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Are we dating? : an exploratory study of nonsexual, passionate friendships between women

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Linda Christine Chupkowski
Are We Dating?
An Exploratory Study
of Nonsexual, Passionate
Friendships Between Women

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to explore nonsexual, passionate friendships between women. Particular areas of interest were challenging the binary between “just friends” and “lovers,” as well as exploring the meaning of the lack of a term for identifying these friendships in women’s lives. This study attempted to answer the following research question: How do women conceptualize, define, and make sense of their nonsexual, passionate friendships?

This qualitative study involved interviewing 14 women selected from a sample of convenience. The interview questions were open-ended, allowing the women to share narrative accounts of their friendships in their own words.

The findings indicate that women who experience passionate friendships consider such friendships to be unique, meaningful, and committed. Participants also addressed the issue of inadequacy within the language to capture the essence of their friendships. There were similar themes to traditional intimate relationships such as emotional growth and identity development fostered by the friendship, jealousy, break-ups, and shifts and changes in the relationship. There also was a blending of the language used to describe non-sexual intimate friendships and the language used to describe sexual relationships, and occasionally a blending of the emotions and sexual feelings between the two kinds of relationships. More research is essential to further understand nonsexual, passionate friendships and to better enable clinicians to validate and mirror their clients.

ARE WE DATING? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF NONSEXUAL, PASSIONATE
FRIENDSHIPS BETWEEN WOMEN

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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2007

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“Oh, the comfort—the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person—having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pouring them all right out, just as they are, chaff and grain together; certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and then with the breath of kindness blow the rest away.”

Dinah Maria Mulock Craik.

Oprah is famous for being a talk-show host, a philanthropist, a healer, an actress, an activist, a reader, and a leader. She is not famous because of her personal relationships, but because of her fame, her relationships have come under public scrutiny. It is well-known that Oprah has a committed male partner as well as a 30-year-long friendship with her best friend Gayle. Oprah confesses that they call each other four times a day. She builds a “Gayle wing” in each of her houses. Because of their intimacy and closeness, they are often accused in the tabloids of being a lesbian couple (Kogan, 2006).

In an interview in *O, The Oprah Magazine*, Oprah discusses her friendship:

I understand why people think we’re gay. There isn’t a definition in our culture for this kind of bond between women. So I get why people have to label it—how can you be this close without it being sexual? How else can you explain a level of intimacy where someone *always* loves you, *always* respects you, admires you? (Kogan, 2006, p. 188)...In a way, our friendship is better than a marriage or a sexual relationship. You know, there’s no such thing as unconditional love in a marriage as far as I’m concerned, ‘cause let me tell you, there are some conditions. So don’t ask me to give you unconditional love,

because there are certain things I won't tolerate. But in this friendship, there isn't an expectation because there isn't a model for something like this. There isn't a label, there isn't a definition of what this is supposed to be....Something about this relationship feels otherworldly to me, like it was designed by a power and a hand greater than my own. Whatever this friendship is, it's been a very fun ride—and we've taken it together. (Kogan, 2006, p. 246)

Oprah is describing what is called in the academic literature a nonsexual, passionate friendship. She is also communicating the fact that there is no well-known, popularly understood term for these friendships in American culture.

These nonsexual, passionate friendships are understudied, perhaps because they are not recognized as a discrete category of friendship, worthy of attention. Lisa Diamond has looked at these friendships in adolescents. She defines them with the following criteria: inseparability, jealousy, cuddling, preoccupation, separation distress, and/or fascination with one another (Diamond, 2000). Her work has also recognized that participants in passionate friendships are often preoccupied with each other and frequently commit to the relationship, sometimes making future plans together (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999). Diamond says that there is a common assumption that intense, intimate, passionate friendships experienced by adolescent girls who later come out as lesbians or bisexual women are really just expressions of repressed or denied sexual attraction (Diamond, 2002). However, she argues that if we listen to women recount their friendships in their own words, we will recognize that this is not the case (2002). She demonstrates that there are more than two discrete categories of friendship (i.e. "just friends" or "lovers") and that there is a great deal more going on in these intimate friendships than repressed sexual energy (Diamond, 2002). Additionally, her research shows that passionate friendships occur between women, regardless of their

sexual orientation (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999). Much of Diamond's work argues that passionate friendships are unique in their own right and deserve research and attention paid to them as such (2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, Diamond & Dubé, 2002, Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999).

When Oprah talks about the lack of label for this kind of friendship in our culture, she does so with ambivalence. On the one hand, she seems to lament the lack of a model for what she has with Gayle; on the other, she describes the freedom and lack of expectation she feels because there are no rules for this type of friendship. This discussion of a label or a model for these friendships is important.

Language has the power to define and shape experience. If humans experience something, but do not have the words to describe or understand it, we may feel confused, different, isolated, unheard, or unseen (Diamond, 2000). Without having language to name the experience, it is possible to feel a lack confidence in defining the experience. Likewise, it is difficult as a clinician to mirror a client's experience without the language to reflect it. Such is the case of passionate friendships between women. A woman who is involved in a non-sexual, passionate friendship with another woman may wonder, "Why do I feel this way? What does this mean? Am I crazy?"

Additionally, without language, mirroring is difficult and mirroring within the culture is impossible. The words "marriage," "boyfriend," "girlfriend," and more recently, "partner" have come to define and shape experiences in modern-day America. There exists a whole cultural set of rules, norms, and expectations that define and describe romantic relationships. These descriptors establish boundaries and expectations within the relationship; and they enable the existence of mirroring to occur on a cultural

level. When someone says, “She’s my girlfriend,” others know what that means and can respond accordingly. When a couple begins a marriage or a partnership, culture can mirror this with celebration, gifts, and shared joy. If the marriage or partnership ends, others can feel empathy because they understand the depth of this loss.

When a woman is in an intimate, non-sexual passionate friendship with another woman, she will most likely not experience this mirroring that occurs on a cultural level. In contemporary American society, we distinguish between “just friends” and “lovers.” However what happens when one is more than “just friends,” but is not “lovers?” When “just friends” decide to move in together, do other friends and family gather to celebrate and bring household gifts? If there is a break up, will friends and family understand and share the individuals’ mourning? This lack of cultural mirroring can create an isolating, lonely experience.

Historically in America, there exists a context for these relationships. Boston Marriages, for example, were popular in the late 1800s (Faderman, 1993). In these relationships, two women would commit to each other, live together, and share many aspects of their lives together. This was an accepted way for women who did not want the constraints of marriage or children to experience the benefits of intimacy and partnership. Sometimes these Boston Marriages were a way for lesbian partners to acceptably and covertly cohabit; other times they were an escape for heterosexual women who did not want to live the lives prescribed to them by mainstream cultural expectations (Faderman, 1993).

The term Boston Marriage has reappeared in modern-day pop literature (Kennedy, 2001). The contemporary use of this term connotes two women who

consciously choose a degree of commitment. They often intertwine their living spaces, their finances, and their child-raising. They also may make a proactive plan for what is expected should one of them decide to enter into a romantic relationship. These modern Boston Marriages are one form of nonsexual, passionate friendships. The current study, however, explores passionate friendships that are more vague, less formally committed, and less understood.

This researcher examines those relationships between women that are more intense than close, platonic friendships and what it is like when women in these relationships lack words and expressions that accurately define their passionate, non-sexual friendships. The existence of these nonsexual, passionate relationships is documented meagerly in the literature, and shows up almost exclusively in the work of Lisa Diamond (2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, Diamond & Dubé, 2002, Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999).

Clinical social workers will benefit from understanding women's passionate nonsexual relationships for two reasons. Firstly, we can use our understanding to normalize and validate client experiences and to more completely mirror that experience. Furthermore, understanding women's passionate nonsexual relationships will help clinicians to define and understand their relationships with clients. A study that explores women's experiences in these types of relationships gives language to this phenomenon and validates its existence.

The purpose of this study is to explore nonsexual, passionate friendships between women as they affect women's lives and relationships. The study is guided by the

following research question: How do women conceptualize, define, and make sense of their nonsexual, passionate friendships?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review addresses the phenomenon of women's nonsexual, passionate relationships with other women. Research on the topics of companionship and intimacy, friendship, attachment, romantic love, and the lesbian continuum is studied in order to provide contextual information. For a historical context of passionate friendships, literature about Boston Marriages in the late 1800s is presented and available information on nonsexual, passionate relationships among women will be examined in detail. Lastly, gaps in the research are discussed and connected to the current study.

Intensely close friendships among adolescent girls that seem to be as emotionally intimate as romantic relationships, yet do not include sexual activity and/or desire, have been documented over time and across cultures by historians, anthropologists, and psychologists (Diamond, 2000). Such relationships often include emotional and behavioral characteristics common to romantic relationships and possess preoccupation, jealousy, inseparability, cuddling, and hand holding (Diamond, 2000). There are various terms used to describe these relationships across both culture and time. As cited by Diamond (2000), Faderman describes *romantic friendships* in the United States, Sahli focuses on *smashes* in 19th century New England, Ng studies *Tom-Dee relationships* in Thailand, Firth describes *bond friendships*, Reina discusses *camaradia*, and Gay details *mummy-baby friendships* in Lesotho.

Historical Context: Boston Marriages

In the Progressive Era of the 19th century, middle- and upper-class White women's roles and opportunities were limited to the domestic realm. During this time, however, feminists called "new women" emerged among the White, middle- and upper-class. Cynical about the freedom and opportunity that heterosexual marriage and motherhood would allow, many of these women chose to be in long-term partnerships with other women. These relationships were called "Boston Marriages."

Because of the severity of men's and women's homosocial culture, it was quite common for members of the same sex to share intimate friendships (Faderman, 1981). Additionally, because women were socialized to be more nurturing, compassionate, and relational, it is likely that their relationships were of a deeply intense and intimate nature (Faderman, 1981). Also, during this time, women were not conceived of as independently sexual creatures; therefore the sexual nature of these intimate relationships went unquestioned (Faderman, 2004).

These relationships between middle- and upper-class White women, so common and normal in the time, became known as "Boston marriages." It is unclear whether this term developed because so many of these relationships existed in New England (Faderman, 2004), or if "Boston" was included to represent its Puritanical history, and therefore imply that the relationships were nonsexual (Rothblum & Brehony, 1993). Whatever the case, new women were realizing that the lives prescribed to them of marriage solely for the purpose of procreation, child-rearing, and economic survival afforded them little emotional or intellectual fulfillment. Husbands of the time did not provide support or companionship, only finances (Faderman, 1981). New women wanted

more. Unwilling to follow this model, they choose instead to identify with other women, thereby freeing themselves from the constraints of heterosexual relationships (Faderman, 1981). Women in Boston Marriages reported more freedom to devote their energy to their work and intellectual pursuits than they would have had, had they taken the normative, socially prescribed path of heterosexual marriage (Faderman, 1981). Most of these women were either independently wealthy or earned their own wages, and were not supported by men (Faderman, 2000).

Whether these “Boston marriages” were sexual or not is open for discussion. Indeed, some were. Certain letters and other pieces of evidence point to this. One example is that Jane Addams, thought to have been in a Boston marriage with Ellen Gates Starr, often wired ahead to hotels where the pair was planning on staying in order to request a double bed (Neumann, 2004). In other Boston marriages, however, the evidence is not so clear. It is likely that many of these women were highly emotionally connected, though not sexually involved. If *heterosexuality* was so repressed, it seems unlikely that it would be common for two women to feel free enough to engage in sexual acts together (Faderman, 1993). Whatever the sexual nature of their relationships, they were no doubt intimate, fulfilling, and intense.

The fact that so many women could be living in long-term committed partnerships together and not be sexual is sometimes difficult for 21st century thinkers to understand. Faderman (1993) suggested that because of the repressed nature of sexuality at the time, it seems likely that many of the women who were in nonsexual relationships might be in sexual relationships if they were alive today. Also, these partnerships were, in many ways, relationships of escape and survival. A woman living alone might have difficulty

with such things as finances and emotional or other support, but a pair of women living together enables them to care for each other. Clearly, a practical and care-taking relationship can exist between two non-sexually intimate humans. If we are to understand Boston Marriages today, we need to embrace a broader understanding of intimacy (Hill, 2003).

