you are not
> as close and I think we are going through one of those times right now. We are
> not as close 'cause we haven't been able to find a time [to get together] and two
> years ago I would have said we were very close and spending a lot of time
> together. I think that the pendulum will swing back the other way.

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It is interesting that one of the groups with the loosest structure had three members comment on the strength of their group and the fact that it was growing stronger.

> Dr. D: Tomorrow, I'd say the same thing I'd say today and that is that it constantly changes but it's so well, it has such a strong foundation…And I would say "maintenance," it's maintaining, but I think the level—I think it's high up there. I would sit here and think, well it can't get much better, but it could, because everything evolves.

Comments like these speak eloquently about the construction of this group as a fluid, loose-knit "federation of women" who are too busy to get together regularly.

Rituals. Rituals are one of the unspoken strategies used to maintain group identity and an important part of the expression of group solidarity. Research in communications indicates that we often invent rituals or ritualize various aspects of life. Rituals are a form of communication represented by the creation of symbolic behaviors used in social situations as a means for individual participation in larger actions, orders, or fundamental realities (Rothenbuhler, 1998).

Rothenbuhler (1998, p. 41) observed, "there is in important rituals something numinous, something mysteriously self-powering, which gives the experience a force for the faithful beyond their ability to recast the meaning in words." The role of rituals in friendship groups is closely involved with the creation of the group as a distinct entity. By creating and living the rituals of the group, members are able to create a group with its own identity separate from other life involvements.

Types of rituals. Friendship groups regularly utilize a common ritual of getting together for a meal. Sharing food, either in someone's home or at a restaurant, is a long-honored tradition among friends (Becker, 1987). These friendship groups are no different. Gatherings range from informal, spontaneous get-togethers for the Valley Women, Sandpipers, and First Ladies to planned events such as the birthday parties hosted by the Southern Stars. The restaurant meals shared by the Best Friends, Wednesday Club, and Merry Moms are planned and scheduled long in advance. The Best Friends always share a special holiday celebration by breaking their restaurant tradition and meeting at someone's home. Occasionally groups plan events to include

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spouses and children as in the cookouts hosted by the Merry Moms or the First Ladies' party for the entire college. Many of the women also meet with their friends for shopping trips or special interest events as illustrated by this excerpt from my interview with Valley Woman, Dr. J:

> Kathy: You eat fish together and you eat lunch together after church but are there other things that you do to keep your friendship alive and going?
>
> Dr. J: Well, we shop together. Basically most of us work so much and we don't have a lot of time to spend together.

Occasionally, various friendship groups will arrange overnight trips or pajama parties. One group, the Sandpipers, even had a crafts business together for a short time. Both the Sandpipers and the First Ladies have taken beach trips together. For the Sandpipers, the trip is an annual event—always successful; unfortunately, the First Ladies experienced group conflict during the first trip and have chosen not to repeat it for the whole group.

All the groups have embraced email as the communication ritual of choice. Some go to great lengths to set up mailing lists and even create mini-newsletters. They also send cards and occasionally make telephone calls as a way of keeping in touch between meetings.

Groups in this study with the greatest longevity have the strongest ritual repertoire. Activities and custom play a distinct role in keeping interest and commitment levels high. Traditional group rituals increase feelings of group cohesiveness and allow participants in this study to participate in symbolic acts of communication that enhance the group's personal identity (Rothenbuhler, 1998). The following example of the Wednesday Club provides one of the most fascinating group ritual arrays in this study. The women meet for lunch each week in the same bar/restaurant, at the same table reserved for them with their own personal "reserved" sign placed by the management. During lunch, the women write postcards to send to absent members and read the mail they have received. The restaurant management acts as a postal drop-off for cards coming to the Wednesday Club in care of the bar. Dr. E, tells this story:

> We have a sign that we had made that reserves our table…Sometimes someone will get seated there before we get there...we don't know how that happens but everyone is always very apologetic. It is really like creating your own turf and

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space and claiming it for an hour out of every week.

Dr. C, the leader, maintains an archive of post cards and pictures sent and received by members on sabbatical chronicling more than 14 years of group history.

> I keep the archives. Yes, we do have archives which consist of all of the postcards that we've sent, or that have been sent [to us]. And again, I started that when they started sending me postcards [when I was on sabbatical]. I saved all of them. And they saved the ones that I sent back to them, and so when I returned to [campus] we decided that we needed to keep them. Because they really were a lot of fun to look back through and read and see if we could remember what in the world we were talking about…So we got scrapbooks and we put all of the postcards in there and so I do have the archives. They have lasted; it would have to be in the last person's will that they be burned. I don't think they could see the light of day outside of our group!

A Christmas quilt became the Best Friends' most influential ritual. Over a period of five years they designed, made, and exchanged quilt squares as Christmas gifts to be used to create four unique Christmas quilts that will be "the only four quilts like them in the whole world." The significance of this event is not lost on the four members of the Best Friends. During their interviews, each of the members discussed "the quilt" and its impact at great length. The creating of the quilt has become a metaphor for their friendship according to Dr. L:

> maybe it's like Adrian and Rocky. We fill in each other's gaps. You've got gaps; I've got gaps - we fill in each other's gaps. And I think that's true of all of us. It's sort of like this wonderful puzzle, that we've all got these little feelers that go out in a particular direction, and then somebody else has got this little hole and when we get together, we become this one...And so this quilt in a way is very much a symbol of that, although I'm sure we've never investigated that. It is for me at least a metaphor for what we are. And the fact that each year—we started with little individual pieces and we put them together and we find that we complete the puzzle, and then everybody brings their puzzle piece and we then we put those

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together. And it keeps getting bigger, but it's organic and it will have an end.

Naming. Another ritual involves the selection of a group name. For instance, members of four friendship groups have named their groups. The Sandpipers, Merry Moms, First Ladies, and Best Friends all use the group name in referring to group meetings and activities. The other three groups have informal names that most members use to refer to the group. Even without a formal name, members of all seven groups agree that their respective group is an entity in its own right and that they are comfortable thinking of it in this way. Through their names, the groups have then become identifiable to outsiders including family, friends, and colleagues. While the naming gives power to their roles as group members, it also leaves them vulnerable to negative repercussions and accusations of exclusivity, elitism, and power-mongering by those who see it as a threat to the larger academic culture. An example of the negativity of being "named" shows in the experience of the First Ladies who do not currently use their name in public because of negative associations their campus has with it. The Wednesday Club members have also experienced this phenomenon although to a lesser degree.

Cycles. Friendship groups are living entities made up of members with shared and individual needs. At times needs reach a crisis point that can have a huge impact on the functioning of the group. How the group deals with the crisis predicts whether the outcome will be positive and growth producing or negative, and beginning a path to possible dissolution. As I discussed earlier, groups seem to evolve through a sort of spiral process as they move from one level to another within or between phases. Trigger events may cause the group to spiral up or down to a previous level of group cohesiveness or move toward a new one. Yalom (1989, p. 50) points out that we must never assume that cohesive groups are static—that upon attaining a certain level of group cohesion a group will continue to remain there. To Yalom, the degree of cohesion maintained by a group fluctuates during a group's life due to the many variables that affect individual and group attraction.

Effects of group crisis. Members of several of the groups in this study faced crisis points during their membership. Deaths, divorces, illness, or problems with children were life cycle events that generally made the groups pull together with renewed vigor and focus. Women

friends were quick to respond in a crisis and provide support wherever they were able. Crises of this type had positive effects causing groups to cycle toward higher levels of cohesiveness. In doing so, they were able to achieve a high level of interaction, support, and productivity within the group.

There is another type of crisis which friendship groups in this study find more difficult to weather. This type of crisis is <u>internal</u>. Groups like the Valley Women who have faced, confronted, and verbalized an internal crisis among their members regard it as a difficult, although strengthening, process. "I think we're getting stronger and we're tested when there is a major crisis for one of us, in terms of what happens, what do we do," says Dr. B of the Valley Women. Although none of the members of this group would say the exact nature of the internal crisis they faced, several members mentioned having gone through this process in the last year and being stronger now because of it. Dr. B said, "more I'd call them kind of growth pains because anytime that happens and it means that you need to talk about it, and once we talk about it, the relationship becomes—grows stronger."

One could conjecture that because they are a "loose federation" of women a crisis would easily make them dissolve, but this is not so. I think their strength is due to the manner in which they address internal crisis—head on. They and other groups like them (e.g., the Sandpipers), tend to be outspoken in verbal exchanges between group members and use this process as a mode to create <u>strength through confrontation</u>. Members of the Valley Women attribute their confrontation style as typical of black culture. However, I also saw this style used by the all white group, the Sandpipers. Both groups have similar patterns of communication, very healthy and playful, creating a trust level that could withstand a loving, yet confrontational process of group interaction.

Alternately, other friendship groups, facing crisis, deal with it covertly or not at all (e.g., Wednesday Club, First Ladies, Southern Stars). These groups attribute both geographic and ethnic cultural attitudes as contributing to their lack of ability to confront.

<u>Changing Expectations</u>

Initial reasons for coming together in a group may lessen as women begin to acclimate to their social setting, make other friend contacts, become closer to one member of the group, or develop a primary partnership. In one of the longest-lived groups, Dr. T acknowledges how things have changed for her:

Dr. L and I have a lot in common and I would say [the other two members] have in the same way but the four of us together don't have as much in common together anymore but we have this trust and this history that keeps us going...keeps us seeing each other and missing each other if we don't get together. I think probably we've even, I don't [know] if the others would say this, but I think that certainly some of us wondered, "Well, is it time to drop this?", but I think we would really miss it if we did because of the history.

Overall, women in situations like these show surprising commitment to maintaining the continuity of the group. They feel grateful for what it has been for them and respect the fact that others continue to receive a high level of benefit from group interaction. Women who consciously or unconsciously decide to pull away, tend to do so in a very protective and caring way. Dr. A from the Wednesday Club shared her feelings about it like this, "As soon as I formed other strong friendships here and kind of moved outside that group, the group has been less important to me but still important, nonetheless."

Dissolution

Although many of the participants in this study may have had thoughts of discontinuing their friendship groups at one time or another, only one group has actually come to the brink of doing so. The cultural presses of the church-related academic community that conceived the First Ladies could not tolerate what the community perceived to be an elitist group. Ultimately the group succumbed to the pressure placed on them. This part of the story is a sad one, for the First Ladies were born out of a need for a place for single women in a campus society which did not recognize them as having unique needs. Ms. P recalled:

And there were some people who had some core problems with that. Would say, "no, well, you know, there's so-and-so over in whatever department and should we

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invite them?" I think that part of it was, it was a nice group at the time, but it's grown and we could have added more and more and more people and then we'd lose some of the personal... You know when there's a group of four or five, it's a lot different than if there's a group of 12. And I think we grew and we weren't quite sure how to deal with that. And so when you say First Ladies, we know [who we mean].

Named by a colleague and well known within the community as an example of elitism and exclusivity, they were ultimately tried and judged guilty of these heinous acts against the culture of the community. Internally they were also doomed by the jealous actions of a group member who wished to exclude any member who was not single, like her. Literally torn asunder from without and within, the group still tried to reconfigure itself in efforts to be inclusive of family members and others in the campus community while maintaining the relationships they once had. This, of course, was not possible.

And also because there were more and more single women coming on and we didn't want to become an elitist type group that we only selected. And so we ran into issues where if we wanted to have a party, a social gathering, who did we invite? Did we invite everybody? Or did we just pick and choose? And this community has a real issue with elitism.

Now, along with vestiges of the former group, only the memory is maintained in existing dyadic friendships. "I think we passed the dissolution stage, because I think there was that stage for us, at least for me, and gone back into more of a maintenance state, but the expectations are different."

Changing Expectations Can Result in Dissolution

The First Ladies tries to rationalize this process by saying that perhaps they were growing apart anyway because they had "different styles" or because of lack of time to put into the energy of the group. However, these statements are made with regret—that as a group they were not allowed to live a full life cycle or make their own decisions about when it might meet its demise. Group member, Dr. M comments:

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I don't see it functioning as really a group all that much any more for anybody, maybe. Except that if one of us really needed help or something I don't know then what would still be there. We do things together in different combinations, so that we're once in a while all together, like I said for a celebration, but that's it. We don't have any talk any more about getting together once a month or something like that. So, to me, the whole thing has kind of fallen apart. But yeah, for me, I would see that as somewhat peripheral in my life. Some of the individual friendships are important.