How were these relationships so prevalent and yet not stigmatized? According to Faderman, “Perhaps because for centuries men did not take them seriously” (1993, p. 32). These types of partnerships were considered temporary and often secondary to marriage. Faderman (1993) goes on to report that many married women were in intense relationships with other women and that these women, “view themselves, and were seen as, kindred spirits who inhabited a world of interests and sensibilities alien to men” (Faderman, 2000, p.650).

It was not until the 1920s that men began to question Boston marriages and other partnerships between women. During this period, the feminist movement had made important achievements and women were becoming more and more economically independent. Female partnerships became threatening; therefore, men began to propagate the idea that they were abnormal (Faderman, 1993). In fact, the word “lesbian” did not come into existence until political and economic power for women led to new competition for men in the 1920s (Faderman, 1993).

Boston marriages were a natural solution for educated, wealthy or middle-class White women looking for an escape from the constraints of heterosexual marriage and all of the obligations that came with it. Unfortunately, information is omitted on poor

women or women of color mainly due to their under-representation in education, wealth, and social status during this period (Faderman, 2004).

The term *Boston Marriage* recently made an appearance in popular literature. A Ms. Magazine article published in 2001 was written from the point of view of a woman who chose to merge her living arrangements with her best friend (Kennedy, 2001). She stated, “In the year and a half that we’ve lived together, I have struggled with the namelessness of our situation.” (pp. 75-76). She discussed the inadequacy of the term “roommate”:

It means transience and 20 years old. It does not mean love or family. Words offer shelter. They help love stay. I wish for a word that two friends could live inside....Sometimes, in an attempt to make our relationship sound more valid, I tell people Liz and I are in a ‘Boston Marriage.’ The usual response is, ‘You’re in a what?’” (Kennedy, 2001, p 76).

This illustration demonstrates how *Boston Marriage* is a term that might adequately capture the richness and complexity of women’s intimate nonsexual relationships, though it is not recognized in common parlance.

Friendship, Companionship, and Intimacy

The need for companionship and intimacy is universal and begins at a young age (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987), but not all companionship is experienced equally. Research confirms that Americans make a distinction between best friends, friends, and acquaintances (Rybak & McAndrew, 2006). Best friends are rated as more intense and intimate than other friendships (Rybak & McAndrew, 2006), but what makes a “best” friendship? Youniss and Smollar characterize friendships as “important, enduring, relatively problem-free peer relationships in which the participants understand one another and learn new things.” (as cited in Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990. p. 277).

Friendship, companionship, and intimacy are important for many reasons. In Western societies, forming and maintaining positive peer relationships is considered essential to social, psychological, and academic adjustment and development (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990, p. 278). Sullivan proposed that “intimate conversations with close friends increase adolescents’ sense of self worth and the accuracy of their understanding of other people” (as cited in Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990, p 288).

Many Americans have a similar conceptualization of intimacy. Fehr (2004) suggested that there are certain “prototypical” interaction patterns that American participants agree suggest intimacy in a relationship. These “prototypes” include relationships with responsive self-disclosure, bidirectional emotional support, mutual comforting, practical help, feeling assured that problems will be resolved, and help in achieving important personal goals (Fehr, 2004). Disclosure seems to be a significant factor contributing to intimacy in women’s relationships (Fehr, 2004).

Floyd and Parks (1995) looked at studies of companionship and closeness. They found that many of the studies define closeness differently or have conducted research to define different components of closeness. Their study looked at gender differences in closeness. They conclude that men and women do not have different “referents” for closeness, but instead that women may have a wider range of meaningful outlets for the expression of closeness than men do. In further studies, they found that different individuals hold different meanings of closeness and intimacy, though there are some commonly agreed aspects of closeness and intimacy that are the same between men and women (1996). Self-disclosure, support, shared interests and explicit expressions of the value of the relationship were among the most commonly given elements of closeness.

Most of their respondents agreed that an intimate relationship implied a more intense relationship than a close relationship (Floyd & Parks, 1996).

Hatfield and Rapson (1987) distinguished between the experience of “being in love” associated with passionate love and the experience of closeness associated with companionate love. Passionate love includes attraction, preoccupied fascination, and intense longing to be with another person. Companionate love includes intimacy, closeness, support, and mutual understanding. Both of these forms of love are present in romantic relationships (Hatfield & Rapson, 1987). They also have called companionate love a “far less intense emotion,” that combines feelings of deep attachment, commitment, and intimacy (Hatfield & Rapson, 1993a, p. 655). Sprecher and Regan (1998), in their study of heterosexual couples, found that passionate love, to a greater degree than companionate love was sexualized and declined with the passage of time.

Vetere (1982) postulated that friendship plays a strong role in the development and maintenance of lesbian love relationships. Her research established that many adult lesbians report that their first sexual/romantic relationship grew out of an established friendship. Additionally, she wonders if adolescent girls’ experience of intense intimate relationships with other girls “could prove to be of prime importance in the development of lesbian love relationships and in the development of a lesbian identity.” (1982, p. 54). She notes that many of the participants in her study “expressed discomfort with the lover/friend conceptual dichotomy.” (1982, p. 64). She stated that these participants saw the rise of “feminist consciousness and woman-identification” as facilitating solutions to this bipolar divide (1982, p 64), yet interestingly, this divide continues to exist 25 years later.

Vetere's work raises the question: what are the solutions to the problem of the lover/friend dichotomy? For example, will a third category, such as "Boston Marriage" allow women to tell their friends and families that they are in a Boston Marriage, and have their friends and family understand all that is contained within their friendship? Will naming this special kind of friendship give it validity and enable mirroring to occur on a cultural level?

Attachment Theory and Passionate Friendships

Attachment theory is a long-established and accepted area of psychological theory and research (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1973; 1980; 1982). Bowlby proposed attachment as an evolved behavioral system designed to regulate an infant's closeness to a caregiver. An attachment bond, which an infant forms slowly over time when soothed by contact with a caregiver, serves to provide the infant with an experience of felt security. Attachments are characterized by four components: proximity seeking, safe haven behavior, separation distress, and secure base behavior (Bowlby, 1982).

More current research looks at how children's early attachment styles influence adult attachment. Shaver and Hazan (1987) first proposed that romantic love is a form of attachment and that adult attachment mirrors the attachment style developed in infancy. Other works (as cited by Shaver and Hazan, 1987: Waters, Treboux, Crowell, Merrick, & Albersheim, 1995; Zimmermann, Fremmer-Bombik, Sprangler, & Grossmann, 1997) have critiqued their proposal, yet the scientific community seems to be in agreement that romantic love is a powerful and compelling form of attachment.

For many, the primary attachment figures are transferred from parents to peers in adolescence (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994). Hazan and Zeifman demonstrated that this

process takes place gradually over time as attachment needs such as companionship, comfort, and security are met through peers and dating partners instead of parents (1994). They report that sometimes an adolescent will direct all of his or her attachment needs to one person. When this happens, it is nearly always a romantic partner. They ascribe this to the fact that sexual desire and activity are compelling motivators for the repeated intimate and comforting interactions that likely promote attachment formation (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994).

Sometimes, however, adolescents or adults will turn their attachment needs towards one person with whom they are not sexual (Diamond, 2000). This is often a passionate, nonsexual intimate friendship. These friendships frequently contain the heightened contact and proximity seeking usually found only in romantic attachments. Diamond's thinking is that these relationships may be meeting the primary attachment needs of their participants (Diamond, 2000).

Diamond (2000) proposed that sexual-minority youth may be more likely to develop these kinds of friendships because of limited opportunity to find dating partners in adolescence. They may be using passionate friendships to meet their peer attachment and developmental needs in the absence of the availability of romantic partners. Additionally, they may turn their attachment needs towards peers if their parents are unsupportive of their sexual orientation (Diamond, 2000).

The work of Jeanne L. Stanley (1996) expanded this concept. She stated, "Lesbians may experience rejection from traditional sources of support such as parents, siblings, relatives, or co-workers. Friends, therefore take on even greater importance than

usual in that they offer not only acceptance but affirmation for the lesbian; they often become ‘surrogate families’ or ‘family networks.’” (Stanley, 1996, p. 43).

Passionate and Romantic Love

Hatfield and Rapson (1993b, p. 5) defined passionate love as:

a state of intense longing for union with another. Passionate love is a complex functioning whole that includes appraisals or appreciations, subjective feelings, expressions, patterned physiological processes, action tendencies, and instrumental behaviors. Reciprocated love (union with the other) is associated with fulfillment and ecstasy; and unrequited love (separation) is associated with emptiness, anxiety, or despair.

Anthropologists agree that passionate love is universal across cultures (Hatfield & Rapson, 2006). Cultural pressures, of course, have a marked impact on the normalcy and intensity of passionate love and on how lovers manifest and manage these sometimes turbulent feelings (Hatfield & Rapson, 2006). Additionally, there are cultural and historical differences in the way men and women throughout the world view and have viewed passionate love—is it a happy, positive experience, or one associated with sadness and suffering (Hatfield & Rapson, 2002)? Hatfield and Rapson (1996, p. 71) were surprised when the results of their study on American adults from European, Filipino, and Japanese ancestry demonstrated that they “loved with equal passion.” This was true even when they looked at degree of acculturation. Furthermore, Susan Sprecher et al. (1994) found that the experience of passionate love was more universal than she had originally hypothesized in her study of adults in the United States, Russia, and Japan.

Romantic Love has been established as an attachment process involving nearly the same biological and social components as infant attachment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In these studies, “Romantic Love” meant an intimate partnership that is sexual in nature.

One of the questions the current study seeks to answer is: Do nonsexual, passionate relationships fulfill the same attachment needs for adults as romantic, sexual relationships?

Many women have reported experiencing romantic passion without accompanying sexual desire (Tennov, 1979). According to the literature, there are both chemical and cultural differences between romantic love and sexual desire (Diamond 2003, 2004). Logical conclusions may be drawn suggesting that romantic and sexual partners can serve separate and distinct functions in women's lives.

Others disagree. Susan and Clyde Hendrick (1987) stated, "It is apparent to us that trying to separate love from sexuality is like trying to separate fraternal twins: they are certainly not identical, but, nevertheless, they are strongly bonded (p. 282). Regan and Berscheid (1995) found that most young adults believe that although platonic love exists, one cannot be "in love" with someone unless a sexual attraction exists.

Maybe these perspectives are not mutually exclusive. One might not be able to be "in love" with someone without a sexual attraction and yet an intense same sex friendship may be able to fulfill primary attachment needs. Or, maybe it is possible to be "in love" without a sexual attraction.

What is the Difference Between Friendship and Romantic Love?

Diamond's research demonstrates that it is often difficult to distinguish between "simply finding a woman attractive, and being attracted to her." (2005, p. 12). She argues that cultural conditioning, including the normative nature of adolescent girls scrutinizing each other's bodies, hair, skin, and general physical attractiveness, often makes this differentiation a difficult one. She also discussed the fact that sexual attractions towards

men are considered normal, and therefore go unquestioned. One of her participants stated, "It's like there's this track, for men, and it's just easier to get on that track. But, because of society, there is no track for my feelings for women" (2005, p. 12). Her work underscores the often blurry lines that separate friendship attraction from romantic/sexual attraction (Diamond cites Michelle Fine's 1988 research for support).

Davis and Todd (1982) attempted to differentiate friendship and romantic love. They described friendship as a relationship of equal eligibilities ("parties participate as equals in the sense that those things that one person is eligible to do, the other also is eligible to do," p. 83); one in which participants enjoy each other's company; involves trust ("that other person will act in friend's best interest," p. 83); provides mutual assistance ("Can count on each other in times of need, trouble, or personal distress," p. 83); and contains acceptance, respect, intimacy, spontaneity ("free to be themselves in their relationship," p. 83), and understanding.

In comparison, Davis and Todd described romantic love differently. It is based on asymmetric eligibilities (This is based on the sexist and heterosexist assumption that all couples are man/woman and are therefore eligible for different activities in society.); enjoyment ("of each other's company," p. 91); an element of being an advocate/champion ("involves furthering or championing another's interest," p. 89); giving the utmost ("to the lover when he or she is in need," p. 89); acceptance, respect, spontaneity, understanding, intimacy, fascination ("to be inclined to pay attention to that person even when one should be engaged in other activities," p. 89), and exclusiveness (each lover would be upset, indeed feel betrayed, if his or her loved one had the same relationship to someone else that he or she has to him or her," p. 91).

Davis and Todd (1982) referred to Fascination, Exclusiveness, and Enjoyment as “the Passion Cluster.” In their studies, spouses and lovers consistently rated their relationships higher in this area than did friends, even same-sex best friends. They call this the “most obvious difference between a romantic love relationship and a friendship” (p. 89), but is this always the case? What happens when friendships include fascination, exclusiveness, and enjoyment?

Interestingly, Davis and Todd (1982) found that their participants rated same sex friendships as more successful than lovers/spouses, a fact which they hypothesize may be attributed to the “relative lack of intimacy” (p.100) in same sex friendships.

The Lesbian Continuum

Adrienne Rich proposed the idea of the Lesbian Continuum in her groundbreaking 1980 article. Rich expertly lays out the factors that serve to keep women oppressed and notes how these forces also guard against same-sex sexual attraction in women (2003). Her analysis begs the question: What would the nature of women’s relationships with each other be without the forces of oppression acting upon them? In Rich’s analysis, all women fall somewhere along the Lesbian continuum, whether or not they ever have sexual encounters with other women (Rich, 2003). Her work provides an interesting lens through which to understand nonsexual, passionate friendships between women.

The works of Stanley (1996), Vetere (1982), and Rose (2000) illuminate or expand Rich’s ideas. Jeanne Stanley (1996) conducted quantitative and qualitative research on lesbian friendships. Her work uncovered many themes, one of which is the impact of relationship status on lesbian friendships. She noted that many single lesbians

reported feeling “abandoned, expendable, or replaced” (1996, p. 50) when their friends entered a new relationship. Many of her focus group participants felt hurt, angry, and unforgiving when their friend joined the “universe for two” (1996, p. 51) and neglected to reciprocate their former friendships. Other women reported understanding this “honeymoon period” and allowing distance during their friend’s time of infatuation with their new romantic partner. In Stanley’s research, the most frequently stated concern among partnered lesbians was the potential threat of a friend becoming romantically involved with a member of the couple. Indeed, here is evidence of the fluidity of women’s intimate and sexual attractions with one another.

Vetere’s work also examines the lesbian continuum. She states, “almost all the [lesbian] women interviewed had at some time felt feelings of attraction toward female friends, and a large majority had at some point acted on them” (1982, p. 64). Because lesbians’ friendship circles and dating pools often overlap, it is common in lesbian communities for friends to turn into lovers (Stanley, 1996). In Stanley’s focus group research, she found that many of her participants found the “ambiguity surrounding the distinction between friend and lover in the lesbian community...considerable” (p. 54).

Suzanna Rose (2000) explored in her theoretical work how cultural scripts for heterosexual romance constrain the fluidity in relationships between women as well as researchers’ ability to understand what is truly happening within them. She stated, “Lesbians may be less likely than heterosexual women to view friendships as substantially different from romantic relationships.” She cited the work of Kitzinger & Perkins (1993) as arguing that the distinction between “love relationships” and “friendships” are artificial, and states that friendships *are* love relationships. Rose further

stated that it is heterosexual scripts that suggest that heterosexual women's friendships must be less passionate than lesbian relationships, when this is not necessarily always the case (2000).

Nonsexual, Passionate Relationships Among Women

The literature on nonsexual, passionate relationships among women is not extensive by any means. Lisa Diamond appears to be the main researcher focusing on this topic (2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, Diamond & Dubé, 2002, Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999). Her work focuses on young, college-aged, or adolescent women who are mainly middle-class and White. Additionally, Rothblum (1994) presented evidence of women who are involved in passionate friendships after they have been in sexual relationships with each other.

There is a common assumption that intense, intimate, passionate friendships experienced by adolescent girls who grow up to be lesbians or bisexual women are really just expressions of repressed or denied sexual attraction (Diamond, 2002). However, Diamond argues that if we listen to women recount their friendships in their own words, we will recognize that this is not the case (2002). She demonstrated that there are more than two discrete categories of friendship (i.e. "just friends" or "lovers") and that there is a great deal more going on in these intimate friendships than repressed sexual energy (Diamond, 2002). Additionally, her research showed that passionate friendships occur between women, regardless of their sexual orientation (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999). Much of Diamond's work argues that passionate friendships are unique in their own right and deserve research and attention paid to them as such (2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, Diamond & Dubé, 2002, Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999).

Participants in passionate friendships are often preoccupied with each other and frequently commit to the relationship, sometimes making future plans together (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999). Their relationships also may involve physical affection similar to lovers or from parents to infants and children (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999). Participants may “stroke, hold, or cuddle each other and experience feelings of jealousy, possessiveness, and intense separation anxiety” (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999, p. 195). Diamond, Savin-Williams, and Dubé speculate that the unusual degree of physical affection in passionate friendships “may promote their transformation from normative best friendships into full-blown attachments, in spite of the absence of sexual contact” (1999, p. 196).

Additionally, passionate friendships serve many ego-related functions for their participants. According to Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, (1999) adolescents involved in them gain “high level[s] of intimacy, companionship, and affectionate physical contact, as well as a sense of stability and trust” (p. 195). They also display the attributes of attachment: proximity seeking, separation distress, using their partner as a safe haven, and using their partner as a secure base from which to explore (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999).

Early in her work, Diamond began a longitudinal study which explored and analyzed “friendships containing the emotional intensity of romantic relationships, yet lacking sexual activity” (2000). She was looking only at women which she classified as “sexual-minority”. (This category includes women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or refuse to label themselves, but are sexually attracted to other women.) Using attachment theory to inform her analysis, Diamond found that 63% of her 80 participants had had a

significant passionate friendship in adolescence. She discovered that most of the research participants assumed that their passionate friendship was “unique” or “abnormal,” reflecting a lack of language and cultural mirroring to conceptualize the full spectrum of friendship (Diamond, 2000).

Diamond and Dubé (2002) explored differences in attachment to same-gender or cross-gender friends among both heterosexual and “sexual-minority” youth. They found that, out of a pool of heterosexual and “sexual-minority” participants of both genders, women who later identify as lesbian, bisexual, or unlabeled had the highest percentage of same-gender best friends who met their attachment needs (Diamond and Dubé, 2002). This raises questions about the importance of nonsexual, passionate friendships in sexual identity development among women. What needs are these relationships meeting for queer youth?

One answer to that question might be found in looking at mental health issues. Sexual-minority youth are prone to “negative affectivity,” i.e. depression, anxiety, and physical symptomology (Diamond, 2004). Close peer relationships can mediate these mental health issues (Diamond, 2004). This finding suggests that intimate peer relationships are essential to the survival of sexual-minority youths. It seems that assistance with affect regulation, mediated by attachment, is one reason that queer youth seek out nonsexual, passionate relationships.

Research by Nardi and Sherrod (1994) postulated another reason. They believed that friendship may take on heightened importance in queer communities because they often substitute for familial relationships. Their research asserted that gay men and lesbian women both value friendships equally and tend to define and enact friendships

similarly—an element that differs from heterosexual men and women (Nardi & Sherrod, 1994).

Are passionate friendships more commonly experienced by queer women than by heterosexual women? Some of the research explored here indicates that intimate friendships among queer youth are crucial for survival. Nardi and Sherrod (1994) found that many sexual-minority adults increase their emotional investments in close friendships to compensate for inadequate support from their families. This process may or may not be conscious. Diamond and Lucas (2004) concluded that this might lead queer youth to prioritize close friendships over casual friendships. Further research is needed to answer this question.

Summary

Many gaps in research exist on this topic. Some of the dialogue in the literature around nonsexual, passionate relationships is theoretical as opposed to empirical. The majority of the research was conducted by convenience samples and reached an age group of adolescents and young adults. The subjects were generally college educated or on the college track, meaning that they carried a large degree of privilege. Also, much of Diamond's work centers around nonsexual, passionate friendship during the adolescence of sexual-minority women. There has been little research on adult's and heterosexual women's experience of nonsexual, passionate friendships. Additionally, there has been little research on these friendships in different racial and ethnic communities.

On a whole, the literature leaves gaps in the understanding of women's experience of nonsexual, passionate friendships in their own words. Voices are missing

from heterosexual women, older women, women of color, and women from working class backgrounds.

Based upon these realities, a study is indicated that will inform our understanding in this area. The focus of the current study therefore seeks to expand the voices of women's experiences of nonsexual, romantic friendships.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

As noted in the literature review, there is a great need for research on nonsexual, passionate friendships between women. The current qualitative study draws upon the question, how do women conceptualize, define, and make sense of their nonsexual, passionate friendships with other women, in an attempt to address this gap in the research literature. In this chapter the researcher presents the research methodology, sample selection process, data collection, and method of analysis.

Research Design

Research was conducted using flexible, qualitative methods. Data collection included an interview guide that was specifically designed for this study and audio recordings of the interviews. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured, open ended questions to gather narrative data from participants, which allowed women to give voice to their own experiences in nonsexual, passionate relationships with women. Onlookers are quick to interpret nonsexual, but passionate relationships between women as expressions of repressed sexual content (Diamond, 2002). According to Diamond (2002) however, these relationships have greater meaning for women. In order to challenge the binary between “just friends” and “lovers,” it is important to examine women’s experiences in their own words. Thus, a qualitative study allowed women in these relationships to give meaning and language to their expressions of nonsexual intimacy and connectedness with other women.

For purposes of this study “nonsexual” refers to a lack of intimate contact involving genitalia, though it may include other forms of physical contact such as cuddling, handholding, and even sexual fantasizing directed at the relationship partner. “Passionate” refers to a degree of intimacy and attachment and is defined by Diamond (2002) to include proximity seeking, separation distress, use of the relationship as a secure base and a safe haven, inseparability, cuddling, hand holding, preoccupation, fascination, inseparability, and possessiveness. Original criteria for participation in this study included these criteria; however it soon became evident to the researcher that for women who have been in nonsexual, passionate relationships with other women lasting more than one to three years had extended criteria. In addition to Diamond’s (2002) definition, these women consistently identified level of commitment and value of relationship/friendship as equally important criteria. For purposes of this study, “friendship” carries the same meaning as “relationship.” “Queer” includes women who identify as lesbian, bisexual, or refuse to label themselves, but describe sexual attractions to other women.

Sample

The researcher used a non-probability, convenience sample of fourteen women who have experienced nonsexual, passionate relationships with other women. Time constraints, location, finances, and feasibility factors led the researcher to use a word of mouth/snowball technique for this study’s recruitment of participants. Participants were solicited through a network of contacts, including emails, throughout the United States. Using this type of sampling method created the potential for bias within the sample,

therefore this researcher took precautions to limit this occurrence, including an explicit statement of researcher bias found in the data collection section below.

The explicit criterion for inclusion in this study was current or past involvement in a nonsexual, passionate friendship with a woman friend. The study looked exclusively at women's friendships, and all participants were women. The researcher sought women who were 25 and older, of any sexual orientation, of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and from various class backgrounds.

Participants were recruited through word-of-mouth/snowball and email techniques. The researcher drew up an email "flyer" advertising the study and required criteria. This email was sent to the researcher's professional network who then forwarded the email to their colleagues and professional organizations. The researcher screened responses to ensure that they met inclusion criteria. Several of the participants recruited by email suggested other potential participants for the study. Additionally, the researcher used the Women's Center at Emory University in order to increase the likelihood of obtaining more diverse participants for the study.

Data Collection

The researcher followed all federal guidelines that establish the safeguards for human subjects and the NASW Code of Ethics. Research on humans was initiated only after receiving final approval from the Smith College School for Social Work's Human Subjects Review Committee.

Ethical standards also were upheld stringently. All interviews were audio-tape recorded and transcribed. Participant privacy was maintained by assigning a random code to each participant's tape and matching consent form. All identifiable names and

locations were privileged only to the researcher. The signed consent forms were coded and stored separately from other materials under lock and key. Only this researcher transcribed the tapes. Tapes and transcriptions will be stored in a locked compartment by the researcher for three years, consistent with Federal regulations. After this three-year time period, all data, including notes, tapes, and transcriptions will be destroyed. In this document as with all future presentations or publications, data will be presented as a whole and not be linked to individual participants. When brief illustrative quotes or vignettes are used, they have been and will be purposefully disguised.