At first, the founder of the First Ladies sought to be philosophical about the events in the group life as we met in our interview. In the end, though, her comments became similar to her fellow group members about the state of the group.

[Personal] support has moved into some more professional support. And we used to do a lot more together than we have in the last year or two. And I was talking with someone about why that is. And I think some of it has to do with that initially we all felt like we had all these things in common. And then as you get to know people more and more, you realize the things you don't have in common. And there are some that I would probably choose to hang out more with socially than others. And then you kind of just do things with them. But I would say as a core group, most of my best friends both professionally---And so it wasn't just like it had to be a women's group, but there were some women's issues that we discussed. And so I think it was because of the size and not wanting to hurt people's feelings because we knew there were other single people that we didn't continue to tap on the shoulder. And just something about the [church culture] mystique that you didn't want to become an elitist and put yourself up above everyone else because you're part of a special group or something.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored the impact of friendship group membership on women in

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higher education at seven colleges and universities throughout the United States. By closely examining the content of 36 interviews, it was possible to identify themes that emerged during my analysis in relation to the research questions around which this project was constructed. I attempted to clarify the influence of context on the thinking, feelings, and actions of women in informal friendship groups to identify cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes, including support, provided by friendship groups. In addition, I identified and discussed how context affected the themes evolving from the movement of groups through phases as they changed over time.

Chapter 6 will present the overarching themes identified from the material in this chapter, discuss their relationship to previous literature, and propose areas for further study. These themes illustrate influence of context on friendship groups. The contextual hierarchy in friendship research is presented through personal environment, network, community, and societal levels of Adams and Allan (1998), the structure of support offered in friendship groups, and finally, and how groups sustain themselves over time.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusions

Recapping the Study

The intention of this study is to describe the phenomenon of women's informal friendship groups for women in higher education via a qualitative interview process involving open-ended questions constructed to elicit the processes and phases occurring in these groups. To this end, I created a call for participants directed to several professional groups for women in higher education including the National Association for Student Personnel Administrators, the American College Personnel Association, specifically through the Standing Committee for Women, and the North Carolina Association for Women in Education. I also contacted several women's lists including WISA-L, the listserv for NASPA women in higher education, and AFROWOSCHO, a list for black women in higher education, as well as women's organizations at my own doctoral institution.

Identifying and Selecting the Participants

Through the process mentioned above, I was able to initially identify more than 10 possible groups of women who volunteered to participate. As stated in previous chapters of this dissertation, I was overwhelmed at the immediacy of the response, the poignancy of the initial stories, and the willingness of busy professional women to participate in this research project. After further screening to identify those groups that fit the selection criteria, I arranged interviews with seven groups of women in colleges and universities across the country.

The seven groups meeting my research criteria consisted of groups of females who have been meeting for one or more years, have the majority of members working in higher education, and consider themselves "bounded;" that is, membership is well-defined and accepted by members. Finally, selection criteria depended upon members' availability to participate in an hour-long personal interview, and ethnic and geographical diversity. An ethnically diverse sample proved to be the most difficult to achieve. Using an initial process of snowball sampling did not produce the diverse sample required for this study. Since the initial respondents were Caucasian, all initial respondent groups were re-contacted and asked to provide additional information about the ethnicity of their members. When this did not reveal ethnically diverse

groups, I contacted AFROWOSCHO and other listservs targeting ethnic women in higher education. Five months after beginning the interview process, I was able to obtain permission to interview members of a friendship group of African American women. The results of the latter interviews created a profound effect on the analysis and interpretation of my findings in previous groups. The process of data collection, analysis, and writing proceeded in the following four phases outlined here.

First stage: Interviews and coding of data. In total, I interviewed 36 women in seven friendship groups across the country. The groups included women at three research institutions, one community college, two private church-related liberal arts colleges, and one comprehensive university. I interviewed as many as seven members in the largest group and as few as four in the smaller groups. Although I was not able to interview all the members of every group, I interviewed the majority of members in each of the participating groups. Out of a total number of 41 group members in the seven friendship groups, I interviewed 36. After an initial contact by email, I was able to conduct most of the interviews in person. A few (six) I conducted on the telephone due to distance of the interviewee. Before transcription began, I reviewed all interview tapes and made additions to my field notes, clarifying my experiences of each interview. After my trained assistant or I transcribed the data, I conducted a case study analysis of the data from each friendship group using the constant comparative method of grounded theory as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). In this endeavor, I used the qualitative software applications QSR NU*DIST 4.0™ and NVIVO 1.1™ to ease the coding and categorizing of the interview transcripts. After completing the analysis of each case, I conducted an additional process of cross-case analysis to define relationships between cases and identify overarching themes emerging from the data. To corroborate my analysis, a colleague reviewed and coded a section of the data in QSR NU*DIST™ that enabled her to view the original text, my coding, and analysis. Approximately 178 nodes (codes) originated from the analysis stage that were later collapsed into categories that began to become recognizable as major and minor themes within or between groups. From this point, the analysis continued by going back into the literature to seek

confirmation or support for some of the findings or to begin to identify where I was on new ground.

Second stage: Writing the cases. A key factor or benefit in choosing to do a qualitative research study over a quantitative one is to be able to accurately hear and retell the participant's stories. I think qualitative researchers immerse themselves in accurately collecting stories of their participants in the same way that counselors immerse themselves in hearing the stories of their clients (Coles, 1989). Each has the potential to be fascinating and has something new to share. Storytelling is inherent in capturing the lived experience of the participants, sharing the richness of the data by bringing it to life while making it more comprehensible for the reader (Adams, 1989). Therefore, part of the analysis process for this study on women's friendship groups involved writing each group case study within the framework established by the research questions upon which the study is based. To do this, I identified common themes and key points expressed by the majority of the members while also noting individual differences in construction or views by a single member about another or about the whole group.

Third stage: Analyzing the processes and phases. The next stage of analytical writing for this dissertation sought to identify threads of data woven through cases and individual interviews, describing them in specific terms of relationship to the phases and processes of friendship. Did they express cognitive, affective, or behavioral aspects of a friendship group? Did they occur at formation, maintenance, or dissolution stages of group development? Did groups or individuals stay the same or did they change? This lengthy analysis sorted out the findings and offered insight into interactions between phases and processes.

Fourth stage: Final thoughts on friendship groups. I have come to know, intimately, the meaning of the term constant comparison. For in engaging in a qualitative study, one is never finished with one's analysis. There are so many pages of data, nuances, and relationships to be explored that one can only hope to have sorted through it all with the most judicious eye, trained ear, and infinite command of the literature as one begins to make assumptions about the phenomena in which one has been so long engaged. My observations and analysis reflect my gender and life stage as well as the experiences of a career in higher education. With this in

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mind, I offer the following as overarching themes I have identified in my qualitative study of seven friendship groups of women in higher education.

Assessing Quality in Friendship Research

In 1989, Adams and Blieszner published an edited book on older adult friendship. The intent of the volume was to study friendship through the "interplay between structure and process (p. 12)." In their introduction to the volume, the authors stressed that this approach to friendship research should not be restricted to friendships of older adults. Researchers from a plethora of disciplines study friendship. Just as the term "friend" is open to the definition of the researcher or participant, criteria for structuring research on friendship have been largely unspecified in much of the literature. The result is what Adams (1989, p. 17) views as "a hodge-podge of studies, designed with different intentions, using different measures and methods, and with different strengths and weaknesses." As her contribution to the book, Adams conducted an extensive review of current literature involving older adult friendship. After weeding out studies only peripherally related to friendship, she found such variation among criteria used in friendship research that comparisons among studies are very difficult. As a result, she made several recommendations that will strengthen friendship research and provide a common framework for the future. Among these are to: (a) define friendship from a social-psychological definition of the term "friend" instead of one related to physical proximity; (b) study friendship in the context of the environment in which it exists; (c) study specific relationships or the unit of analysis (e.g., network) without making assumptions that one is equivalent to the other; (d) study friendship as a developmental process rather than a static one; (e) use open-ended questions and inductive research techniques instead of survey methodology whenever possible; (f) construct sources other than survey (e.g., face-to-face, email, or telephone) for data collection and to expand the sample; and (g) provide for longitudinal data collection wherever possible. Adams asserted that by including stronger methodological and conceptual decisions, friendship research would be strengthened.

The current study of friendship groups of women in higher education meets many of Adam's suggestions for increased rigor in friendship research. First, while utilizing an inductive,

open-ended process, friendship is defined through a participant's relationship to a group and studied within the context of the academic environment in which it takes place. Second, data collection included multiple contact methods of email, telephone, or face-to-face interviews. Third, I analyzed data at the individual and group levels as well as between group levels. I made every effort to make inferences within and between groups firmly grounded in the data. Last, although this study was not a longitudinal one, participants were able to discuss the development of both their personal roles as group members and their group's evolution over time.

Several significant findings emerged from this study. The results are discussed in terms of the research questions, beginning with the meaning of context. The effect of context in friendship groups was an unexpected finding of this study. As described below context is the "location of relationships within their broader environment" (Adams & Allan, 1998).

The Overall Effects of Context on Friendship Groups

When I first began my study of friendship groups, I had no idea that one of the most important findings to come from this research would create a link between how a friendship group forms and lives relative to the context of the environment from which it emerges. Yet, as it has become increasingly clear during my interviews and later data analysis, context proved to be the essential factor in shaping the form, type of involvement, life, and interaction pattern (to one degree or another) in each group. When it became apparent that the pattern was emerging from the data after the interviews with the First Ladies and later, the Valley Women, it struck me with such force that I began to follow this link back through previous interviews and to discover it there.

I conducted all of my interviews before the publication of Adams and Allen's (1998) book discussing the significance of context in the shaping of friendship patterns. I was unprepared for the impact of this finding and initially identified it as a factor of campus culture. Clearly, the concept goes much beyond campus culture to societal contexts influencing friendship development. I wanted to study it in relation to the impact of culture on the development of friendship groups. Evolving from the effects of culture were backlash effects of elitism, exclusivity, power and gender issues, ethnicity, and religion. The groups most outwardly

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affected by the cultural context of their university environments were The First Ladies, Valley Women, and Wednesday Club. However, all the groups shaped themselves within the prevailing cultural context simply by the fact of being women in a predominately male-oriented environment at the time of their formation. As black women, the Valley Women formed in response to the dual impact of gender and racial contexts in a majority white university.

Personal context. Person-environment interaction theories are familiar to practitioners in student affairs (Rodgers, 1990). These models highlight the effect of interactivity between the student (person) and the campus (environment) and one or more student development theories to create model living/learning environments. Furthermore, the personal environment level of friendship is the contextual unit most familiar to us in terms of research addressing the environmental impact on the individual in a friend relationship.

Women in all seven groups of this study felt the impact of the campus environment and sought the friendship of other women as a support for existing within the environment. As it is with the student on the college campus, the campus culture in which faculty and staff women are employed leaves a strong environmental impact on the lives of individual women in friendship groups. Several factors are involved here. First, for women in this study, gender issues play a strong role in creating needs for affiliation in the workplace. Gender differences regarding women's needs for affiliation have been well documented in the work of Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1982), and Josselson (1996), showing both women's intellectual and identity development are based on women seeking out strong affiliation and connection through relationships.

Second, another factor in the relationship between women in friendship groups and college environment is the transition period of being new. The majority of the members were new to their campus context when they joined together to establish a friendship group. In a very few groups, only the group leaders, (e.g., Dr. C, Ms. P etc.) had been at the college for several years before creating a friendship group.

Career mobility creates situations where women in higher education obtain appointments at colleges geographically far from their support systems (Wilson, 2000). As single women

without the traditional supports of kin, they seek to create friend networks in their new communities. A campus community with a single value celebrating family life caused members of the First Ladies to seek support from other single women. Women in the Best Friends and Wednesday Club originally came together as a safe environment to obtain advice and mentoring from one another on tenure and other academic issues. The term "lifeline" originated from a member of the Wednesday Club as she discussed how the group had helped her cope during her entry into the academic environment. Exclusions to this trend were women in the Merry Moms and some of the Southern Stars who were already in residence and responded to needs for support to juggle multi-level parenting and professional roles.