The interview process was conducted as follows. Participants were screened through email, on the phone, or in person. If they met the study's criteria and agreed to participate, they were given or mailed the informed consent form that outlined all of the issues surrounding ethics and safeguards, as well as the study's purpose. One copy of the consent form was signed and given to the researcher; the second copy was retained by the participant. The individually conducted interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and were audio-recorded. Thirteen were conducted over the telephone and one was done in person. This study was exploratory; therefore the questions were semi-structured and open-ended to provide the most possible latitude for answers. Occasionally, the researcher asked clarification questions or sought additional information on points that needed elaboration. All telephone interviews took place in the researcher's office so as to assure confidentiality and quality of recording. The singular in-person interview also took place in the researcher's office.

Participants were oriented to the structure of the interview before it began. The interviews started with several brief demographic questions followed by the participant

identifying and providing a narrative overview of one particular passionate, nonsexual friendship she experienced with another woman. The interview ended with a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit descriptive data about the participants' experiences with nonsexual, passionate relationships with other women. Data analyzed from the responses to these questions helped illuminate answers to the research question: How do women conceptualize, define, and make sense of their nonsexual, passionate friendships with other women?

Several steps were taken to address validity and reliability. Firstly, reviewers gave feedback on the questions in the interview guide, assessing it for clarity, relevance, and structure. This feedback was used to revise the questions. Also, to address reliability issues, this researcher piloted the interview questions to one subject that was not part of the study. The subject provided feedback to help the researcher refine the questions and technique. Use of a journal log provided additional safeguards and controls for bias and assured reliability and validity of the data collected. This log contained written notes that recorded the researcher's own reactions and reflections after each interview as a way of monitoring and reducing bias.

Data Analysis

Data collected in the demographic section was analyzed manually using percentages, while the narrative data was analyzed by content and theme. Recordings of the interviews were transcribed, and phrases, the unit of measure, were coded. These phrases were entered into an Excel spreadsheet for ease of data sorting and manipulation. Analysis uncovered themes that clarified the nature of women's nonsexual, passionate friendships.

Analysis focused on searching for content and themes that emerged when examining the unit of measure, phrases. The researcher's log also was analyzed to screen for researcher bias. The review of the log material and discussion with the researcher's research advisor further controlled for bias and improved reliability and validity of the data. Summaries of the themes and content are included in the findings chapter. The goal of the data analysis was to produce a baseline understanding of non-sexual, intimate relationships between women.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This research explored nonsexual, passionate friendships between women. Using open-ended, semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study examined how women conceptualize, define, and make sense of their nonsexual, passionate friendships with women. Findings from this study indicated that women who experience passionate friendships with other women consider these friendships to be unique, meaningful, and committed. Participants in this study spoke of inadequate language and words to capture the essence of their committed friendship with other women. Themes that surfaced in their expressions included emotional growth and identity development fostered by their friendship, jealousy, questioning the possibility that the relationship could become sexual, break-ups, and shifts and changes. There also were similarities found in the language patterns used to describe these friendships and the language used to describe romantic relationships. This chapter provides a detailed description of the themes that emerged when the interviewees spoke about the many aspects of their nonsexual, passionate friendships with other women.

Sample

The sample consisted of 14 women who ranged in age from 25 to 56. Nine participants were in their 20s; two were in their 30s; two were in their 40s; and one was in her 50s.

Seven reported their race as White; five considered themselves White/Jewish; one was Afro-Caribbean; and one was Pakistani-American. Two mentioned that their parents had been immigrants. Two were originally from Canada, but currently reside in the U.S. All of the participants gave their socioeconomic status as middle- or upper-middle class. Ten of the subjects said that they were heterosexual. Three stated that they were bisexual, and one said that her sexuality was fluid. The participants lived in various parts of the U.S: North Carolina; Queens, NY; San Francisco; Washington, D.C.; Atlanta; and St. Louis. Many of them were from geographic areas other than where they were residing. These included: Connecticut, New York, Ohio, St. Louis, Canada, Massachusetts, Chicago, and Michigan. The sample included one mother and one daughter describing separate friendships, two pairs of friends, several referrals from women who participated, and independent recruits from word of mouth.

The participants were all involved in or had been involved in passionate, non-sexual friendships with women. The friendships described in this study ranged in length of time from 1 to 27 years. Some friendships were ongoing; others had ended. Many of these friendships had an intense period at the beginning, followed by an enduring calmer period.

Brief descriptions of each of the participants and their friendships are included in discussions of the following themes: Relationship as Meaningful and Unique; Commitment; Emotional Growth/Identity Development; Similarity to Romantic Relationships; Sexuality within the Friendship; Jealousy; Break-Ups; Shifts and Changes; and Indescribability or Lack of Language.

Relationship as Meaningful and Unique

Participants in this study identified their relationships with other women as highly meaningful and unique. As participants spoke of their relationships, they exhibited a sense of gratification, fulfillment, and wholeness. Many of the participants spoke of connectedness as demonstrated by the following reports.

Interviewees 1 and 3 were friends. They met during their sophomore year in college. They both lived on campus and were drawn together by their shared interest in activism. Interviewee 1 said that they were the “best of friends,” “totally attached at the hip,” and that their friendship was based on an “emotional and intellectual connection.” She said, “we were hanging out all the time, we went to class together, we were going to the gym together, we were having dinner together...” Interviewee 3 called them “inseparable”, and mentioned that they would eat all of their meals together, go to the gym together, and “call each other constantly.” This intense period of their friendship lasted for about a year. After that, Interviewee 3 started dating a man, and her friendship with Interviewee 1 became strained.

They wrote poems to communicate the difficult feelings between them.

Interviewee 3 said:

We both wrote poetry a lot of the time and actually we had one really interesting exchange where she wrote a poem about...I think in her poem she talked about a silver thread that bound us and how she felt like we were growing apart and I responded with another poem explaining that even though I was off in these new adventures with [my boyfriend], that I still trailed this silver thread and that it bound up my world and that her and I would always be connected, but that's-- it was very personal and intense feelings of love for each other, that I haven't been able to express to other girlfriends half as well.

This exchange speaks to the quality and depth of their relationship, an emotional bond that transcends separation. When asked about that, interviewee 1 said, “I think it's

unique...I have not had that experience with any other of my close woman friends, to that extent.”

Interviewee 2 described her friendship in the following way:

I met her during the first few days of high school. I think...if there was love at first sight, then, that was what it was when I saw [her]. And it wasn't anything sexual, it was just sort of like, I have to know this girl, and it was such an attraction from me towards her. I don't know if it's-- if she felt the same way or reciprocated, but we formed a friendship and, you know, it's been 10 or 11 years so far and we were like *best friends* through high school. I mean, we were sisters, I mean, if we were having sex, we would have been lesbians, but I mean, it was just pretty much a very, very close intense relationship, to the point where even towards the end of high school we were just so snobby and, you know, we kind of narrowed down our friends to just she and I and maybe just a few other people.

This quote addresses their connection, their bond. It describes the uniqueness of their friendship, the strength of their attraction to one another, and the similarity in the language she used to describe her friendship and the language commonly used to describe a romantic relationship.

Interviewee 2 was extremely close with her friend for about three and a half years. They drifted apart at the end of high school because her friend entered into a romantic relationship. They went to the same college, but were not especially close. Her friend eventually married a man who committed suicide about a year and a half ago. At that time, Interviewee 3's friend reached out to her and they became close again, though not as close as they were in high school. She says:

We totally acknowledged the insanity of it and sort of the, uniqueness of it, at the time, but then we changed so much during college that I think we kind of...I don't know if she kind of wrote it off as something in the past, but it's something that I feel like I really kind of miss the intimacy of having a friend that close and I don't expect that to ever happen again with anybody or any female friendship that I have.

She also said, “She’s one of the few people that—one of the few friends that I really, truly cherish and my life would be a lot emptier without her.” Clearly their friendship held elevated meaning in their lives. For Interviewee 3, this was an once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Interviewee 4 has been in her friendship for three and a half years. They were roommates at first and then traveled abroad together for seven months. When they returned, her friend moved across country. Interviewee 4 did not have a job or know what she wanted to do. She eventually decided to move to join her friend and they now are roommates again. Interviewee 4 is in a long-distance romantic relationship and her friend has explicitly told her that she does not want the boyfriend to move to their city for fear that it will impinge upon their relationship. Interviewee 4 expressed ambivalence about this as well. She said,

I think of it as like a really nice, special friendship. I’m pretty sure that she’ll always be a special person in my life just because of everything that we have shared up until this point and then, at the same time, I do kind of wonder about when one of us does have someone else significant in our lives, a significant other, kind of what—I don’t know, I think that will be a hard transition whenever that happens. We’ll see.

Interviewees 5 and 13 described friendships that were unique to this study. In these friendships, one of the members wanted the relationship to become romantic. Interviewee 5 described her 2-3 year friendship as, “very close,” “very tight,” and “lovely.” She said that they spent “tons and tons of time together.” The friendship changed dramatically after her friend expressed romantic interest in her. Interviewee 5 did not share her interest and tension grew between them. Eventually they had a huge argument and stopped talking. She described the friendship this way: “I think it has meant a lot. It has affected the way that I think about my friendships and also my

romantic relationships too...a lot.” Interviewee 5 conveyed her affection for her former friend with intensity and non-verbally expressed how much this relationship meant to her.

Interviewee 6 and her friend have been friends for seven-and-a-half years. She says, “It just kind of feels like we’ve always known each other.” They met during their first year of college. She shared,

Basically, she walked up to me and was like “Hey, I think we should be friends, come walk with me.” And we walked off and by the end of the walk, we were like, “You’re my best friend in the whole world.” Yeah, it’s like an amazing story. And we’ve basically talked to each other every day since, unless we can’t connect.

Here is a story that Interviewee 6 shared which demonstrates the quality of their friendship,

[My friend] just broke up with her boyfriend and she was talking-- I mean everyone around us knows that we’re intimate friends like this. So she broke up with her boyfriend and she was talking to her dad and I wasn’t there, she related this story to me, and she was saying to her dad, “Oh my god what if I never find anyone like him and what if I’ve made the worst decision ever.” And her dad was like, “Well if [Interviewee 6] were a boy, would you pick this guy or would you pick [6]?” And she was like, “I’d pick [6], you know I’d pick [6]. [6] is my partner.” And so that’s basically-- I mean we talk about it all of the time. Like, we know that we’re each other’s partners. That’s how we say it. Like when we obsess about boys, we say, “I’m never going to find a partner like you’re a partner to me.”

Later in the interview, she said,

Sometimes I’m scared that I’ll never...like I wonder, can I be with a man like I am with [my friend]? I’ve talked to my mom about it--you know, what does this mean? This is my best relationship, this is like the love of my life, and then my husband will just be like the second.

Clearly this friendship is exceptionally meaningful and completely special in her life.

Interviewee 7 spoke about her friendships with two women. The three of them were best friends and roommates in college. They had a two bedroom house, but chose to all sleep in one bedroom. She said that none of them wanted to be apart from the others

and that there were rumors they were lesbians because they were always together. These women were all Afro-Caribbean and Interviewee 7 said that she thinks that part of what enabled them to be so close was their shared heritage. Interviewee 7 said, “Those friendships changed my life.” Seven years later, she is still extremely close with one of the women and less close, but very much connected to the other. Interviewee 7 also spoke in general terms about the significance of women’s friendships in her life.

Interviewee 8 spoke about a friendship she began in graduate school. She has been involved in this friendship for about five years. She and her friend connected a great deal around their shared identity as bisexual. They refer to each other as “sister,” as a “soul companion,” and as “half.” Their term “half” evolved from “half-pint,” a term from *Little House on the Prairie*, but Interviewee 8 joked that it also symbolized “other-half.” In fact, she said, their classmates often joked with them by asking where their other halves were. Interviewee 8 said that she and her friend often told each other, “I feel like I’ve known you from a past life.”

Interviewee 9 described a friendship she has had for about six years. She says about her friend, “I love her so much; she’s one of my best friends.” At the same time, she characterized this relationship as one with significant amounts of conflict. The uniqueness of this friendship is evident particularly in the way that these friends usually make their relationship primary over their dating relationships. So far, they have been able to stay connected despite their many conflicts, described below. This speaks to the meaningfulness this friendship holds for each of them.

Interviewee 10 and her friend connected after they had each broken up with long-term, serious boyfriends. They met while they were each in relationships, but Interviewee

10 shared that they were only able to connect after their romantic relationships had ended and that space and energy was opened up. She says, “I guess for me, calling her my best friend is more meaningful than when I said that other people are my best friends. She’s like my real best friend.” The following quote about what Interviewee 10’s friends think about their relationship captures the intensity and uniqueness of it:

We became a unit and there was a group of friends that we formed together. They often ask me, how is she? Because they know how connected we are. So it became the [Interviewee 10 and her friend]-show a lot of times. And at parties, we would be running off and be having our own fun in the corner. People were always intrigued, I think, by the amount of energy that we had together. And the amount of fun and laughter and just stuff we were up to together.