The Merry Moms sought support as working mothers balancing career, parenting, and marriage. Best Friends created a faculty support group that started as professional and became personal over time. The Southern Stars, mostly women with husbands and children, formed an extension of the workplace through their friendship network to address professional affiliation and support needs. The personal environment structure of friendship groups was most influential as women joined an academic environment or faced a new life stage within a familiar one such as the breast-feeding of the Merry Moms or the Sandpipers facing the death of their friend, Mary.

Network context. Upon initial examination, the network level of environmental impact on friendship groups would seem to be the most important to this study. However, while I view it as being a very rich and important part of the development and maintenance of friendship groups, I suggest that other levels have proven more significant as outcomes of this study. As members of friendship groups, the women participating in the seven groups addressed not only personal environment issues at the individual level but also addressed those same contextual issues from their group persona at the network level. The groups identified other women as potential members through a criterion of "she needed us" that alluded to group members seeing that another woman could benefit from having the group support. As bounded groups, they came to know and trust one another and to depend upon one another for personal and instrumental support to provide basic survival resources or to improve the quality of life in their workplace environment. In order to do so, they at one time or another raised money, provided food, home

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and yard workgroups, child-care, and moving support for their members. As providers of professional support, they coached members on career moves and dissertation support, provided a sounding board for trying out new behaviors or ideas, and exchanged information on coping with the academic environment. In this way, they provided support at each of the three levels named by Kahn and Antonucci in their convoy support model (1980).

The groups also developed certain levels of cohesiveness and a unique group culture of their own through group ritual adapted over time. As groups developed, they created their own history including myths and legends that confirm and contain idealized views of the group culture. Myth has a great deal to do with how groups act out their group entity or personality. Myths increased group cohesion and therefore became an instrument of socialization (Kellerman, 1981). Groups further provided verification of their identity through the naming of each group. This continued a process that provided each group standing, within the workplace environment, as an entity in its own right. At the network level they practiced support for individual's needs within the community by addressing professional issues such as tenure while also meeting needs of members' personal life stage development, e.g., child-rearing, menopause, and death of family members. The network stage develops structures to sustain and maintain group connection and solidarity to create a sense of "we-ness" (Cooley, 1909).

Community context. For the purposes of this study, the community context is indicative of the institutional culture (the university or the work environment of my participants). It is here that I found multiple contextual cues while conducting the participant interviews. I have previously remarked upon how strongly I felt the effects of campus culture during interviews with the First Ladies and how the next set of interviews with the Valley Women was a turning point in my view of friendship groups, their growth and development. It is here at the community level (institutional culture) where I assert that we can touch the crux of the issues that affect friendship group development of women in higher education.

As I have discussed at length in previous chapters, women of color and single women in this study feel the most disenfranchised by the academic institutions into which they are hired. First of all, the academic community is instrumental in creating an environment where, because

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of the chilly climate identified by Sandler (1992) and Sandler et al. (1996), women feel it necessary to come together for understanding and support. Lack of support from the academic community is especially instrumental in creating a need for support for women of color and for single women. They often face situations where there is little support from the local community and few cultural outlets to meet their specific needs. For example, black women have difficulty finding hair and skin care products, salons, and even more importantly, black churches to attend without traveling to distant cities. In the case of the First Ladies, single women were labeled as elitist (the most abhorrent of charges in their university culture) when it became publicly known that they established a closed women's support group in a community that recognized only group or family oriented social organizations. Their dean, who had previously recommended the group to other women, did so without realizing it was, in fact, a bounded group of women friends—a private group of women who happened to be members of the academic community. The resounding outcry forced the women to open the group to all, effectively destroying group entity and solidarity among the already shaky interpersonal relationships within the group.

Wednesday Club members, accused by male faculty of using their friendship group to push forward initiatives within their small mid-western liberal arts college, continued to meet in spite of some snide remarks made by male colleagues. The Merry Moms struggled to balance career and motherhood in an academic research hospital where the term "family friendly" was at times delivered more in name than in substance.

Secondly, a constant struggle exists to construct a community in higher education created from diverse cultural and ethnic constituencies as evidenced by the efforts of the women of the seven friendship groups in this study. Faculty report feeling disenfranchised within the academic world. Group members in this study struggled to create community and establish strong relationships. The ability to use positive confrontive interaction within the group seemed to be essential to successful group solidarity. Palmer (1987), who has written extensively on the subject of community in higher education, posits that conflict is an integral and positive part of building community when addressed in an open, respectful, and honest way. Open communication and positive use of conflict resolution have shown themselves to be important

factors in the success of at least two groups in this study: the Valley Women and the Sandpipers. Each group used appropriate (open, honest, and respectful) confrontation strategies to affirm and support women in their groups. In doing so, groups achieved two ends. First, they created a supportive community for themselves. Second, they were also able to offer colleagues outside their groups the benefit of their strength. In both cases, this interaction created a ripple effect in the academic community enabling them to give almost as fully to the community at large as the women gave to one another through their groups.

Societal context. At the societal level, women's higher education friendship groups address both general issues in American society and gender specific issues representing on-going changes resulting from the feminist movement begun in the 1970s. All groups in this study were affected by the advance of women into positions of responsibility in academe in unheard of numbers prior to the women's movement and legislation requiring gender equity.

There has not been any great war since the 1970s to move people out of their hometown communities. However, increased availability and growth of higher education due to affirmative action for women and minorities of the middle and working classes coupled with ease of transportation has created a society of persons willing to move long distances for greater opportunity. Economic growth in the south and west has provided for employment opportunities in formerly rural areas of the country. The Boomer and Generation X cohorts that included increased numbers of women due to the feminist movement of the 1970s followed these opportunities.

Increased mobility in academic society is coupled with a loss of strong academic communities to assimilate these newcomers. For example, today a working spouse or partner of a female faculty member does not join the Faculty Wives Club to build a social network for the family and establish the faculty spouse's place in society. That spouse or partner has his or her own job, often not at the university. Increased housing costs in university towns along with dual career couples have created situations where many faculty commute to distant cities to pursue their academic careers resulting in the faculty member being disenfranchised even more from the "community of academe."

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Throughout it all, faculty and staff women seek friendship and a sense of belonging in the workplaces they have chosen. As increasing numbers of women enter academic life, women's ways of knowing and affiliation continue to be major factors in their acclamation to the university life.

Interaction Processes as a Function of Trust

The processes of friendship groups revolved around a single common element: the concept of a shared trust established by group members. Trust manifested itself in group interaction through cognitive means as groups thought about groups as safe places for talk and disclosure and held positive thoughts about their member friends. Members also thought that being in a friendship group meant a haven from the pressure of competition found in the outside professional world or as a lifeline for a person new to academe. A friendship group was trusted affectively because of the affection and caring felt among members the majority of the time. Trust in this care allowed members to accept as well-meaning, groups in this study who refrained from confrontation (Southern Stars, Best Friends, Wednesday Club and Primaries) or boldly, but lovingly confronted undesirable member behaviors (the First Ladies and the Sandpipers). Trust also manifested itself in behaviors through the actions of group members toward one another through the provision of support.

Friendship Group Processes as a Structure of Support

Support, a behavioral process, is an integral factor in friendship group development. In previous sections, I discussed how the model developed by Kahn and Antonucci (1980) for a convoy of support applies to the concept of friendship groups in this study. The Kahn and Antonucci model posits that different persons deliver support throughout the lifespan as people move through various life stages. I found support offered in friendship groups through the phases of group development particularly at the initial offering of group membership and in substantial amounts through the maintenance phases.

Support Sustains Groups through Initial Phases

Initial support during the formation and maintenance stages of group development is offered to new members from the selection criterion of "she needed us," a critical factor used by all groups in this study to identify women who would benefit from the support of other women. These new members were most often beginning their careers on the group's campus and as newcomers were therefore more available for new friendships (Gouldner & Strong, 1987). Offering support served several purposes for a friendship group. First, it provided a way to identify new members and evaluate whether the group would be productive for them. Second, using this criterion allowed members to mentor newcomers and give back some of the support older members had received. In this way, group members acknowledged women's needs for connection and affiliation by offering membership that also enabled the group to act in the role of mentor to newcomers. Third, it provided a way to assure the longevity of the group by adding new members seen as compatible with the focus of the group in response to normal attrition.

Support Sustains Individual Members

Acting as a "primary lifeline," friendship groups offer sustenance to individuals who seek affiliation and support in a new work environment (Gouldner & Strong, 1987). Through these links, women learned about the campus culture, tried out coping behaviors, and began to establish professional and social relationships. Effects of this lifeline solidified a woman's role on campus and helped ease the transition to campus life. Personal support offered by friendship groups had a direct effect on the professional transition of the women participating in this study. Women who felt supported by friendship groups in their academic communities showed that they had increased coping skills for navigating academic life or seeking professional advancement. For example, group members supported one another through tenure, obtaining advanced degrees or finishing dissertations, selecting opportunities for university service, and coping with administrative problems.

Women in this study maintained groups populated by women from various disciplines and ages, who became close to one another and supported one another in their academic roles. Academic background by discipline seemed to have little effect on the level of support offered by members of friendship groups in this study. This is contrary to the popular notion that women

only choose to become friends with women who are exactly like themselves. Although many participants enjoyed a common age range and educational level, a few groups sustained their friendships despite variations of discipline and also of educational level, age, and professional responsibility. In this study a common life stage was more important than any other factor for women coming together to provide support.

Support Sustains Maintenance

I found the broadest examples of support in women's friendship groups in higher education in the maintenance phases of group development. The maintenance phase offers individuals the full array of affect, affirmation, and aid supportive activities outlined in the Kahn and Antonucci (1980) model. These activities are described at length elsewhere in this study. To avoid redundancy, I will recap them briefly here:

Affect: (e.g., expressions of liking, admiration, respect, or love). All groups in this study provided affective expressions toward other group members both within and outside of group times together. Listening, sharing, and supporting through words, cards, email, and phone calls showed group members expressions of caring.

Affirmation: Acknowledgment of appropriateness or rightness corresponds to unconditional positive regard in my study. Group members constantly offered support for other members using affirmation. For example, members of the Valley Women offered affirmation in response to feelings of insensitivity from the white academic culture regarding issues of race. First Ladies members were provided information on how to conduct themselves within the power structure of a college run by mostly male administrators and the Sandpipers supported one another with coping skills for dealing with administrative bureaucracy.

Aid: (e.g., instrumental support). Aid is delivered physically or intellectually to group members in every one of the seven friendship groups in this study. Often it comes in conjunction with affective support. For example, the Best Friends provided affective support when Dr. L's brother died along with bibliotherapy offerings on the topic of coping with loss. I have previously outlined the multiple ways that the Sandpipers and First Ladies provided physical

support for members of their groups as well as for their campus communities through collecting money, food donations, work parties, and other activities.

<center>Effects of Phases in Sustaining Groups over Time</center>

Findings of this study indicate effects of cohesion, interaction style, and constant renewal were instrumental in sustaining friendship groups.

How Groups Change Over Time

Friendship groups change over time as they move through formation, maintenance, and possibly dissolution phases of group development. Groups in this study conduct their primary work in the maintenance phase. They move rather quickly through formative stages (identifying initial members, establishing common goals, and beginning a group history) into maintenance of the group where the real development of group solidarity begins. Cooley's "we-ness" (1909) and Yalom's (1985) "groupness" are the goals of this movement. Cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes begun in the formation stages are solidified and built upon as group members seek to create greater group cohesiveness over time. Group cohesion has several components. Depending upon the researcher conducting the analysis (Wilson, 1978; Yalom, 1985), cohesion generally includes factors of attraction, group norms, common goals, awareness of membership, and mutual values and respect, along with high levels of interaction. As noted in Chapter 5, groups in this study developed group cohesion through a spiral effect, ever moving and changing in response to actions of group members.

Accidental cohesion and the spiral effect. Friendship groups do not consciously conduct business with the intent of shoring up group cohesiveness. Group cohesion is the result of an outgrowth of activities initiated by groups in response to the personal needs of members. For example, we know that rituals strengthen a group and reinforce group history (Kellerman, 1981). The Best Friends created their Christmas quilts out of a long-term process of exchanging gifts during the holidays and the interest of two members in quilting. In a similar vein, the Southern Stars' birthday celebrations, which were their initial reason to come together, became a ritual and common reason to stay together.