Interviewees 11 and 14 have been friends for 17 years. They met when they were both participants in a psychotherapy group and united over challenges they faced in the group. They describe their relationship as very much centered on emotional and spiritual growth. Their friendship is exceptionally unique in terms of the degree of commitment they share, which is described in detail below. When asked about the meaning that Interviewee 11 gives to her relationship, she struggled to find the words. She said, “What meaning does it have? Gosh, what meaning does life have without it? I don’t know. I don’t know. She’s family. She gives life meaning.”

Interviewee 12 and her friend are both social workers. They met through a mutual friend and eventually worked at the same agency. They became pregnant and took maternity leave around the same time, which cohered their friendship. They have been friends for 26 or 27 years. She says, “So I think that our husbands see that our connection is the primary connection and I think that they kind of feel peripheral.” Their relationship is absolutely central in their lives. She also shared, “I just feel loved because of my

friendship with her, at a real core level, in terms of unconditional acceptance.” They are trying to negotiate retirement so that they will be able to live near each other.

Interviewee 13 and her friend have been friends for eight years. They went to high school together, but did not become friends until college. They lived together in college and became “best friends.” For four years, they were “the most important people really in each other’s lives and each other’s confidants and biggest supporters in some ways and play companions.” Their relationship shifted after the first four years. This is elaborated below.

Clearly the connection and bond described by these women transcends general friendships. Their emotional attachment, openness and understanding reflect an intimacy that is rare and uncommon to non-sexual relationships.

Commitment

Though commitment in these friendships was never explicitly asked about, it emerged in 60% (n = 9) of the interviews. For example, the fact that interviewee 4 is not sure if she wants her long-distance boyfriend to move to the city where she and her female friend live speaks to her commitment to her female relationship. Interviewee 7 spoke about how important it was for her and her two friends to like each other’s partners. She was one of several participants who spoke as if their friendships were primary and their romantic relationships were secondary.

Interviewee 6 said the following about her friendship,

I hope it’s forever. We’ve made a pledge with each other that we can’t live far enough away that it wouldn’t be a doable weekend trip. That’s like the agreement. We have to commit that whatever happens, we can see each other quasi-regularly, that our kids will know each other. That’s important to us.

Additionally, the way that Interviewee 6 and her friend refer to each other as their “partners” speaks to their commitment to one another.

The commitment that Interviewee 9 shares with her friend can be seen through the internal struggle that she is having about the possibility of leaving the relationship. She said that at first, she and her friend handled conflicts by avoiding them. Now, Interviewee 9 wants to talk about conflicts and does not know if her friend can handle that. She is aware that she is frequently not getting what she wants out of the relationship, yet she does not want to give up on the friendship.

Interviewee 10 and her friend created an exceptionally unique way to both commit to their friendship and to communicate the meaningfulness of it to the rest of the world. They married each other at the Burning Man Festival in the Nevada desert. She describes this:

The trust that I have with her is above and beyond any other friendship. And so being able to rely on somebody in a way that I don't rely on others and the way that she's shown up consistently for me, made me want to dedicate myself to her in a very specific, powerful way. And I think that us getting married at Burning Man was a declaration of just how strong we really wanted to dedicate ourselves to each other for the rest of our lives. And we committed to that. So in the sense of it being a powerful friendship, it's one where we have committed to one another forever, and I don't feel like it will ever dissipate, where as my other relationships might. She's definitely the one person who's still there. I know that I can count on her forever, even though we live thousands of miles apart. I don't talk to her as much anymore. We've been best friends for almost 7 years and our lives have changed a lot, she doesn't live near me anymore, but every time I talk to her, we're still right there in that same place.

The commitment reflected in this friendship is exceptionally powerful.

Interviewees 11 and 14 also have an extraordinarily strong sense of commitment in their friendship. Interviewee 11 said this about her friend, “I consider her my sister.

She is my family of choice.” She says that the level of commitment in their friendship is what makes it different from other friendships. Interviewee 14 shared,

We’re very committed to our relationship. When things come up...we’re going to work through it—which is nice, to have that security of a commitment in a friendship. I mean we really are more like family than like friends. She’s taken me into her family and vice versa--as far as her son and my son call each other brother...I think we both have spoken how important our relationship is, how committed we are, especially when we are going through something difficult between us. Because you know, growth happens, and old baggage gets in the way. But I think, especially, even though it’s hard, I think we keep choosing each other, over and over again, over the years, you know? We continue to choose our friendship.

Interviewee 11 said this,

....to me, that is what the difference is. I mean, that level of commitment that if you need me and it takes two or three years to resolve whatever this is, I’m going to be here. That’s a huge level of commitment. It’s the same as my marriage...And I don’t have any other, nor have I ever had any other friends...now I’ve had really, I have a lot of intimate friends and a lot of close friends, but I don’t have anyone that I have this spoken commitment with, that I have with her, where we both understand that no matter what, you know, we’re in this and we’re going to deal with life together...that’s why I was saying the conflict resolution is just part of it, because you have to be willing to come forward and say, “You know, this is making it real uncomfortable to continue, to maintain the relationship with you, and so we need to address this because the relationship is important.”

The sense of commitment in Interviewee 12’s friendship is likewise strong. She shared that she and her friend spent large amounts of time together when they were younger and their children were younger, whereas now, they see each other less frequently. The way they negotiate this, she said, is to preserve Saturday mornings for each other. She called it, “an inviolate time on our calendar.” The commitment in their friendship is also apparent by the way and she and her friend’s children each refer to their mother’s friend as “aunt.” They are integrated into each other’s families. They would like to be able to deal with retirement in a way that allows them to be close to their children as well as each other.

Interviewee 13 and her friend had a different kind of commitment. She described this commitment in their friendship before it shifted when they had a series of conversations about the possibility of becoming romantically involved.

Our friendship was the most important thing, and to her, it was more important than her boyfriend. And so I always felt secure and that's why it was a very threatening friendship [to her friend's boyfriend]...I know that because we really were best friends in all of that deepness that that implies, that there was definitely a—well, we're going to remain. Other people might come and go, but we'll be together, which, by us having that conversation about getting together in a different way, is gone, basically...Well, I always thought in my mind, I always thought [she] and I would end up living together when we were 50—that that would be like somehow we'd end up together, and at that time, not sexually either. Just as, we'll end up together, that's how it's supposed to be.

The way that the commitment changed in Interviewee 13's friendship is described below.

Emotional Growth/Identity Development

Several of the participants spoke about how their relationship enhanced their personal growth. Similarly, they described ways in which their identity development had expanded because of their friendship.

Interviewees 1 and 3 spoke about being united around a shared belief in something greater (environmental activism). Interviewee 1 said, “[Our friendship was something] I really grew through...and it was a very important time in my life.”

Interviewee 3 described feeling highly validated by the relationship. She said,

Well, I think that she really helped me form and develop my own personal identity at a very vital time...she affirmed me, really. It was a time when I was feeling and thinking different things and she came along and said, “Oh, this is how you see yourself, absolutely, then I see you that way, too.” Basically. And that was very healthy for me.

Interviewee 2 said, “I could talk to her about the most existential things, and the most ridiculous things and it [was] ok.” She and her friend connected over their

similar sensibilities of stuff like music and clothing and the things that define you in high school, but I think, there was even sort of a deeper sensibility about just life in general

that we'd connect on. Especially now, we just have very—we think along the same lines, like very similarly about a lot of things, like growing up, and our 20s and what we're going through now and we kind of have the same attitude and approach towards things that come our way.

Here, she is speaking about “the things that define you in high school” and her friendship was one of them. It was both part of her identity and it enabled her to form an identity.

Interviewee 6 said this about her friend:

She's my savior. I feel like she has taught me so much about myself and I can think of so many times, where I was in some sort of—I'm very high strung, so I have my little breakdown moments, you know, at least once a year, and she'll be like, I mean I can't imagine anyone else handling me the way that she handles me, and that's just invaluable to me, for sure. And it's...I feel like she's very wise and not only that, but I feel like she thinks I'm wise in the same kind of way, which is so...I mean I feel like she pushes me, but she also verifies me and my thinking at the same time. I think both of us are going to be therapists, too. She just went to get her Psy D. I don't know if that makes a difference or not, but I feel like we have the language and the vocabulary to have more psychodynamic...I don't mean that as in the theory, but as in the dynamic conversation about ourselves. Like some people just don't have the vocabulary to really understand the depth of what you want to convey. That's nice too.

In this way, it comes across that having a shared language helps these friends to more adequately mirror and validate each other, which in turn, enables them to grow and develop.

Interviewee 7 joked that she has her friend programmed into her phone as her therapist. She said that even though one of them currently lives in New England and the other lives in the South, they still call each other frequently, and especially anytime there is trouble and they need the other for support. It is this degree of “I'll-drop-everything-to-help” support that makes these friendships unique and enables the women to grow individually.

Interviewee 8 spoke about how meaningful her friendship was in helping her sort out one piece of her own identity development.

Oh it's very meaningful. I think the sexual orientation piece really...discussing it so much and so openly...with someone who was so safe, was so helpful in helping me to accept my own sexual identity and not only accept it, but let it be something that's always changing--you know changing and flowing and progressing and moving. It doesn't have to be static. That's something that I really learned from her—about my own personal growth. So I feel it's been really healing in trying to be more self accepting. I'm really grateful for that.

Interviewee 8 also spoke about the emotional growth that was fostered by the friendship. She said,

She's someone who I feel is growing while I'm growing too. It's really nice to be with someone who's not insecure—she's got her insecurities and so do I, but like allowing me to grow and really being invested in my personal growth where I can do the same for her.

Interviewees 11 and 14 repeatedly stated that their friendship was founded on and continued to encourage the emotional growth of each of them. It came up again and again in their interviews. To give one example, Interviewee 14 said,

Well, I can't imagine what it would be like without her. I can't. I can't imagine. I'd be ok, but it just wouldn't be the same. It just would not be the same. I feel like I've had a much richer life because she's been in it. I've been really blessed and I know how special it is. So, it's been good. It's been very good. I don't know that I could have grown as a person as much had she not been in my life. Yeah, I'm not sure that I would have...that I would have stretched as much.

Interviewee 12 mentioned emotional growth when asked what meaning her friendship has held for her. She said,

I think my friendship has made me a better person because she's one of a few people in my life who will be really, really honest with me and confront me about stuff and vice versa. So that when we're confused or we're upset or angry or anything, we really go to each other to sort it out and we know that we will say to each other those hard things that no one else may say like, "I think you're wrong here." Or, "you're in denial." Or, "This is your pattern that you've had over the years." There aren't many people who would take that risk. So, I think as a result, I'm a better person.

Interviewee 13 spoke to the growth process her friendship allowed,

It was and it has been very influential in shaping. I did a lot of growth with her, in terms of the way that we were able to learn to communicate better and better together in some

ways...I think the friendship has served a certain developmental stage as well. You know, I became friends with her when I was just turning 20 in the final years of University and then graduating and kind of that continuity, and perhaps some people get married right out of college and it provides them with that security and yeah, so I think developmentally, it was significant in terms of getting in touch with myself.

A significant number of participants in this study reported how their nonsexual intimate friendships fostered their emotional growth and helped to advance their identity development and formation. Hence, it appears that these non-sexual, intimate friendships have contributed significantly to participants' sense of self.

Similarities to Romantic Relationships

Each of the friendships discussed by the participants was nonsexual. However, many of the participants either explicitly compared their friendships to romantic relationships or used language to describe their friendship that is usually reserved only for describing romantic relationships.

This was very much the case in the friendship that Interviewees 1 and 3 shared. They communicated their love for one another and the pain in their relationship through poetry, which is often used between lovers to convey feelings, but seldom between friends. Additionally, when asked how their friendship affected other friendships, Interviewee 1 said, "It was almost like when you first start dating someone and your friends are kind of envious or jealous that they don't see you as much." Interviewee 3 said, "You know, for the time that we were together, I don't even remember anyone else." Interviewee 1 also mentioned that her roommate had said, "You guys act like boyfriend and girlfriend."

Similarly, other participants described friends commenting about their friendships being similar to dating relationships. Interviewee 9 mentioned that her friends would say to her, “You two have such a rocky relationship; it’s like a love affair.”

Interviewee 2 used a great deal of language in describing her friendship that was similar to language used to describe a romantic relationship. She called it “love at first sight,” said, “If we were having sex, then we would have been lesbians,” and she called their falling out a “break-up.” She also described how she and her friend would talk about others and say, “Oh they probably think we’re lesbians.” But, she said, “I never took that to heart, because I was just like, ok, if they think that, they think that.”

Friends, family, and the two women involved have compared Interviewee 4’s friendship to a romantic relationship. Interviewee 4 mentioned a boyfriend had asked her, “What’s up with you and [your friend]? Are you two together?” She told her friend, and they both thought it was funny and laughed together. Interviewee 4 said that she and her friend joke that their three-and-a-half year friendship is “the longest relationship that any of us had.” She also noted that her mom said, “Oh, you two spend a lot of time together, you have a pretty nice set-up.” This happened after Interviewee 4 had mentioned that her friend was going to go pick up their dry cleaning. They help each other with the tasks of daily living. Even these details are suggestive of a romantic relationship.

Interviewee 5 theorized a bit about these relationships and how they compare to dating relationships.

Well, I’ve definitely had other women friends where it was a very close friendship and very tight and a lot of emotional intimacy in a friendship. And, I’ve also had friends that you know were like the attached-at-the-hip people, “We’re like a unit. And we always show up together.” I think that happens a lot, where you have a best friend who you pal around with, but to have it also be a very emotionally intimate and intense relationship

makes it feel almost like dating somebody.... I'm not a serial dater or a serial monogamist, so I spend long stretches being single and my women friends are very, very important to me, so literally, just the time that I have, just the emotional space in my life, like there are long periods in my life where I have lots and lots of space and lots and lots of time and we spend lots and lots of time together and I think that doesn't often happen for people. I think there are some people who date a lot and who have really solid, long-term relationships and the rest of their friendships—there's a really clear hierarchy. You know, they're not as important. They don't take up as much time or space for that person. Especially, and it's interesting, because in this current space in my life, because I've lived in Raleigh for the past three or four years of my life and I've been dating some and not a whole lot, but more often and more consistently than ever before in my whole life and it's interesting because I have a wonderful group of woman friends, but I don't know that I would label any one of these as quite so intense as the ones that I had when I wasn't dating very much. And I'm sure that's part of it, just that dating takes up emotional energy.

Interviewee 6 also used a lot of language to describe her friendship that is usually reserved for romantic relationships. For example, she refers to her friend publicly as her “partner.” She stated, “Everyone knows we're in love.” Here is another example of language that interviewee 6 used which is suggestive of a romantic relationship:

So we lived together two years, and then we were separated for two years and then we were back together for a year here in DC, which is one of the reasons I moved here. But now she has moved away to NY and it was horrible, it was like breaking up. Like we got all angry and we would like randomly cry and we couldn't separate out all our stuff...our stuff had been intertwined for like five years or whatever—yeah it was bad. And we split it all up, so now she lives in NY.

The image of these two friends crying as they separate their belongings is powerfully evocative of a dating relationship.

Additionally, Interviewee 10 uses language to describe her friendship that is suggestive of a romantic relationship. They refer to each other as “wives” because they were married at the Burning Man Festival. (Notably, Interviewee 10's friend is also in a heterosexual marriage.) This word is powerful and conveys to others and to themselves the significance of their friendship.

Interviewee 10 also says:

And I guess [our friendship] really developed...when we both broke up with our significant relationships at that time...and we connected over the break up of a past relationship. So, we saw in one another, you know, taking that lovers place. So we would call each other and talk. We would go to movies together. We would rent videos together. We'd cook together. We'd do all these things that we might be doing with the person that you used to live with. We tended to rely on one another to fill that gap and we helped get each other through a really rough time.

In this way, her friendship fits the model that Interviewee 5 described above.

All together, eight out of the fourteen participants either outright compared their friendships to romantic relationships or used language to describe their friendship that is usually reserved only for describing romantic relationships.

Sexuality within the Friendship

Several of the participants described questioning whether there was an underlying sexual component to the friendship. Additionally, two of the interviewees described what happened in their friendships when one of the friends wanted to shift the friendship to a dating relationship and the other one did not. Again, this was not something explicitly asked in the interviews; rather, it emerged on its own.

Two of the participants who identified as heterosexual shared that they explored the idea of dating their friend. Interviewee 2 said, "I think that we both kind of questioned maybe like what our sexuality was." Interviewee 6 shared that she and her friend actually kissed one night. She said that as soon as they started kissing, they knew that the chemistry was "off" and they stopped. She shared that since then, they have talked about why they cannot date each other.

Interviewee 8 and her friend had conversations about the sexual ambiguity in their relationship:

In the beginning of our friendship, it did feel a little awkward, like, is there sexual tension here? Or, is there not? And then we discussed it, I initiated a conversation with her. I'm like "you know, I'm kind of feeling this way and I'm wondering..." I don't know if it's part of the intimacy that I was experiencing with another woman, or if there's something really there. And we talked about the intimacy thing and how close she feels to me, too, but it doesn't feel sexual. And that was a really good conversation.

Interviewee 5 and her friend's friendship unraveled when her friend disclosed romantic feelings to her. Interviewee 5 said that her friend went through the coming out process during their relationship. She dated her first girlfriend, and then broke up with her because she said that her true feelings were for Interviewee 5. Interviewee 5 did not share these feelings. Because they lived together, they were not able to give each other space and Interviewee 5 said that she became annoyed at the amount of processing conversations that her friend wanted to have. Finally one day, Interviewee 5 said that she had an angry outburst at her friend and they stopped talking after that. Now, they see each other and talk only seldom.

Similarly, the exploration of turning their friendship into a sexual relationship proved to create significant difficulty in Interviewee 13's friendship. Here is the story in her own words:

On my bus ride home across the country, I realized that I wanted to, that I felt attracted to [friend] and I hadn't thought that before, even though we had been really intimately in relationship for many years. So, I got home and I felt really uncomfortable seeing her again and I didn't know what to do. Finally, like a month and a half later, I said something about it and she said that she had similar feelings. We proceeded to do this kind of three month dance of not doing anything about it because we didn't want to ruin our friendship. And it was really painful. And then, this guy, who we had both known for a really long time...was quite clear with her that he was very interested in her. One night I didn't go to this party because I wasn't feeling well and she went and he was there. They kissed at the party. And so then it became this discussion between the two of us briefly, you know, what's going to happen, and I said, you just go for it if you want to. And so she did. And [they] have been together now for like three years.

This caused significant amounts of pain in Interviewee 13's life. She shared that for three years she had a hard time talking about this without crying. She felt angry and bitter towards her friend for being in her relationship. They kept in contact, but were not nearly as close. With time and effort on both of their parts, she thinks they are coming through it and are more able to be in relationship again. She said:

So I feel like I'm back now to being able to be her friend, but I don't know if we'll ever be as intimate as we were—well unless we live closer to each other—you know, I mean we spent like all of our time together basically.

Jealousy

Ten out of the fourteen women interviewed admitted to feeling jealous of their friend's other friendships or romantic relationships at one time or another. Interviewee 1 described feeling jealous and angry at Interviewee 3's boyfriend. She said that he was unreasonably threatened by their relationship. Interviewee 3 said that she was jealous of Interviewee 1 and of her passion, but not jealous of anyone she dated.

Interviewee 2 described her jealousy towards her friend's boyfriend, She started going out with this guy that I knew, and that was around and that hung out with us, but he was so jealous of our relationship that he hated me and I hated him too. So, it wasn't like all of the sudden this new guy came in; it's just sort of like, they hooked up, and like, they just got so wrapped up in each other. And I was really hurt by it, you know, that really hurt. And I was so jealous of him and he was jealous of me, and so she, I guess, I mean, I don't know if she chose, but she chose to be with him and our relationship kind of fell apart, actually, towards the end of high school.

What happened next in their friendship is described in the Break-Up section below.

Interviewee 6 described the jealousy she felt in the following way:

Well, when I worked [at a wilderness program that required me to go into the backcountry for week-long shifts] I got jealous of her boyfriend. I was jealous of him because you know I'd disappear for a week. That was like the hardest point...because we would like miss whole chunks, and you know it's so hard to really explain to someone what your life is like out there, so it was like this weird world that she was not a part of at

all. That was our hardest point. So that was why when I decided to go back to school, I decided to come back here because we needed to reconnect a little, but then I would be jealous of her boyfriend. Because I felt like he got all of the juicy bits. Like if she came home and had a bad day, she would like tell him about it and I would get the 5 second synopsis at the end of the week.

The fact that Interviewee 6 felt jealous when her friend would share the details of a bad day with her boyfriend and not her speaks to the significance of their connection.

Interviewee 8 shared a bit about her jealousy. When she met her friend, her friend was partnered with a woman. Over the course of their friendship, her friend and her partner broke up, and her friend started dating a man.

When she broke up with her female partner and began dating a man and went through that whole, you know, getting swept up in it, she would call me with all the details, but otherwise I didn't really hear from her--that did hurt my feelings and I did feel really possessive and I felt really ignored or not valued as much and of course intellectually I understood, you know, she's swept up, she'll come back when she's ready. I did air that to her. We have a very open relationship and we did talk about, "I'm feeling kind of jealous, I hardly see you, you talk about him all the time, and I'm feeling a little threatened by that." And she responded really positively to that.

Interviewee 9 said that she often felt as though her friend was jealous of her. Interviewee 9 is bisexual and her friend is straight. She said that her friend was always putting their friendship first, ahead of the men she dated. When Interviewee 9 went abroad and returned home in love with a woman, her friend was jealous and angry that Interviewee 9 was putting her girlfriend ahead of the friendship. Also, there were times, she said, where her friend would say, "Why aren't you attracted to me? Why don't you want to make out with me?" It was not that her friend was attracted to her, only that her friend wanted her attention exclusively.

Interviewees 11 and 14 described feeling jealous of each other at various different points in their friendship. Their jealousy was fairly minimal. Interviewee 11 has been

married for 25 years and she shared that, “my friendship enhances my marriage and my marriage enhances my friendship.” Both she and interviewee 14 (who is a single mother) did not express that they felt any jealousy toward their friend’s romantic partners.

Jealousy came up for Interviewee 13 around her friend’s boyfriend. She shared, “There were lots of times when I was jealous or kind of bitter about them being together.” After their conversation about their friendship becoming romantic and her friend subsequently beginning to date a man, they both moved to the same city. Interviewee 13 thought that there they would be able to work on their relationship and connect again as friends. Instead, her friend’s boyfriend moved there as well and Interviewee 13 described that year as “just painful basically.”

Break-Ups

Some of the participants described endings or shifts in the friendship that were similar in nature to break-ups from dating relationships.

Interviewees 1 and 3 had a break-up after they had shared an intense friendship for about a year. Interviewees 1 and 3 both agree that Interviewee 3 left their friendship for a boyfriend that she eventually married. Interviewee 3 said that the intense part of their friendship ended because “a boyfriend takes up the same kind of space.” She said, “It used to be that we had a kind of schedule together and we knew each other’s schedules and all of the sudden, I had incorporated myself into [boyfriend’s] schedule and I disappeared.” They have been friends for 6 years since their “break-up.” They both describe their current friendship as distant, with “a really long phone call every once in a while.” Interviewee 3 says that their friendship is more of a “nod to our history” than an active friendship.

Interviewee 2 actually used the term “break-up” when she described her separation from her friend:

I don’t know if she chose, but she chose to be with him and our relationship kind of fell apart, actually, towards the end of high school. We really like had a break-up. And it was like during graduation and everything. We weren’t speaking to each other. It was kind of miserable, actually. So I consider that our break up...I think, that boyfriend... was the only relationship that has ever really dampened—you know, kind of destroyed ours.

When she talked about the process of the break-up, she said, “I just remember, one day just really crying my eyes out, just mourning, knowing that things have changed at that time. Like I remember just acknowledging that something had changed and it was a different time.” Interviewee 2 and her friend eventually became close again, though she says they are not as close as they once were.