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Women's needs for affiliation and support, which are well documented by a number of researchers on women's intellectual and identity development (e.g., Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Josselson, 1994), became part of the affect and affirmation provided in supportive exchanges between group members as they listened to one another, exchanged information, and conducted the activities of their lives together. By doing so, members of groups began to develop levels of cohesiveness that resembled blood relationships. As long as they maintained a reasonable level of group cohesion that included maintaining mutual values, unconditional positive regard, and trust, they had the ability to feel close and committed in a sort of elastic relationship similar to those of families. Many of the women in this study likened members of their groups to a sister or family member—people they attributed as knowing them, their history, what was important to them, and having their best interests at heart. Women friends also felt that as primary relationships they were structured with a level of elasticity. Elasticity meant that group friendships could stretch themselves to accommodate different levels of spontaneity and ability to make demands among friends (Bates & Babchuk, 1961).

Factors Contributing to Group Cohesion

Two factors proved to be major contributors to the development of group cohesion in women's friendship groups. They are constant renewal and interaction style.

Constant renewal. Much of the time, assumptions of elasticity, spontaneity, and freedom to make demands in women's friendship groups were correct. High levels of interaction, unconditional positive regard, shared time, and mutual values and respect did create highly cohesive friendship groups for women in this study. However, when these groups began to flounder or, in some cases, fail due to a group crisis, these were two factors that I found essential to be present for a group to return to higher levels of cohesion. The first of these was an outside stimulus or issue that created a need for the group to pull together, renew their shared interests, and re-focus. In addition to the ebb and flow of group interest, women members needed this stimulus to regain their center, especially after years of being together as a group. Women in several groups (e.g., Best Friends, Southern Stars, Merry Moms, Wednesday Club) commented on the difficulty in maintaining a continued level of commitment and time when their groups

seemed more or less close. Reasons to maintain the group ranged from group loyalty to being part of the history to trust that the group would re-evolve to a more cohesive state. Dr. A identified this process as "constant renewal." Constant renewal indicates the group still maintained enough of the previously mentioned factors influencing cohesion to effectively self-renew.

Interaction style. The second factor that influenced a group's ability to return to higher levels of cohesion was a process that affected the internal workings of women's friendship groups, the interaction style utilized by the group. In Chapter 5, I discussed the different interaction styles used by friendship groups and showed how two of them, the Valley Women and the Sandpipers, used a loving but openly confrontive style. Use of this interaction style allowed the Valley Women and the Sandpipers to confront negative behaviors of group members up front. They were able to achieve this by using a no-nonsense approach laced with humor and caring attention to address issues within the group. This interaction style resulted in increased group cohesion as group members clearly expressed expectations for group norms and member behaviors. Wilson (1978) identified functions of low and high cohesion in informal groups. Groups with high cohesion maintained high consensus on both group norms and group status (among others elements) while negatively sanctioning unsupportive behaviors. Cohesive groups also maintained a friendly interaction, high awareness, and high morale with fully engaged members.

Friendship groups in this study having less open styles of interaction tended to have more problems maintaining high levels of cohesiveness within their groups. If this pattern was coupled with other factors, such as an especially difficult cultural context problem similar to those experienced by the First Ladies (internal strife plus the impact of a negative campus culture), problems could develop that would affect the group's ability to survive as a cohesive group. While it was possible for friendship groups in this study to survive in altered states of lowered group cohesiveness, group members recalled the times of high cohesion as the most satisfying. They lamented the loss of what they had once experienced. I would assert that the demise of a friendship group carries a greater sense of loss than the fading away of some dyadic

relationships. A friendship group is a rarely found, unique, and organic entity, and as such is not easily come by.

<center>Implications for Theory Development</center>

Friendship groups are part of a larger system affected by the academic culture in which they exist. As systems, they are influenced by factors in the academic context, the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes, and the phases of formation, maintenance, and dissolution. Shifts in any one of these parts create a subsequent reaction in the rest of the system. The results of this study of seven friendship groups of women in higher education have shown clearly that the context in which friendship groups are formed is the primary factor influencing their formation, maintenance, and dissolution. Cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes occurring within these phases are mitigated by the influence of context on the women members of the friendship groups. Figure 2 presents an illustration of these findings. While not meant to represent a theoretical model, this figure does illustrate the interactivity between the context, processes, and phases of friendship group development based on the theoretical construct developed by Adams and Blieszner (1994).

As shown in Figure 2, the context of the academic environment influences the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes that create an impetus for group phases. Figure 2 also attempts to show how processes generating group trust affect the phases at each point in friendship group development. Initially, friendship trust processes are begun or influenced by the academic context or university environment in which the group exists. Over time, the context continues to affect these trust processes positively or negatively as friendship groups work to maintain group cohesiveness and attend to the needs of the group. When group cohesiveness is negatively affected due to changing expectations of some group members, friends may renew efforts to sustain the group or begin to move toward dissolution. It can be assumed that the full benefit of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes (including trust and support) available from members at a particular stage of group development are offered at each group phase. This study has shown that cognitive, affective, and behavioral trust processes increase and deepen over time as groups move from formation to maintenance stages of group

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development. This finding supports research on the development of group cohesion discussed earlier in this chapter (Wilson, 1978; Yalom, 1985).

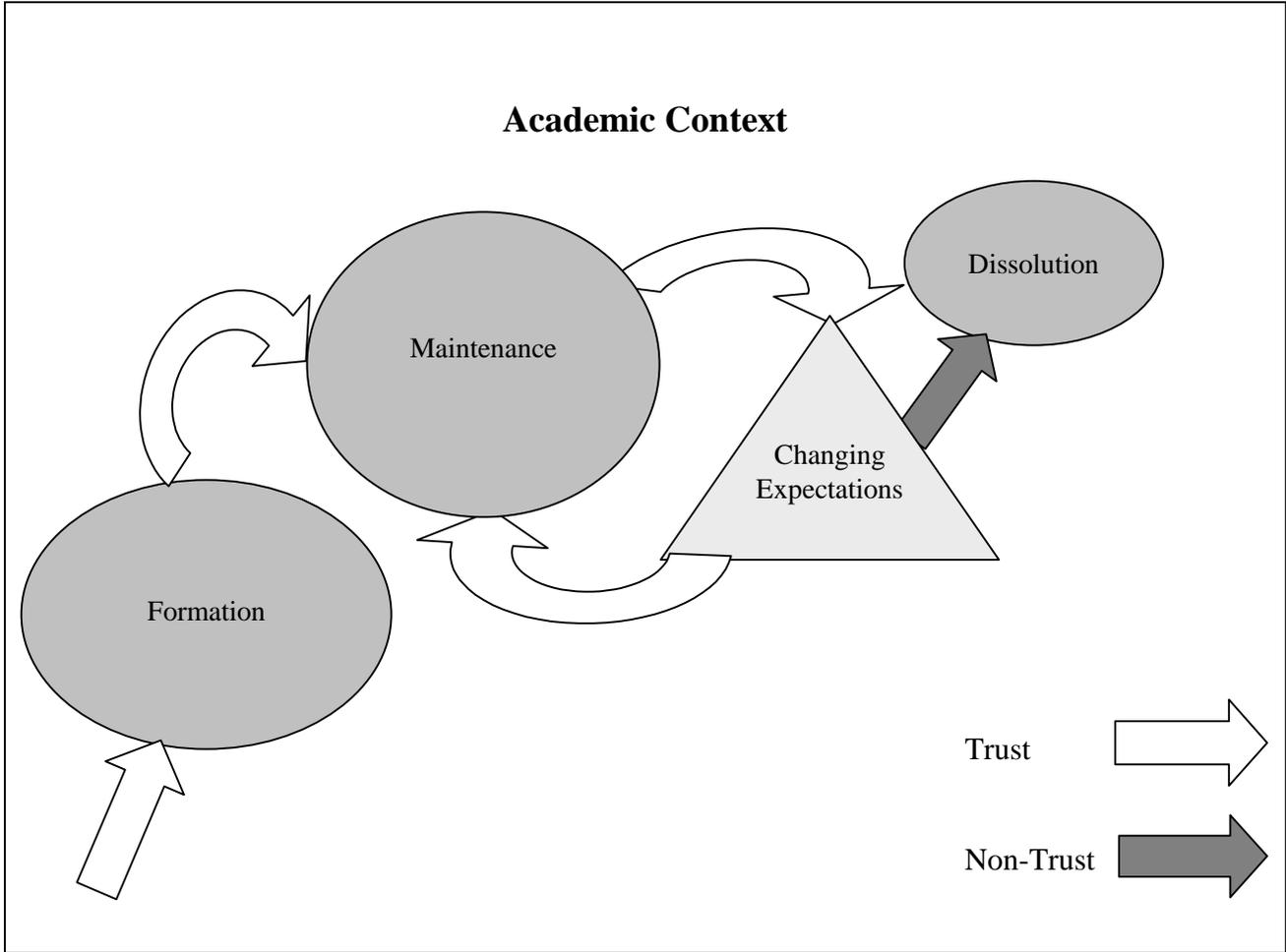**Academic Context**

Dissolution

Maintenance

Changing
Expectations

Formation

Trust

Non-Trust

Figure 2. The interaction of friendship phases and processes on decisions to sustain friendship
group membership by women in higher education.

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It may also be assumed that Figure 2 presents the trust processes that are dwindling as groups move from maintenance to changing expectations and possibly dissolution. Although none of the groups participating in this study went through a dissolution process during the data collection stage for this dissertation, the First Ladies had drastically reconfigured their group through the changing expectations of both the community and needs of group members. This group exemplified the process of constant renewal in reaction to changing patterns of solidarity and contextual influences. Other groups also experienced constant renewal, however they were not forced to accept the contextual rigidity experienced by First Ladies and could renew themselves to new levels of cohesiveness.

<div align="center">Relationship to the Literature</div>

<u>Theory</u>

The Adams and Blieszner (1994) conceptual framework for friendship specifically addresses structure and process in friendship dyads and networks of all sizes and types. I have used this model to discover the unique properties of the informal friendship groups that are the focus of this study. Many of the basic properties of both dyadic friendships and friendship networks are similar, with the expectation that dyadic friendships can offer greater density, opportunities for deeper commitments, and greater personal interaction. Networks are made up of dyads of members who know one another well in addition to those who are of lesser acquaintance (Adams & Blieszner, 1994). Networks may be less dense than the friendship groups involved in this study and their member interactions less intimate. Although there was some variation in their cohesion as small groups, friendship group members know one another quite well—usually sharing information on a level not commonly seen in a less densely structured network environment. Therefore, groups in this study represent a unique level of friendship.

Findings of this study contribute to the expanding literature in the field of close relationships by extending the depth of knowledge about friendship in informal bounded groups. This study, considers how friendship groups contribute to knowledge of friendship in context. Findings of this dissertation also identify small group friendships as a rich and legitimate next

step for study since most research to date has explored dyadic or more extensive network friendships. The present work on friendship groups allows a bridge to be built between the two larger areas of research: dyads and networks, while noting that there are commonalities as well as differences between the types of friendships. Most importantly, the results of this study extend the findings on the effect of context on friendship (Adams & Allan, 1998) and provide additional insight into context as a major factor in the life (processes and phases) of a friendship group.

Process Factors

Friendship groups presented a mixture of qualities identified by researchers as "freedom to make demands" in looking at educational and class distinctions in terms of friendship as a support network for women (Bates & Babchuk, 1961; Gouldner & Strong 1987). Some of the women in this study provided instrumental care and support in a manner very similar to that provided in a family; other groups provided only intellectual support for their members. Perhaps geographically mobile, educated, middle-class women have the ability to offer a third level of support combining all of Antonucci's levels of support (affect, affirmation, and aid) rather than the class related findings supported by Gouldner and Strong (1987).

A friendship quotient (Gouldner & Strong, 1987) for groups in this study influenced the number of new members coming into a friendship group however, the "liking criteria" of Gouldner was replaced by the criterion of "she needed us" in these women's friendship groups. Members of groups in this study varied somewhat in educational level and age; however, most groups were composed of similar age and occupationally related women who work in academe (Matthews, 1986; Rawlins, 1992). Similarities to the family relationships proposed by Becker's discussion of friendship families (1991) were found in this study. Members of the most cohesive groups in the study thought of one another as extended family or sisters.

Findings on friendship group members concurred with many of the qualities of the new breed women identified by Gouldner and Strong (1987). Clearly, the mobility of career women is a factor in seeking new friendships and support systems within workplace settings. Women in this study also had in common a value of utilizing women as providers of support despite the time constraints imposed by busy careers and family responsibilities. Study participants also

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concur with findings by O'Connor (1992) that women value the friendship of women as acceptable partners for leisure activities, although many participant women did not have or take time out for what they would term, leisure friendships. Dr. C of the First Ladies provided a good example of a woman discovering the power of women's friendship for the first time. Ms. PK described the satisfaction she obtained from her experience as a member of the Merry Moms despite juggling a long commute, strenuous job, and a young family.

Woman talk. Talk provided the same foundation for friendship groups as it has done for women's dyadic friendships (Oliker, 1989). Women talked about work, home life, children, personal problems, and the campus community. Humor was often a part of this talk as were supportive and caring affirmations. In this study, both family members and members of the campus community acknowledged and gave emotional space to group members to meet together. Only in instances issues where power and elitism came into question (e.g., First Ladies, Wednesday Club) were groups sanctioned for coming together. A primary purpose for woman talk in friendship groups is to provide support followed by supportive aid as discussed at length in this study using the convoy model developed by Kahn and Antonucci (1980). Antonucci's work on support was developed for dyadic relationships but a case was made for its adapted use with small groups for application in this study.

Group cohesion. Kellerman (1981) and Yalom (1985, 1970) provided a framework for the development of group cohesion that was utilized extensively in this study along with the work of Wilson (1978). Development of a strong cohesive group was an important predictor of longevity for friendship groups in this study. Multiple factors identified as contributing to cohesion included high interaction, attraction, establishment of group identity and common goals, and mutual values and respect. Rituals established by groups celebrated group history and aided in establishing group identity. During the maintenance phrase, groups in this study created a spiral effect similar toYalom's theory of small group process (1985) as they deepened ties of group cohesion. The groups moved in and out of levels of cohesion in relation to the factors noted above.

Women in Higher Education

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<u>Two Steps Forward, One Step Backward</u>

       In Chapter 2, I conducted a thorough review of the literature on the career roles of women in the academy. A book I cited at length in this section (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988) described women, particularly faculty, who felt unheard and unsupported as they made their way through the ranks. Today discrimination against women and people of color is much more subtle than it was 13 years ago. In general, white women in this study are not the recipients of overt discrimination, as workplaces make a show of being family friendly by hosting pump rooms (Merry Moms), allowing flex-time, or by being accepting of women in faculty and staff roles (Southern Stars, Best Friends, Sandpipers). However, academic environments for women of color (Valley Women) and some single women (First Ladies, Wednesday Club) have been unable to become more accepting of differences related to race or gender. Therefore, institutional culture and lack of community (Palmer, 1987) are still very strong issues for all members of the campus community. They become the primary reasons for issues of context, age, ethnicity, and gender to insure that women will seek out friendships for mentoring, support, and affiliation in their roles as professional women in higher education.

<div align="center">Suggestions for Practice</div>

       This study about the processes and phases of friendship groups of women in higher education should bring forth some recommendations for policy changes at institutional levels. Results of the study have shown a strong relationship between the context (academic culture or environment) and the development of women's friendship groups as a function of affiliation and support for academic women at both staff and faculty levels. The field of higher education must examine policies in place for the recruitment, hiring, and support for retention of all new faculty and staff. Precious resources are being lost to attrition when systems are not in place to support new hires after they enter professional life in the academic community. This type of false economy can only result in increasing numbers of talented faculty and staff leaving academe to seek employment elsewhere. The social capital of universities can be utilized to provide personal contact and support in the workplace for all employees. This can occur through funding to

implement institutional policies supporting parenting, job sharing, released time from the tenure track and administrative careers as well as opportunities for collaborative efforts in research, teaching, or administrative work across disciplines.

There are several ways for our academic communities to recognize and achieve a value of interdependent community (a criterion noted by Palmer) through social capital. For example, with increased funding women's centers could assist in the creation and promotion of women's mentoring programs. In turn, tenure and merit review processes could be revamped to provide credit to faculty who serve by mentoring students and colleagues in the workplace. In addition to mentoring opportunities, institutions of higher education could support opportunities for faculty and staff to join in community service and volunteer work on behalf of their local communities.

University as internal catalyst. Research has shown early mentoring opportunities are important to newcomers in a workplace environment (Twale & Jelinek, 1996). Informal groups are often, in fact, great equalizers by bringing into contact faculty and staff of different academic ranks, disciplines, and at times, age groups. What can the university do to enhance the academic climate to support and develop employees in the workplace? First, universities should not assume that departmental support is enough (Ray, 1987). Departmental diversity may not meet or compensate for lack of support systems within the regional areas where women employees must reside. Opportunities for support can be provided by the university in terms of extended-time orientations for new staff and faculty, and through network groups. Second, allowing time for people to meet and get to know one another before or after meetings or other scheduled events by serving refreshments and pairing faculty and staff in new colleague programs will increase opportunities for organic development of friendships. Third, creating interdisciplinary work-teams for task forces or committees will offer opportunities to meet others outside of a newcomer's area of work. Fourth, providing time and funding for interdisciplinary research and co-teaching will create opportunities for faculty and student affairs staff to work together on issues such the freshman or senior year experiences or to examine retention issues.

Utilization of social capital along with directed funding of supportive, community-building processes would create a synergy of involvement and renewal for new and senior level

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employees alike. The result will be increased employee retention, job satisfaction, and service to students, research, and community partners.

<div align="center">Suggestions for Further Research</div>

With the conclusion of this research project, there are several areas of inquiry I would like to suggest for further research. First, a next step beyond the findings of this study would be to investigate the impact of interaction style on longevity in women's friendship groups. Are there other group interaction styles that are especially effective in promoting cohesiveness and maintenance processes in friendship groups? Is there any relationship to class or ethnicity in the use of these communication styles? A second area of interest would be to investigate the effect of ethnicity and socioeconomic class as factors influencing longevity of women's friendship groups. Further areas of inquiry might investigate the existence of friendship groups of women outside the academy and how they are similar or different from those in the context of academe. Last, a study might look at the impact of membership in a women's friendship group as a predictor of future involvement in similar groups. Do academic women who have been members of friendship groups tend to create or join other groups of similar type as an outcome of career mobility?

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Women in higher education seek friendships with other women for affiliation, coping, mentoring, and support against contextual presses in the academic environment. Friendship groups in this study represented diversity in environment, institutional type, and educational level of members; however, their experiences were remarkably similar in both the phases and processes of friendship group development. Friendship groups offered support and affirmation of identity to professional women in the academy through groups that became "more than the sum of our parts" (Allan & Adams, 1998, p. 191) and provided a unique opportunity to bond with other women over their common experiences of being women.

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List of Appendices

· · Appendix A: Call for Participants: North Carolina Association for Women in Education

For submission to the February, 1997 edition of the NCAWE newsletter (published approximately four times per year by the association)

SPECIAL PERSONAL NEWS:

Would you be willing to share your story with me regarding your friendships with other women? I am seeking the help of NAWE members in identifying women who are willing to participate in my dissertation research. I am conducting a qualitative study involving personal interviews of 1-2 hours with women in higher education who are members of an "informal friendship group," I would like to be able to conduct individual interviews with all the members of a friendship group, if possible.

An informal friendship group consists of women who have spontaneously and over a significant period of time (years) formed a bounded group (membership is closed) which meets consistently for the purpose of sharing their mutual experience of being a woman. These groups are not "official" groups of any kind-professional organizations, Junior League, church women or support groups for any identified problem area and were not formed with an official agenda in mind, i.e. they are not self-esteem groups, nor recently divorced women's groups nor career transition groups. The women in them know exactly to whom they refer when they mention this group to others in their world and consistently commit time and support to one another as part of their mutual involvement.

If you are the member of such a group or know of someone who is or would just like to talk to me about this topic, I would be most happy to be in contact with you. I am completing my Ph.D. at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA in Counselor Education and Student Personnel Services. My academic experience involves 15 years in counseling, career development, and student success at UNC-CH, Appalachian State, and North Dakota State Universities. I am happy to be back "home" and nearer my own informal friendship group. You may contact me by E-mail at ksack@vt.edu or by phone: 540-953-1739 (h) or mail at 609 S. Main St., Apt. 2., Blacksburg, VA 24060. Thanks a lot.

Kathy Sack

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate, Members of the Women in Student Affairs Listserv

(WISA-L)

Hello fellow colleagues,

I would like to take this opportunity to ask your assistance in identifying participants for my dissertation on women in higher education. Would you be willing to share your story with me regarding your friendships with other women? I am seeking the help of WISA-L members in identifying women who are willing to participate in my dissertation research. I am conducting a qualitative study involving personal interviews with women in higher education who are members of an "informal friendship group." I would like to be able to conduct individual interviews with all the members of a friendship group, if possible.

An informal friendship group consists of women who have spontaneously and over a significant period of time (one or more years) formed a bounded group (membership is closed) which meets consistently for the purpose of sharing their mutual experience of being a woman. These groups are not "official" groups of any kind: professional organizations, Junior League, church women or support groups for any identified problem area. Nor were they formed with an official agenda in mind (i.e., they are not self-esteem groups, nor recently divorced women's groups, nor career transition groups). The women in them know exactly to whom they refer when they mention this group to others in their world and consistently commit time and support to one another as part of their mutual involvement.

If you are the member of such a group, know of someone who is, or would just like to talk to me about this topic, I would be most happy to be in contact with you. I am completing my Ph.D. at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in Blacksburg, VA in Counselor Education and College Student Affairs. My academic experience involves 15 years in counseling, career development, and student success at UNC-Chapel Hill, Appalachian State, and North Dakota State Universities. Currently I am taking the academic year "off" to complete my dissertation. I am also happy to be back "home" and nearer my own informal friendship group. You may contact me by E-mail at ksack@vt.edu, by phone: 540-953-1739 (h), or mail at 609 S. Main St., Apt. 2., Blacksburg, VA 24060. Thank you very much, as always, for your support.

Kathryn W. Sack, Ed.S., NCC
"Kathy"

Appendix C: Screening Interview Protocol

_____   _____
Contact name   Address, Telephone
Hello_____(name of contact),
        My name is Kathy Sack from Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. I am conducting a qualitative study involving research on women's friendships for my doctoral dissertation. I received your name from _____(referral source), whom I interviewed for my study. She mentioned that you are also involved in a woman's friendship group and might be willing to talk with me about your experience. Do you have a few moments to speak with me about this?
        <u>Yes</u>: (proceed to questions)
        <u>No</u>: (Alternate: could we arrange a time I could call you again when it would be more convenient?)
         Date, time to recontact: _____

I have chosen this topic for my dissertation because I am also the member of a friendship group. Could you tell me a little about yourself and your friendship group by answering the following questions:

1. Are all the members of your group women?

2. How many members do you have? Is your group open to anyone or would you consider its membership quite stable?

3. Are all the members of the group working in higher education? If not, how many are in higher education?

4. How long have you been meeting?

5. Would you be willing to participate in an in-depth interview about your experience as a member of a friendship group?

6. Do you think that the other members of your group would be willing to participate also?

7. Could you provide me with the names of the other members of your group and a way to contact them?
    <u>Alternate</u>: Would you be willing to speak to the other members of your group about participating in this study on women's informal friendship groups?
Thank you very much for your information and cooperation. I will look forward to seeing (talking) with you on _____(date, time, place). I you need to contact me at any time prior to the interview, please call me at 540-953-1739 or email me at ksack@vt.edu.

Appendix D: Participant Data Sheet

Today's Date:
Place:
Time:
Interviewer's Name:

Participant's Name:

Street Address:

City, State, Zip:

Area Code and Telephone:

E-Mail:

Age:

Marital Status: Single   Married   Divorced   Separated   Remarried
                          Widowed

Number of Children:

Ethnic Group: Black   Hispanic   Native American   Pacific Islander   White Other

Employing College/University:

Highest Degree:

Position or Job Title:

Name of Friendship Group (if any):

Number of Women in My Friendship Group:

Years in Friendship Group:

Appendix E: Virginia Tech Institutional Research Board Protocol

Justification of Project

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of women's informal friendship groups for women employees in higher education. Data will be collected by asking members of five friendship groups to participate in semi-structured interviews focusing on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes, developmental phases, and support mechanisms inherent in these groups. The study is designed to gain a better understanding of how friendship netgroups function for women working in higher education. Specifically this study is designed to explore the following research questions:

1. What processes (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) occur within informal friendship groups of women in higher education?
2. How do informal friendship groups move through phases of development (formation, maintenance, and dissolution)?
3. How do informal friendship groups provide support for women in higher education?