Interviewee 5 and her friend had a clear break-up. She and her friend had been close for two or three years when her friend came out as a lesbian. Her friend dated a woman briefly and then told her that her true feelings were for her. Interviewee 5 did not return her friend’s feelings and their relationship became highly conflict-ridden. She said that they had many “DTRs” and emotional processing discussions. (DTR is an abbreviation for Discussion of The Relationship and is a term commonly used in reference to romantic relationships.) Interviewee 5 grew frustrated with these conversations because she felt that they were not appropriate for friends to be having. Finally, one day, the friend became jealous about something and Interviewee 5 said, “Basically, I yelled at her, and it was the first time I had gotten really angry and yeah—we didn’t talk for a couple of years after that.”

The concept of “Break-ups” were not described by the majority of participants; however it was addressed by roughly a third of the participants, which brings attention to the concept.

Shifts and Changes

Several of the participants described shifts or changes that happened in their friendships over time. These shifts occurred for various reasons that were sometimes based on external factors and were sometimes specific to the particular relationship in which they occurred.

The introduction of geographic distance into the relationship was something that came up in the interviews over and over again. Interviewee 8 spoke about this very phenomenon:

[The relationship has shifted] since I’ve moved, with the geographic distance. I don’t have as much energy and time to talk on the phone as I used to. I feel it takes away from the intimacy not seeing someone...not having a physical presence there. So yeah, I definitely feel that it’s shifted. I feel close to her, but I don’t feel as close as I did, while I was seeing her 3-4 times a week, you know with classes and stuff.

Interviewee 10 and her friend went through a shift in their relationship when her friend got married. She says:

She’s married now and I helped her plan her wedding, which was part of the ritual of letting her go and seeing her move into a new space when our roles were starting to be different for one another. And that was good. So the fact that we’ve been able to move through the change of our relationship through ritual and through significant experiences and she makes sure that I’m there to share them with her and that just naturally shifts our relationship a little bit as it grows. It’s less superficial than it is when you first get to know somebody and it’s definitely more of a sisterhood that just is forever. It is, it’s deeper and it’s different, but it’s still the same.

She spoke of the power of ritual to mark these changes and shifts that occur naturally in friendships.

Interviewees 11 and 14 say that their friendship has been through many shifts and changes over the course of their 17 years together. Interviewee 11 shared:

I think it shifts. I think it's a changing entity and that's what makes it healthy...I think there're times that we spend much more time together and have much more contact than other times. There's an ebb and a flow in our relationship where we'll come closer, closer meaning the intensity or the frequency of our contact with each other is heightened, and then there'll be a natural moving away from that where the intensity and the frequency of seeing each other or talking with each other decreases and then increases. So I think that it's very natural for that to do that.

Interviewee 14 said:

Oh, we've definitely had shifts. I mean, 17 years is a long time. I mean her children are grown and out of the house and I have a 7-year-old that she supported me in being a single mom by choice and so shifts, yeah? Those are big shifts. They're just life shifts. I think those things are major ones that we've been through and it definitely affected the relationship, but I guess we're definitely still getting through it. I think we have survived and are surviving. Yeah, we've definitely had shifts. I mean, that's a long time, so of course there's been life events.

Interviewee 12 also mentioned how her friendship has "evolved":

When we were younger and didn't have children, or had very young children, we actually spent a whole lot more time together--because we would take the kids places. The nine months we were on maternity leave, because we both worked, we spent every day together all day long. But as our kids grew older and as our work progressed, we spent less time together. But one of the things we do is we protect Saturday mornings together and we go exercise and we have breakfast and that's sort of like an inviolate time on our calendar. Things evolve, for instance, she's been divorced and remarried during our friendship, so we've had different relationships as couples and as families. But at this point, we've evolved to where we celebrate all the major holidays together as families. You know, that wasn't part of our early, early friendship, but it evolved fairly quickly

Interviewee 13 and her friend's friendship went through major shifts. They were close, intimate friends for about four years. This was followed by three months of discussing the possibility of shifting their relationship into something romantic. Then, her friend decided to begin a relationship with a man and they had a painful, distant year.

This was followed by three “painful” years. She says, however, that currently they are moving towards being able to be friends again.

Indescribability or Lack of Language

Many of the participants struggled to put the quality of their relationship into words. There was a certain indescribability to their friendships. They also reflected on the fact that there are no words or categories for these types of friendships.

Interviewee 1 spoke about the lack of a term for these friendships:

I think it makes it hard (laughs), at least harder to explain and harder to even dare to talk to anybody about it and because no one’s really talked about it or heard about and there’s really no name for it, nobody really talks about it. Which, I think is another reason why I hadn’t thought about the depth of our relationship until I got your email, so, thank you. I almost want to call [interviewee 3] and say, hey, you need to take this survey!

Her comments suggest that she experiences a sense of validation in finding out that there are others who have had friendships like hers.

Interviewee 4 also felt that sense of validation. She said that she had received the recruitment email and thought, “There’s a word for us! We’re not the only people who have this weird, kind of undefined relationship kind of a thing.”

Interviewee 6 said,

Definitely other people don’t get it. It’s kind of hard sometimes. Sometimes, when I try to describe it, people think I’m being juvenile. People are like, “Right, like your best friend. Like BFF or whatever.” And I’m like, “No, you don’t understand.” So, it is hard. It’s hard to be isolated in it, but at the same time, I feel so lucky that I have it, so, it’s like our own private little treasure. Yeah, people don’t get it. Like I said, I talk about her all the time and I mention her in class, but I don’t think people really understand what the deal is. People, like our boyfriends know, people like our other good friends, people who have seen us intimately interact with each other know that it’s different, definitely.

Interviewee 8 also spoke to the lack of language for these friendships,

The closest thing I can think is a sister, that’s the only thing I can think of, because... there’s no label for it. It feels kind of like family, there’s that comfort, there’s also a

slightly sexual thing. You know how intimacy can get...it's such a blurred line and then sometimes you can feel moments of that. And, that's not something you have for a sister, you know, maybe you could, but something that's really foreign to me. So this whole concept of not having a label is really stifling, it feels really, you know, I don't know how to describe it. It would be nice if I could just use one word to describe the quality of the friendship, but I can't. Best friends? She's one of my best friends...The thing that keeps coming to mind for me, but I know that this would be misconstrued in society, is "soul companion".

Interviewee 10 discussed her frustration at not being able to convey the significance of her friendship and the way that marrying her friend eased this for her.

So I guess the word "best friend," we use that, but that's more the word we use to the outside world. Internally, we refer to each other as "wives" or as "soul sisters." I mean, people would think we were weird if we referred to each other as that in the outside world, so yeah, I'm definitely frustrated with the fact that there isn't a term...I was just so glad that we actually got married at Burning Man, that we had the opportunity to go do that. It just felt so natural, and people were just like laughing and though that was really funny, but they totally got that we would go do something like that because we're just this happy couple running around all of the time. Subsequently, some girlfriends from similar circles recognized how cool that was and they ended up getting married at Burning Man, too. So we've had several groups of girlfriends get married at Burning Man. Because I just thought it was the coolest ritual. I mean it doesn't matter who you marry. You can marry both of your best friends, which one of my friends did out there. It's a ritual of acknowledgement which doesn't really happen here in our everyday lives and acknowledging a deeper level of meaning and friendship that you have with somebody.

Thus, their marriage conveys both to themselves and to others the significance of their friendship and of their commitment to one another.

About the lack of language to describe these relationships, Interviewee 11 said, ...we use [the term "best friend"] but not really, and then we'll use the word sister and... the word "best friend" is tough to wrap your brain around because then it seems like there's this hierarchy of people in your life and then that gets all sticky and gicky and so I like that you're exploring that there are no words, really. I've already used it a couple of times, but I call her family and my sister by choice, which just puts her in a different kind of...I mean I just have a commitment to her that goes beyond other friendships. There's a level of commitment to her that she knows she would have to, you know, do something really bad, you know like, something intentionally horrific, which I can't foresee. So there's just a level of commitment that's different.

Interviewee 14 had this to say,

People who can be intimate with someone probably recognize it more than someone who can't. Because, if you were maybe younger and didn't have--or weren't committed to another person or other people...you might not recognize it. But I do think other people in the past who we have known would think, "I wish I had that." But I will say that...[my friend] has people who would consider her their best friend, and I have too--I have friends from the past, a couple of them who would probably consider me their best friend, even though they're not my best friend. So, I don't know what that is, but I do think that there are people who might think, "I wish I had that." Not necessarily with one of us—maybe with one of us, I don't know, but I do think it's recognizable as something special.

Here are Interviewee 12's thoughts on the matter:

I think in our society, we just don't value those relationships. We don't have labels for them, we don't have rituals around them. There's no way to publicly affirm them. So, I think it's interesting, but I do think that there's a message in our society that friendships are secondary to love interests. And in some ways, our society just sexualizes everything and I think emotionally, friendship can be as powerful as that other relationship.

Interviewee 13 said this about the lack of language for her friendship.

I don't think other people quite knew how to categorize it. It's true that there were people who thought, "Well, why don't you get together?" And other people who just thought we were good friends and men who were threatened. Because there was an intensity that isn't what's really, what is shared.... I'm just trying to think about any books that I've read that have heroines who have great female companions and maybe there aren't models for what that is, but it feels like there should be. Because...it's so significant.

Some of the participants did compare their friendships to friendships from television or literature. For example, Interviewee 2 said, "We wanted to be Kate and Ally when we grew up, you know, like no men. We'll just have kids and we'll live in a basement apartment somewhere in New York and make music." Interviewee 14 said, "I call us Oprah and Gayle....I say, 'I'm her Gayle.'" Interviewee 12 said, "I think of Anne of Green Gables, where they talk about a 'bosom buddy'—that's what it was like."

Six of the participants used the word "sister" or "sisterhood" to try to capture the quality of the relationship. There was a sense that these relationships were as important

and as committed as family members are to one another. Six of them also outright said that their friendships were as important to them as family was or said that their friend was “part of the family.”

Thus, the participants struggled to find words that genuinely captured and defined their nonsexual, passionate friendships.

Summary

This chapter discussed the major findings in this study organized by theme. The study attempted to answer the question: how do women conceptualize, define, and make sense of their nonsexual, passionate friendships with women. The themes that evolved included friendships as special and unique, heightened sense of commitment, enhanced emotional growth and identity development, a mirroring of romantic relationships without sexual intimacy, experimentation, jealousy, shifts and changes, and finally, insufficient languages to describe the breadth of the relationship.

Possible explanations for and interpretations of these themes as well as questions for future research are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study explored nonsexual, passionate relationships between women. It attempted to answer the following research question: How do women conceptualize, define, and make sense of their nonsexual, passionate friendships with other women? The findings indicate that women who experience passionate friendships consider such friendships to be unique, meaningful, and committed. Participants also addressed the issue of inadequacy within the language to capture the essence of their friendships. There were similar themes to traditional intimate relationships such as emotional growth and identity development fostered by the friendship, jealousy, sexuality, break-ups, and shifts and changes in emotional states as well as closeness and distance over the course of the relationship. There also was a blending of the language used to describe non-sexual intimate friendships and the language used to describe sexual relationships.

This chapter reflects upon these findings, considers strengths and limitations of the study, and discusses implications of the study for social work practice as well as suggestions for future research.

Relationship of Study Findings to Existing Literature

The findings of this study parallel existing literature on female relationships. This study especially expands upon and supports the work of Lisa Diamond (2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, Diamond & Dubé, 2002, Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé,

1999), who is the main researcher in the area of passionate friendships. Furthermore this study adds to the body of work on friendships, companionship, intimacy, love, and attachment.

One of the questions posed by the Literature Review was: Do nonsexual, passionate relationships fulfill the same attachment needs for adults as their passionate, sexual relationships? Although attachment needs were not a focus of this study, the findings suggest that nonsexual, passionate friendships do seem to fulfill the attachment needs of their participants. Based on the participants' narratives, there is evidence of proximity seeking and separation distress; and safe haven behavior and secure base behavior can be inferred. Further research is necessary, however, to confirm this observation. For this study, nonsexual passionate friendships were strong examples of attachments in the lives of the study's participants.

In examining the difference between friendship and romantic love, this study created more questions. Regan and Berscheid (1995) found that most young adults believe that although platonic love exists, one cannot be "in love" with someone unless a sexual attraction exists. The results of this study refute these findings. Many of the participants in the current study described being very much "in love" with their nonsexual friend. Some of the participants even discussed or explored sexual attraction and found that their intimacy was not based upon sexual desire. These findings confirm the work of Diamond (2003, 2004), who found that there are both chemical and cultural differences between romantic love and sexual desire; and confirms that passionate friendships occur between women regardless of their sexual orientation (Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé, 1999).