The results of this research might contribute to theoretical understandings of close relationships, specifically friendships of adult women, by providing insight into the processes and developmental phases occurring in friendship networks. The field of close relationships is a relatively new one and scholars have identified friendship network processes as an area requiring further exploration. Of particular interest is the relationship between types of processes occurring within networks or between dyads that make up a network. Additionally, this research may contribute knowledge regarding the connection between friendship processes and phases in networks.

Finally, results of this research might contribute to practice by providing information about support mechanisms that assist women's successful integration into the academy. In this way, it may inform practitioners in areas of counseling, faculty or staff development, or career development regarding important issues for women beginning or continuing academic careers.

Procedures

Participant groups for this study will be selected utilizing the snowball or chain method from groups of women staff, faculty, or graduate students at higher educational institutions throughout the United States. Notifications of the study will be sent to members of two national professional organizations for women in higher education and to professional women's organizations at Virginia Tech. In order to meet the selection criteria, participant volunteer groups must have a minimum of four members, have been active as a group for one or more years, maintain closed or clearly designated membership, and all members must be women who are employed in higher education.

Participant groups will be limited to women in order to explore the informal friendship

group as a support mechanism utilized by women in higher education. The chilly climate for women in academe has been well-documented (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Sandler, 1992).

Participants will be asked to participate in one in-person or telephone interview of approximately one hour. Interviews will take place in the home or office of the interviewee or another mutually agreed upon location. Prior to the interview each participant will be asked to complete a data sheet (see enclosed). The interview protocol will involve four questions:

1. Tell me about your friendship group.
2. What things do you talk about or do within your group that are meaningful for you?
3. How has your group evolved over time?
4. How do you feel participation in this group has (or has not) supported you?

Risks and Benefits

There are no major risks associated with the study. Participants may experience some discomfort revealing information of a personal nature (i.e., needs for support).

The results from this study will contribute to knowledge about the support mechanisms utilized by women in the academy.

Participants will be provided a transcript of their interview to review and make comments on after it is transcribed. Their commentary will be incorporated into the data analysis.

Participants desiring to do so may obtain a summary of the research results by contacting the researcher in August, 1997.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

Participants will be assigned a subject number, to be referred to on all documents and in interviews. Each subject number identifies the subject by friendship group, Carnegie Institutional designation category, marital status, ethnic group, age, and career area (e.g. academic, student affairs, other etc.).

Audiotaped interviews will be the primary source of data collection in this qualitative study. The investigator will transcribe all interview tapes and analyze the text using a computer assisted data analysis program to assist the process of constant comparison for development of grounded theory.   During the transcription and analysis, the tapes will be kept in a locked box in the researcher's home. The tapes will be destroyed five years after completion of the study.

Informed Consent

(A copy of the informed consent form is attached.)

Biographical Sketch

Kathryn W. Sack, doctoral candidate in Counselor Education and College Student Affairs, will serve as investigator of the research project. Ms. Sack received her BA in English and Speech Education from Western Michigan University, an MS in Speech Education from Purdue University, and an Ed.S. in Counseling and Student Development from Appalachian State University. She has received extensive training in counseling and interpersonal relations through both counseling practica and Doctoral and Specialist Internships. Her professional career includes 15 years in College Student Affairs work. She was a specialist in career development at the Career Planning and Placement Offices at UNC-Chapel Hill and Appalachian State. Additionally her administrative experience includes six years as Assistant Director of Career Development at Appalachian State University, a part-time appointment as Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor of Student Development, and two years as Director of Project Success at North Dakota State University. She currently serves as a graduate assistant in the Office of the Associate Provost for Academic Administration at Virginia Tech.

Ms. Sack's research interests focus on women's issues in the academy, faculty and career development, and undergraduate student success. She has been active in professional organizations in her field and currently is on the board of the North Carolina Association for Women in Education.

Don G. Creamer, Professor of Education, will serve as co-chair of the research project. Dr. Creamer received his B.A. and M.Ed. at East Texas State University and the Ed.D. from Indiana University. He has directed the College Student Affairs program at Virginia Tech for the past twenty years and is the author of several texts on college student affairs theory and practice. Dr. Creamer has also served on the editorial board of the Journal of College Student Development and received the senior professional Annuit Coeptis Award of the American College Personnel Association in 1989.

Rosemary Blieszner, Professor of Family and Child Development, will also serve as co-chair of this research project. Dr. Blieszner received the B.A. from Mercyhurst, the M.S. from Ohio State University and the Ph.D. from Pennsylvania State University in Human Development-Family Studies with a concentration in Adult Development and Aging. Her research focuses on family and friend relationships and life events in adulthood and old age, with an emphasis on the contributions of close relationships to psychological well-being. She is the author or editor of several major books on adult friendship. In 1996, Dr. Blieszner was elected a fellow of the American Psychological Association and was selected as one of five finalists for the New Contribution Award of the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships.

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects

Title of Project: <u>The Role of Informal Friendship Groups in the</u> <u>Personal and Professional</u> <u>Lives of Women in Higher Education</u>

Investigator: <u>Kathryn W. Sack</u>

<u>Purpose of the Study</u>

  The purpose of the study is to gain a better understanding of the processes, phases, and support mechanisms of women's informal friendship groups for women in higher education. Data is collected by asking members of five informal friendship groups to participate in semi-structured interviews regarding their experiences as a group member. The study is designed to explore the function of informal friendship groups for women working at colleges and universities in the United States.

II. Procedures

  Prior to participation in the research study, each participant will be asked to fill out a data sheet, read and sign an <u>Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects Form</u>, and select a time for an interview. This information will be returned to the researcher prior to the interview via an enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope or brought to the interview appointment. Data will be collected during March and April, 1997. Each member of a friendship group will be asked to participate in a semi-structured in-person or telephone interview of approximately one hour. Interviews will be conducted in the home or office of the interviewee or another mutually agreed upon location and time. All interviews will be tape-recorded. Information provided in interviews will remain confidential and anonymous.

III. Risks

There are no major risks associated with the study. Participants may experience some discomfort revealing information of a personal nature (i.e., needs for support).

IV.   Benefits of this Study

The results from this study will contribute to knowledge about friendship group phases, processes, and support mechanisms utilized by women in the academy. Each participant will be provided a copy of her interview to review and comment on after it is transcribed. This commentary will be incorporated into the data analysis. Participants who desire a summary copy of the research study may request one by contacting the researcher after August, 1997.

V.   Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Participants will be assigned a subject number, to be referred to on all documents and in interviews. Each subject number identifies the subject by friendship group, Carnegie Institutional designation category, marital status, ethnic group, age, and career area (e.g., academic affairs, student affairs, other etc.).

Audio-taping of the interviews will occur. Interview tapes will be maintained in a locked box in the researcher's home. The tapes will be destroyed five years after completion of the study.

VI.   Compensation

No compensation is available for participants in this study.

VII.   Freedom to Withdraw

Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time by notification to the researcher. Participants are free not to answer any questions they may choose without penalty.

VIII.   Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

IX.   Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

•   I will agree to respond as honestly and fully as I can to the interview questions asked by the investigator, Kathryn W. Sack.

- I will agree to review and provide written comments on the transcript of my interview to the interviewer.
- I will agree to return my comments to the investigator within two weeks. I understand that I may do so by U.S. Mail in the envelope provided or via electronic mail.

X. Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

_____

    Signature   Date

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact:

Kathryn W. Sack, Investigator...540-953-1739

Don G. Creamer, Advisor..540-231-9705

Rosemary Blieszner, Advisor...540-231-5437

Tom Hurd, Chair, IRB, Research Division................................540-231-5281

Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your friendship group.

2. What things do you talk about or do within your group that is meaningful for you?

3. How has your group evolved over time?

4. How do you feel participation in this group has (or has not) supported you?

Participant Data Sheet

Today's Date:
Place:
Time:
Interviewer's Name:

Participant's Name:

Street Address:

City, State, Zip:

Area Code and Telephone:

E-Mail:

Age:

Marital Status: Single   Married   Divorced   Separated   Remarried
                       Widowed

Number of Children:

Ethnic Group: Black   Hispanic   Native American   Pacific Islander   White   Other

Employing College/University:

Highest Degree:

Position or Job Title:

Name of Friendship Group (if any):

Number of Women in My Friendship Group:

Years in Friendship Group:

Appendix F: Request to Review Interview Transcript

<div style="text-align: right">

S. Main Street
Blacksburg, VA 24060
Date

</div>

First Name Last Name
Title
Address 1
Address 2
Address 3

Dear First Name,

Thank you for taking time to participate in my study on women's informal friendship groups. Your comments and recollections have meant a lot to my study. They will add to the richness of the literature on women's sources of support in the academy. In addition, it was wonderful to have the opportunity to meet and get to know you in this way.

As we previously discussed, I am enclosing a copy of the transcript of your interview that took place on [date] at [place]. Please take a moment to read the transcript and make any changes or comments you wish. If there is information you would like to add or clarification you would like to make, feel free to do so. You may write directly on the text.

You may use the enclosed postage paid envelope to return the revised document to me. I would appreciate receiving your comments by return mail in order to incorporate the data into my study in a timely manner. Thank you again for your willingness to participate. I appreciate your time, your interest, and your comments.

Sincerely,

Kathryn W. Sack, Ed.S., NCC
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix G: Contact Summary Form

Contact type: Site:_____
     Group name_____
     Visit _____   Contact date _____
     Phone _____   Today's date_____
                                    Written by   _____
                                      (With whom)

1.   <u>What were the main issues or themes that struck you in this contact?</u>

2.   <u>Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions you had for this contact.</u>
           <u>Question</u>   <u>Information</u>

3.   <u>Anything else that struck you as salient, interesting, illuminating or important in this contact?</u>

4.   <u>Which research questions and which variables in the initial framework did the contact bear on most centrally?</u>

5.   <u>What new hypotheses, speculations, or hunches about this topic were suggested by the contact?</u>

CONCERN: <u>Stop.</u>

revision 1.1.127   Licensee: Kathryn W. Sack

Project: Friendship Groups NV **User:** Kwsack   **Date:** 7/11/00 - 7:34:40 AM
<u>NODE LISTING</u>

Nodes in Set: All Nodes
Created: 6/26/99 - 6:05:56 PM
Modified: 6/26/99 - 6:05:56 PM
Number of Nodes: 256

1	Free Node
2	(1) /DOCS
3	(1 1) /DOCS/School
4	(1 1 1) /DOCS/School/Southeastern Comm~ College
5	(1 1 2) /DOCS/School/Mid-Atlantic University Medical Center
6	(1 1 3) /DOCS/School/Southeastern Private College
7	(1 1 4) /DOCS/School/MidWest Private College
8	(1 1 5) /DOCS/School/Southwestern Research University
9	(1 1 6) /DOCS/School/Southeastern Comprehensive University
10	(1 1 7) /DOCS/School/Southeastern Research University
11	(1 2) /DOCS/Carn~ Rnk~
12	(1 2 1) /DOCS/Carn~ Rnk~/A~A~
13	(1 2 3) /DOCS/Carn~ Rnk~/Comp~
14	(1 2 4) /DOCS/Carn~ Rnk~/Bacc~ II
15	(1 2 5) /DOCS/Carn~ Rnk~/Bacc I
16	(1 2 6) /DOCS/Carn~ Rnk~/Research I
17	(1 3) /DOCS/Group Name
18	(1 3 1) /DOCS/Group Name/Sandpipers
19	(1 3 2) /DOCS/Group Name/Best Friends
20	(1 3 3) /DOCS/Group Name/Merry Moms
21	(1 3 4) /DOCS/Group Name/First Ladies
22	(1 3 5) /DOCS/Group Name/Wednesday Club
23	(1 3 6) /DOCS/Group Name/Southern Stars
24	(1 3 7) /DOCS/Group Name/Valley Women
25	(1 4) /DOCS/Race~Marital
26	(1 4 1) /DOCS/Race~Marital/W-Married
27	(1 4 2) /DOCS/Race~Marital/W-Divorced
28	(1 4 3) /DOCS/Race~Marital/W-Single
29	(1 4 5) /DOCS/Race~Marital/B-Married
30	(1 4 6) /DOCS/Race~Marital/B-Divorced
31	(1 4 7) /DOCS/Race~Marital/B-Single
32	(1 5) /DOCS/Job title
33	(1 5 1) /DOCS/Job title/Administrative Supervisor~
34	(1 5 2) /DOCS/Job title/Technical Specialist
35	(1 5 3) /DOCS/Job title/Support Staff
36	(1 5 4) /DOCS/Job title/Unit Director
37	(1 5 5) /DOCS/Job title/Clinical Coordinator