The current study challenges the literature that polarizes distinctions between “just friends” and lovers. Current findings contradict researchers who draw a separation between friendship and passionate love (Davis and Todd (1982), Floyd and Parks (1995), Hatfield and Rapson (1987), Hendrick and Hendrick (1987), and Sprecher and Regan (1998), but supports Diamond’s (2005) findings that underscore the often blurry lines that separate friendship attraction from romantic/sexual attraction. The participants in this study describe their friendships with some of the qualities of companionate love, commonly associated with friendship, and some of the qualities of passionate love, usually associated with romance and sexuality. Some of the participants, especially those who have been involved in their friendships for extended periods of time, mainly describe a companionate love, and some of these participants describe that love in more passionate terms as they speak about the formation of their friendship. Further research is necessary to explore this phenomenon.

The current study further supported Diamond’s declarations that passionate friendships are a category of friendship worthy of study in and of themselves. Diamond (2002) reported that there is a common assumption that intense, intimate, passionate friendships experienced by adolescent girls who grow up to be lesbians or bisexual women are really just expressions of repressed or denied sexual attraction. Diamond’s work and the current study show that there is a great deal more contained in these intimate friendships than repressed sexual energy (Diamond, 2002).

The findings of this study also support Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé’s, (1999) observations that women benefit from these type of relationships as well as their reports that adolescents involved in such relationships gain “high level[s] of intimacy,

companionship, and affectionate physical contact, as well as a sense of stability and trust” (p. 195). According to Diamond, Savin-Williams, & Dubé (1999), women involved in nonsexual, passionate friendships also display the attributes of attachment: proximity seeking, separation distress, using their partner as a safe haven, and using their partner as a secure base from which to explore. These qualities were confirmed through the voices of this study’s participants.

Strengths of This Study

A major strength of this study is that it used qualitative methods for capturing data. This study was exploratory and sought to understand non-sexual intimate relationships and what makes them unique. A quantitative study would provide information on the prevalence of these friendships and some descriptive data, but would lack the interaction and voice of participants that a qualitative study captures. Qualitative methods provided rich narratives and expanded the scope for understanding these friendships.

The study sample had strengths and limitations. One strength is that it contained two pairs of friends. This allowed the researcher to hear “both sides of the story” and to tease out distinctions and similarities, and it expanded the narratives. Additionally, the sample contained a broad range of length of friendship, as well as diversity in age, race, and sexual orientation.

Other strengths of this study included validity and reliability measures. Firstly, research reviewers provided feedback on the questions contained in the interview guide and assessed them for clarity, relevance, and structure. This feedback was used to revise the questions. Also, to address reliability issues, the current researcher piloted the

interview questions with one subject that was not part of the study. The subject provided feedback to help the researcher further refine the questions and technique. Use of a journal log provided additional safeguards and controls for bias and assured reliability and validity of the data collected. This log contained written notes that recorded the researcher's own reactions and reflections after each interview as a way of monitoring and reducing bias. Lastly, the research advisor served as a second reader of translated data to validate study themes, findings, and implications. Her findings were matched with the researcher's findings for reconciliation.

Limitations of this Study

Some of the limitations to this study include the sampling method as well as the sample itself. The researcher used a non-probability, convenience sample of fourteen women who have experienced a nonsexual, passionate friendship with at least one other women. Time constraints, location, finances, and feasibility factors led the researcher to use a word of mouth/snowball technique for this study's recruitment of participants. Using this type of sampling method introduced some bias into the study, although this was carefully monitored and minimized through research precautions outlined earlier in this thesis.

Other limitations to this study were participant demographics. The majority of interviewees were in their 20s, White, and heterosexual. All were middle- or upper-middle-class. The first participants who responded to recruitment methods were homogeneous, causing the researcher to seek out more heterogeneity. This was achieved. Collecting a more diverse sample population for this study required more time than the

current study allowed, but would have provided more range of experience and more richness in interviewee narratives.

Though clear themes emerged from the data, generalizability in this study is limited by its small sample size to only the current study.

Implications of this Study for Social Work Practice

The findings of this study have contributed to the literature on women's relationships and to clinical social work practice theory. The findings are helpful for clinical social workers in their work with clients who have been involved in these relationships as well as informing their work in developing relationships with their clients. Understanding what it is like for women to have these intense, powerful experiences and lack the language to describe them will enable clinical social workers to more adequately validate and mirror their clients. Also, having a framework for these relationships in all of their uniqueness, meaning, and depth, will allow clinicians to be more attuned to their clients' individual experiences.

Questions for Further Research

It is desired that this study will spark further interest and research on nonsexual, passionate relationships between women. Some interesting questions include: How do these relationships manifest cross-culturally? What attachment and dependency needs do these friendships serve for their participants? What are the different meanings of these relationships for women in different generations? Do men engage in nonsexual, passionate friendships? How are they the same? How are they different? Do these friendships hold different meanings or significance for heterosexual and for queer women?

Empirical research could be conducted to validate several of the findings of this study. For example, how common are nonsexual intimate friendships among women in the U.S.? Are there certain demographics in which these relationships are more common? Is the occurrence of women who question their sexuality as a result of having one of these relationships statistically significant? How common are these relationships in women with partners? In single women?

Summary

This study explored the following research question: How do women conceptualize, define, and make sense of their nonsexual, passionate friendships with other women? The findings were complex and suggest that much more research is needed in order to better understand these relationships between women, as well as how women struggle to name and describe their friendship. At the start of this research project, this researcher had hoped to come up with a name that adequately captures the quality of these friendships. Yet, at the end, this researcher is still left without a name or words to define these friendships. Rather, the researcher is left with a quote from a *Ms. Magazine* article, “Words offer shelter. They help love stay. I wish for a word that two friends could live inside” (Kennedy, 2001). What words best shelter or frame these complex, intimate friendships? The need for ongoing research is necessary to answer this question.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Dear Potential Research Participant:

My name is Linda Chupkowski and I am conducting a study of women's experiences with nonsexual, passionate friendships with other women. Passionate friendships are "unusually intense friendships...that appear as emotionally intimate as romantic relationships but lack explicit sexual interest, sexual activity, or both" (Diamond, 2000). This research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the Master's of Social Work degree at Smith College School for Social Work. It is for a Master's thesis and future presentation and publication on this topic.

I am searching for women who are 25 and older, of any sexual orientation, of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and from various class backgrounds to participate in this study. The main criterion for inclusion is current or past involvement in a nonsexual, passionate friendship with a woman friend. If you decide to participate in this study, I will ask you to sit for an interview with me that will require approximately 30-60 minutes of your time. The interview will include a few demographic questions, as well as questions about your relational experiences. It will include questions about your nonsexual, passionate friend and about other relationships such as romantic partners and non-passionate friends. The interview will be held in person or by telephone and will be audio tape-recorded.

The primary risk of participation in this study is experiencing uncomfortable emotions that might arise from revealing, exploring, and processing personal experiences about another woman as well as examining your friendships and the impact of these

relationships. All information obtained from the interview process will be held in strictest confidence. A list of resources will be included with the consent form for participants who may want to speak with a counselor or to explore their feelings following the interview.

The primary benefit from participation in this study is contributing to a valuable body of scientific research about interpersonal relationships among women. Your participation also will add to that body of knowledge that explores the dynamics of female relationships. You also will be given the opportunity to reflect upon your personal development and your experiences with nonsexual, passionate friendships, and the meanings you give to them. Participants may experience greater self-awareness, greater understanding of significant relationships and their interactions in other relationships, as well as increased awareness of the power of language to shape one's experience. There will be no financial compensation.

All interviews will be audio-tape recorded and transcribed. Privacy will be maintained by assigning a random code to each participant's tape and matching consent form. All identifiable names and locations will be kept confidential. The signed consent forms will be coded and stored separately from other materials under lock and key. My research advisor will have access to interview tapes and transcriptions, but she will not have access to participant's names. Only I will participate in the transcription process. Tapes and transcriptions will be kept in a locked storage compartment by the researcher for three years, consistent with Federal regulations. After this three-year time period, all data, including notes, tapes, and transcriptions will be destroyed. When presenting collected information in my MSW thesis or in presentations or publication, data will be

presented as a whole and will not be linked to individual participants. When brief illustrative quotes or vignettes are used, they will be purposefully disguised.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time: before, during, or after the interview. If you do wish to withdraw from the study, please contact me before March 15, 2007 when the report will be finalized.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION: THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Signature of Researcher
_____	_____
Date	Date

If you have any questions or wish to withdraw your consent, please contact:

Linda Chupkowski
(910) 309-5800
Lindachup@gmail.com

Referral Resources:

National Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK/8255

National Association of Social Workers Directory (202)-408-8600:
<http://search.socialworkers.org/default.asp?df=CSW&fn=>

National Mental Health Assn. Provides free information on specific disorders, referral directory to mental health providers, national directory of local mental health associations. 1-800-969-6642 (M-F 9-5 EST)

Emory University Outpatient Psychotherapy Training Program (404) 727-0399

Tufts House

2004 Ridgewood Rd

Emory University

Sliding scale fee psychotherapy services to individuals in the community; therapists are psychiatry residents in 2nd, 3rd, or 4th years of training or psychology interns; offers insight-oriented and cognitive therapy. Will slide to \$35/session. Talk to Carol Levy, MN, MPH, about sliding lower. Hours 9-5.

Families First (404) 853-2800

1105 W Peachtree NE

Atlanta, GA 30344

Individual, couples, family counseling; domestic violence. Will slide \$85-5. Three days a week open until 8:30. Short term therapy model. Racially and ethnically diverse staff.

Appendix B

Recruitment Materials

Have you ever had a close platonic relationship with another woman, but wondered if you were more than “just friends”?

Have you ever been accused of being attached at the hip?

Have you been asked if you and your female friend are dating, been treated like a couple, or asked what’s wrong if your friend is not with you?

Have you found yourself using “we” to reference you and your friend as you would if you were dating?

Have you experienced “confusion”, “discomfort”, or an “emotional ping” when you or your friend started dating someone else?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you’re a perfect candidate for my social work research study on passionate friendships. Passionate friendships are “unusually intense friendships...that appear as emotionally intimate as romantic relationships but lack explicit sexual interest, sexual activity, or both” (Diamond, 2000).

Women who are 25 and older, of all sexual orientations, of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, and from various class backgrounds are asked to volunteer for this study. Participation will involve an audio-taped interview that lasts approximately 30-60 minutes. Confidentiality is assured and participants have the right to withdraw at any time.

If you’re interested, please contact Linda at lindachup@gmail.com or (910) 309-5800 as soon as possible.

Appendix C

Interview Guide

Code #:

How old are you?

What is your racial and/or ethnic identity?

How would you describe your socio-economic background (poor, working class, middle class, upper class, etc.)?

Sexual orientation?

Where were you born?

Where do you live currently (city/town and state)?

Tell me about a memorable, nonsexual intimate relationship that you have had with another woman.

Did you ever talk about or discuss the intensity or uniqueness of this relationship with the woman?

How did your connection or bond with this woman develop? Was it instantaneous? What “attracted” you to each other?

How did others perceive your relationship?

How did your own romantic relationships, or hers, affect your friendship with the woman?

Did you ever experience jealousy surrounding the relationship, either towards her, or towards someone she was dating? What was that like?

How did the special relationship between you and the woman affect your relationships with other friends?

Did you ever experience conflicts with the woman? How were they dealt with?

How long did your relationship with the woman last? How did you interpret that length?

Did the relationship end or shift into another kind of relationship? If so, what kind?

How do you perceive/view the experience and its significance in your life? What meaning does the relationship have for you?

What is it like not having a name for something you experience?

Appendix D

HSR Approval Letter

January 7, 2007

Linda Chupkowski
593 Scott Circle
Decatur, GA 30033

Dear Linda,

Your revised materials have been reviewed and all is now in order. We are glad to give final approval to your project.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck! I wonder how recruitment will go. You may find that women are uneasy and reluctant to admit to their “passionate friendship” or to talk about it. Homophobia is still alive and well. I was so glad to hear that you are enjoying your placement and learning a lot. I thought it would be a great addition to your very different experience of last year.

With warm personal regards,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Narviar C. Calloway, Research Advisor