38	(1 5 6) /DOCS/Job title/Vice President
39	(1 5 7) /DOCS/Job title/Public School teacher
40	(1 5 8) /DOCS/Job title/Asst~ Professor
41	(1 5 9) /DOCS/Job title/Asst~ Professor
42	(1 5 10) /DOCS/Job title/Instr~,
43	(1 5 11) /DOCS/Job title/Asst~ to the ~ Dean
44	(1 5 12) /DOCS/Job title/VP and Dean
45	(1 5 13) /DOCS/Job title/Assoc~ Dean
46	(1 5 14) /DOCS/Job title/Professor
47	(1 5 15) /DOCS/Job title/Professor
48	(1 5 16) /DOCS/Job title/GA,
49	(1 5 17) /DOCS/Job title/Assoc~ Dir
50	(1 5 18) /DOCS/Job title/Academic Advisor
51	(1 5 19) /DOCS/Job title/Asst~ Dir
52	(1 5 20) /DOCS/Job title/Assoc~ Dir
53	(1 5 21) /DOCS/Job title/Administrative Asst.
54	(1 5 22) /DOCS/Job title/ Systems Analyst
55	(1 5 23) /DOCS/Job title/Administrator
56	(1 5 24) /DOCS/Job title/ Pharmacist
57	(1 5 25) /DOCS/Job title/Clinical Staff
58	(1 5 26) /DOCS/Job title/Assoc~ Dir ~
59	(1 5 27) /DOCS/Job title/Assoc~ Dean
60	(1 5 28) /DOCS/Job title/Director
61	(1 5 29) /DOCS/Job title/Acad. Administrator
62	(1 5 30) /DOCS/Job title/Asst Dir
63	(1 5 31) /DOCS/Job title/Assoc Dir.
64	(1 5 32) /DOCS/Job title/Prof
65	(1 5 33) /DOCS/Job title/Prof
66	(1 5 34) /DOCS/Job title/Prof
67	(1 5 35) /DOCS/Job title/Program Coord. ~
68	(2) /PH
69	(2 1) /PH/form
70	(2 1 1) /PH/form/how started
71	(2 1 2) /PH/form/age vs~ stage
72	(2 1 3) /PH/form/institutional size
73	(2 1 4) /PH/form/age vs~ stage 2
74	(2 1 4 2) /PH/form/age vs~ stage 2/institutional size
75	(2 1 4 46) /PH/form/age vs~ stage 2/changing talk re~ career ladder issu
76	(2 1 19) /PH/form/person seen as needing~benefiting fr
77	(2 1 38) /PH/form/effect of culture
78	(2 1 39) /PH/form/effect of culture 2
79	(2 1 52) /PH/form/academic climate
80	(2 2) /PH/maintain
81	(2 2 1) /PH/maintain/strategies
82	(2 2 1 2) /PH/maintain/strategies/constant renewal
83	(2 2 1 3) /PH/maintain/strategies/known members
84	(2 2 1 7) /PH/maintain/strategies/connection~history
85	(2 2 1 7 2) /PH/maintain/strategies/connection~history/length of membership
86	(2 2 2) /PH/maintain/contact
87	(2 2 2 1) /PH/maintain/contact/outside group mtgs

88	(2 2 2 22) /PH/maintain/contact/who's at group gatherings~
89	(2 2 7) /PH/maintain/neg~ effects of new members
90	(2 2 9) /PH/maintain/rituals of group~meetings
91	(2 2 10) /PH/maintain/leaving group
92	(2 2 12) /PH/maintain/changing need for group
93	(2 2 14) /PH/maintain/Group crisis and effects
94	(2 2 15) /PH/maintain/group threatened
95	(2 2 16) /PH/maintain/configuration-closeness of dyads
96	(2 2 19) /PH/maintain/Name
97	(2 2 25) /PH/maintain/loose federation
98	(2 2 29) /PH/maintain/solidarity
99	(2 2 36) /PH/maintain/positive effects of new members
100	(2 2 37) /PH/maintain/closed groups
101	(2 2 44) /PH/maintain/group size
102	(2 2 58) /PH/maintain/leveler
103	(2 3) /PH/dissolution
104	(2 3 1) /PH/dissolution/different styles
105	(2 3 2) /PH/dissolution/evolution
106	(2 3 2 1) /PH/dissolution/evolution/changing expectations
107	(2 3 4) /PH/dissolution/effect of 9
108	(3) /PROC
109	(3 1) /PROC/Cog~
110	(3 1 1) /PROC/Cog~/trust thinking
111	(3 1 2) /PROC/Cog~/inter~ thoughts-friend
112	(3 1 2 1) /PROC/Cog~/inter~ thoughts-friend/help friend
113	(3 1 4) /PROC/Cog~/STORIES
114	(3 1 5) /PROC/Cog~/friendship quotient
115	(3 1 5 8) /PROC/Cog~/friendship quotient/decisions to offer invitation~who~ho
116	(3 1 6) /PROC/Cog~/meaning of group
117	(3 1 7) /PROC/Cog~/formal vs~informal
118	(3 1 30) /PROC/Cog~/life expectation of friendship
119	(3 2) /PROC/Affect
120	(3 2 2) /PROC/Affect/hostility
121	(3 2 2 6) /PROC/Affect/hostility/betrayal
122	(3 2 2 7) /PROC/Affect/hostility/stress
123	(3 2 2 12) /PROC/Affect/hostility/concealing feelings
124	(3 2 2 17) /PROC/Affect/hostility/competition among members
125	(3 2 2 33) /PROC/Affect/hostility/affect-discomfort
126	(3 2 2 42) /PROC/Affect/hostility/elitist
127	(3 2 2 51) /PROC/Affect/hostility/affect~hurt feelings
128	(3 2 2 53) /PROC/Affect/hostility/affect~jealousy
129	(3 2 3) /PROC/Affect/loyalty
130	(3 2 3 7) /PROC/Affect/loyalty/connection~history
131	(3 2 3 39) /PROC/Affect/loyalty/what is a friend
132	(3 2 3 56) /PROC/Affect/loyalty/philosophy of life
133	(3 2 4) /PROC/Affect/commitment
134	(3 2 4 5) /PROC/Affect/commitment/unique
135	(3 2 4 6) /PROC/Affect/commitment/meaning of group
136	(3 2 4 7) /PROC/Affect/commitment/connection~history
137	(3 2 4 21) /PROC/Affect/commitment/giving good daughter-good christian

138	(3 2 5) /PROC/Affect/appreciation
138	(3 2 5) /PROC/Affect/appreciation
139	(3 2 5 8) /PROC/Affect/appreciation/Valuing of friendship
140	(3 2 5 40) /PROC/Affect/appreciation/feelings of closeness
141	(3 2 22) /PROC/Affect/LIFELINE!
142	(3 2 22 12) /PROC/Affect/LIFELINE!/newbie lifeline
143	(3 2 22 41) /PROC/Affect/LIFELINE!/newbie-ness
144	(3 2 24) /PROC/Affect/unconditional positive regard
145	(3 2 24 26) /PROC/Affect/unconditional positive regard/mutual values
146	(3 2 24 28) /PROC/Affect/unconditional positive regard/mutual respect
147	(3 2 50) /PROC/Affect/sisters
148	(3 3) /PROC/Beh~
149	(3 3 1) /PROC/Beh~/trust
150	(3 3 2) /PROC/Beh~/disclosure
151	(3 3 2 1) /PROC/Beh~/disclosure/location effect
152	(3 3 4) /PROC/Beh~/confidentiality
153	(3 3 5) /PROC/Beh~/Support
154	(3 3 5 1) /PROC/Beh~/Support/personal
155	(3 3 5 1 16) /PROC/Beh~/Support/personal/resource exchange
156	(3 3 5 2) /PROC/Beh~/Support/professional
157	(3 3 5 2 1) /PROC/Beh~/Support/professional/getting in
158	(3 3 5 2 2) /PROC/Beh~/Support/professional/solidarity
159	(3 3 5 2 4) /PROC/Beh~/Support/professional/organic group development
160	(3 3 5 3) /PROC/Beh~/Support/not like family
161	(3 3 5 3 1) /PROC/Beh~/Support/not like family/like family
162	(3 3 5 4) /PROC/Beh~/Support/instrumental
163	(3 3 5 5) /PROC/Beh~/Support/social support
164	(3 3 5 5 8) /PROC/Beh~/Support/social support/conflict
165	(3 3 5 5 12) /PROC/Beh~/Support/social support/recip~ sharing
166	(3 3 5 5 12 1) /PROC/Beh~/Support/social support/recip~ sharing/effect marital status
167	(3 3 5 5 19) /PROC/Beh~/Support/social support/effects of marital status
168	(3 3 5 11) /PROC/Beh~/Support/confrontation
169	(3 3 6) /PROC/Beh~/priviledge
170	(3 3 8) /PROC/Beh~/concealment
171	(3 3 9) /PROC/Beh~/accommodation
172	(3 3 10) /PROC/Beh~/displaying affection
173	(3 3 11) /PROC/Beh~/conflict
174	(3 3 11 1) /PROC/Beh~/conflict/confrontation
175	(3 3 11 1 7) /PROC/Beh~/conflict/confrontation/confrt=stronger
176	(3 3 11 1 13) /PROC/Beh~/conflict/confrontation/not spitefull
177	(3 3 11 2) /PROC/Beh~/conflict/last straw-trigger~
178	(3 3 12) /PROC/Beh~/girl talk ~casual talk~
179	(3 3 13) /PROC/Beh~/indiv~ roles within group
180	(3 3 13 17) /PROC/Beh~/indiv~ roles within group/who leads
181	(3 3 14) /PROC/Beh~/humor
182	(3 3 15) /PROC/Beh~/communication
183	(3 3 15 1) /PROC/Beh~/communication/professional
184	(3 3 15 1 5) /PROC/Beh~/communication/professional/bitching
185	(3 3 15 1 5 1) /PROC/Beh~/communication/professional/bitching/frequency
186	(3 3 15 1 6) /PROC/Beh~/communication/professional/advice
187	(3 3 15 12) /PROC/Beh~/communication/Modes

Curriculum Vitae

KATHRYN WILKINSON SACK

5104 North Oaks Drive
Greensboro, NC 27455
336-545-6922
kwsack@nr.infi.net

CAREER OBJECTIVE:
Faculty position in counseling and college student affairs.

EDUCATION:
Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies with a concentration in Counselor Education and Higher Education Student Affairs
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia
Defense: January 30, 2001
Dissertation: "Primary lifelines: informal friendship groups of women in higher education"
Advisors: Drs. Don G. Creamer and Rosemary Blieszner
A qualitative study of women in seven friendship groups utilized to support women working in higher education that identified the interaction between the environmental context, cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes, and traced group movement through the friendship phases of formation, maintenance, and dissolution.

Ed.S. in Counseling and Student Development, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina. (CACREP accredited program)
M.S. in Communications (Interpersonal Communication), Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.
B.A. in Education (Double Majors in English and Speech), Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

CERTIFICATIONS and HONORS:
Chi Sigma Iota (professional counseling honor society), 1997
Virginia Tech Student Affairs Division Research Funding Award, 1997
National Certified Counselor, 1984-present

TEACHING INTERESTS
Career Development, Counseling Issues for Women, The Student Development Professional as Educator, The American College Student, Peer Counseling: Issues and Techniques, Small Group Process, Qualitative Research in Student Affairs, Supervision

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Adjunct Faculty Member, Graduate School of Education, Department of Human Development and Psychological Counseling, Appalachian State University, 1987-1994

The Freshman Seminar, fall semesters 1988-1990

> Three hour elective undergraduate course emphasizing adjustment to university life, resources, study skills, and critical thinking utilizing Gardener model (20 students per section)

Life and Career Planning, fall 1987, spring 1988

> Introductory three-hour elective undergraduate career and life planning course. (20 students per section)

Career Counseling Theories and Techniques, fall term, 1993 (guest lecturer)

Peer Counseling Techniques, fall and spring semesters, 1988-1993

> Taught counseling and human relations skills to training classes of undergraduate peer counselors and supervised their progress throughout the semester.

RESEARCH INTERESTS:

Qualitative research, the impact of organizational culture on retention and academic success; counseling issues for women; peer counseling in professional settings; women's friendship in the workplace; career development; faculty development

SUPERVISION:

Graduate Counseling Supervision (Interns and Graduate Assistants), Peer Career Center, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, 1989-1994

Undergraduate Peer Counselor Supervision, Peer Career Center, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC, 1989-1994

Undergraduate Student Orientation Leaders and Academic Tutors, North Dakota State University, Fargo, ND, 1994-1996

INTERNSHIPS:

Doctoral Counseling Intern, New River Mental Health Center, Boone, NC, 1992

Counseling Intern, Career Development Center, Appalachian State University, 1983

Counseling Intern, Counseling and Psychological. Services Center, Appalachian State University, 1983

Career Counseling Intern, Counseling and Psychological. Services Center, Appalachian State University, 1983

CONSULTING:

Ashland Community College, Division of Student Affairs, Ashland, KY, October, 1996

UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE
University of North Carolina Greensboro, Greensboro, NC:
Assistant Director for Experiential Learning, Career Services Center, October, 1997-present

Counseling and Program Development: Experiential Learning

Developed technology based delivery system for internship program; Counseled students in 19 departments of the College of Arts and Sciences; Consulted with faculty departments as they implemented or expanded their internship programs; expanded program to School of Business and other academic departments on campus; Promoted experiential learning concepts through teaching workshops for faculty and students; Served as consultant to Provost's office on experiential learning issues for UNCG; Invited speaker on experiential learning for College of Arts and Science, Science Advisory Board; Corporate Relations Committee; UNCG Board of Trustees; and Undergraduate Curriculum Committee; Provide career counseling, job-seeking, resume, and interviewing support for students in addition to internship advising

Initiated contacts with employers to promote internship opportunities; developed technology to facilitate process for employers seeking interns by responding with on-line resume referrals; Reorganized and supervised Internship and Summer Job Fair; Sponsored presentations and interviews for NC State Summer Internship program; assisted students in preparing application packet and interviews resulting in: 50% increase in UNCG students selected for NC State internships; Headed task force to implement a new student employment office at UNCG; served on review and search committees for three staff hired; Assisted in gathering start-up resources.

North Dakota State University, Fargo, North Dakota:
Director, Project Success, 1994 - 1996.
Enrollment Management/Retention

Created and directed new student affairs unit mandated to implement effective retention services via development of proactive orientation programs linked with mentoring programs for faculty and peers, increased accessibility of tutorial services; provided leadership for mandatory student success course; Implemented model peer advising program for College of Business in conjunction with financial support from Student Government; Developed all-campus tutoring program, "Super Tutor", in cooperation with Student Support Services to serve students in the general population; Initiated Ad Hoc Committee to form first NDSU Parent's Association and Family Weekends in conjunction with student honorary, admission office, and alumni affairs

Directed budget and operations of $150,000 annually in state and local accounts; Directed all Freshman, Transfer, Non-Traditional, and Parent Orientation programs, modified new

student Orientation program with increased peer training for leaders, emphasis on quality advising, and parent involvement; Supervised professional, support, and paraprofessional staff of 25; Wrote grant resulting in $10,000 award funding Supplemental Instruction program for Chemistry department; Began development of tracking system for identification of "at-risk" students; conducted research on impact of implementation of support strategies on academic success and retention. Participated in Minneapolis National College Fair, on-campus Discover Days and admission outreach in North Dakota and Minnesota as member of enrollment management team

Appalachian State University, Boone, NC
Assistant Director, Career Development Center,
Coordinator of Peer Counseling Center (Peer Career), 1986 - 1994.

Counseling and Career Development
Provided complete counseling and placement services for 3000+ students in College of Arts and Sciences; presented classroom training in career development processes and strategies; Developed liaisons with employers; articulated transition skills of liberal arts students to world of work; Generated employer participation in campus career fairs, panels and other educational events

Program Development: Special Populations and Peer Career Center
Developed career planning strategies for special populations including learning disabled, athletes, and minority students; Initiated, staffed and trained peer counselors in career counseling unit serving 2000 students annually; supervised operation of facility; utilized computer-assisted career guidance programs, DISCOVER and SIGIPLUS; Planned and implemented delivery system for new campus career counseling program; Developed campus wide liaisons with academic departments and General College advisors to provide counseling services and referrals; Developed and presented highly rated career planning program for Parent Orientation

Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor for Student Development, January-July, 1990.
Student Affairs Administration

Assisted Acting Vice-Chancellor with administrative duties; wrote division annual report; Coordinated preparations for summer 1990 Parent Orientation program; Served as advisor to Campus Judicial Board on revision of judicial code; Division representative to Academic Integrity Board on policy revision; Attended Chancellor's cabinet meetings on behalf of Vice Chancellor, Coordinated Aids Awareness Week, Take Back the Night and Honors Day program

Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA:
Volunteer Career Advisor, Career Services Spring semester, 1997

Staffed technology lab; assisted students with use of on-line recruiting software; Provided internship and summer job workshops, Served as consultant for walk-in appointments regarding resume and job search

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC:
Placement Counselor, University Career Planning and Placement Services, 1983 - 1986.

Coordinated all career placement and counseling efforts for 7500+ students in education, college teaching, library science curricula (B.A.-Ph.D); Coordinated state's largest education career fair (120+ systems, nationwide); Conducted outreach workshops, taught resume, vita, job seeking and interviewing skills; Served as librarian for 900+ volume career library

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS:
Graduate Assistant, Office of the Provost, Virginia Tech, 1996-1997
Coordinated four day new faculty/administrator tour of Virginia and ACE-VIP exchange program between women faculty and administrators at Virginia Tech and UVA; Served as Webmaster for Provost's web page; managed two administrative listservs

Graduate Assistant/Instructional Developer, Hubbard Center for Faculty and Instructional Development, Appalachian State University, 1981-1983
Assisted faculty with project grants and curriculum design; facilitated faculty workshops in teambuilding.

OTHER EMPLOYMENT
News Editor, Teacher Corps Project, Appalachian State University. Boone, NC
Secondary English/Speech Communications teacher, Tippecanoe County, Lafayette, Indiana and Alexandria City Schools, Alexandria, Virginia
Residence Hall counselor, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan
Counselor, Upward Bound Program, Western Michigan University

PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS:
Sack, K.W. (submitted chapter). Reflections on the unfolding of a career. In H. Anderson (Ed.), Voices from the other side of the academy: Women in student affairs.

Sack, K.W. (1994). The multi-advantages of the peer career center. Journal of Career Planning and Employment,. 54, 24-26.

Sack, K.W. (1989).Testing the waters with faculty: Troubled or calm. <u>Journal of Career Planning and Employment</u>, <u>49,</u> 27-29.

Atkins, S.S. & Sack, K.W. (1983). Implementation of a staff development program in the counseling center. <u>UNC Student Services Compendium, II</u>, 55-59.

Sack, K.W. (Ed.). (1976-1977). A report to the university: ASU-ASHE county teacher corps newsletter. Boone, NC: Appalachian State University.

Sack, R.T. & Sack, K.S. (1974). Attitudes of teachers and mental hygienists about behavior problems of children. <u>Psychology in the Schools, 11,</u> 4, 445-448.

Papers in revision:
Sack, K.W. Renewing the passion: Faculty development and the freshman seminar.

Sack, K.W. Natural transitions: The role of the student development professional as faculty development specialist.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS:

"Primary Lifelines: Friendship groups of women in higher education", North Carolina Association of Women in Education Fall Conference, Greensboro, NC, September, 2000.

"Celebrating Partnerships for the New Millennium: Contemporary Issues for Women in Student Affairs", NCCPA/NCHO Conference, Greensboro, NC, November 1999.

"Critical Issues for the New Millennium", American College Personnel Association Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, March 1999.

"Beyond Renewal: New Paradigms for NDSU", National Orientation Director's Conference-Region V, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, April 1995.

"Celebrating Diversity: The Critical Role of Freshman Seminar as a Faculty Development Tool," Conference on the Freshman Year Experience, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, February 1990.

"Career Counseling for the Handicapped Student," UNC General Administration Committee on Handicapped and Learning Disabled Students, UNC General Administration, Chapel Hill, NC, October 1988.

"Leaving Your Job at Work: Stress Management", Southern Association of Student Employment Counselors Conference, Charlotte, NC, July 1988.

"Career Strategies and the Price of Success", Executive Secretary Seminar, Broyhill Center for Continuing Education, Appalachian State University, July 1987, July 1988, July 1989

"Career Planning for Parents of College Students," NASPA/NCCPA Spring Conference, Asheboro, NC, April 1988.

"Career Planning Today for Tomorrow's World," Watauga Business Center/Watauga Council on the Status of Women, May 1987.

"The Educational Job Fair: A Viable Recruiting Technique", Panelist, Southeastern Association of College and University Staffing, Atlanta, Georgia, January 1987.

"Making Your Liberal Arts Degree Pay Off in the Job Market," Faculty and Student Affairs Staff, UNC-Asheville, November 1985.

Getting Ready: A Job Seeker's Guide, "Taking Stock of Yourself," Orange County Women's Resource Center, Chapel Hill, NC, July 1985.

"Job Search and Professional Development Strategies for Student Development," North Carolina Association for Counseling and Development, February 1985 (with others).

"Institutionalizing the Parent: An Orientation Program for Parents that Pays Off," American College Personnel Association, April 1984 (with others).

"Faculty Development Consultation: An Emerging Role for Counselors and Student Affairs Professionals", North Carolina College Personnel Association, November 1982 (with others).

"Teamwork: Making It Happen," North Carolina Association of Women Administrators, Deans, and Counselors, October 1982 (with others).

UNIVERSITY SERVICE:

Division of Student Affairs Program Review Committee for UNCG Counseling Center, 1998
UNCG Dean of Arts and Sciences Committee on Experiential Learning, 1999
UNCG Provost's Task Force on Service Learning, Fall, 1998
UNCG College of Arts and Science Internship Committee, 1997-1998
UNCG Student Affairs Staff Development Committee, 1997-1999
UNCG Step Ahead Orientation Committee, 1998-1999
Alternate, UNCG Staff Council, 1999-2000

NDSU College of Agriculture Academic Advising Committee, 1995-1996
"Career Planning for the 1990's," Parent Orientation presenter, Appalachian State University, 1986-1994
Southern Association of Schools and Colleges, Student Development Evaluation Committee, 1991
ASU Committee on Institutional Study and Planning (CISP), spring 1990
ASU Student Development, Staff Development Committee
ASU Student Associations Budget Committee, Chair
ASU Student Development Budget Council
ASU Staff Quality of Life Survey, Interviewer
UNC-CH Student Affairs Staff Development Committee

COMPUTER SKILLS:

Webmaster, Provost's Web Page, Virginia Tech
Hardware: MAC, IBM
Software: Excel, Access, Power Point, Publisher, Word, JobTrak, NVIVO, NUDIST

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS:

American College Personnel Association,
        Directorate member, Standing Committee on Women, 1997-2000
        Coordinator, Research Committee, SCW
North Carolina Association of Women in Education
        Past President, 2000-2001
        President, 1999-2000
        President Elect, 1998-1999
        Vice President, 1984 - 1986; Conference Chair, 1986;
        Executive Committee, 1988; Executive Board, 1996-1997
American Counseling Association (1983-1994, 1996-1998)
Southern Association of Colleges and Employers
North Carolina Association of Colleges and Employers,
        Conference Committee, 1988; On-site arrangements, 1992;
        "Memorable moments"- 25 Years, 1994.
North Carolina Career Information Consortium (for Discover Users),
        Vice President, 1990 - 1992