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FRIENDSHIPS AND RELOCATION: MAKING THE TRANSITION TO LONG-DISTANCE FRIENDSHIPS

By

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TRANSITION TO LONG-DISTANCE

FRIENDSHIPS

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PREFACE

Wings of Friendship

Through our work, children and home we made our start.

We soon had our friendship down to a fine art.

And though we are now miles apart,

You're still very much in my heart.

With distance the wings of our friendship have spread.

Our lives are forever sewn with golden thread.

Precious moments we have shared,

Through trying times we have cared.

Birthdays, Christmas, and an ordinary day

Bring fond memories of you winging my way.

Snail mail and email, while not directed,

Brighten my world. I feel so connected.

Some clear nights when I look up at the North Star

And wonder about you, I know you're not that far.

For you can search the night sky and see

The same star that's twinkling back at me.

Tanya Finchum
October, 2002

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research project was more than what can be read in the following pages. It was human development, my own development, enhanced by the educational process. Seven years ago I followed my husband as he pursued his lifelong dream of being a professor. This meant relocating away from a place that was full of emotional and physical connections. The transition was very difficult. I missed family, friends, co-workers, the work I did, and favorite places where I had gone to replenish my soul.

I was reared in the hills of Western North Carolina and East Tennessee and I say "thank you" to my parents who instilled my sense of place. We shared regular Sunday afternoon drives, picnics, and just family time in the backyard. They taught me to take the time to sit on the porch on a rainy day and listen to the rain and soak in all the different smells that God's liquid sunshine brought. All those memories are cherished and tied to that place that I can visit frequently only in my mind.

In the months immediately following the move to this place, I thought about what I was missing and began to look inward to find some part of me, and for me, in this new place. I have come to realize that at times in my life when there have been pockets of stress I have returned to higher education to give myself space to ponder and grow. That is what I have done again. As part of this graduate program in human development and family science I have learned that I have an internal and external pattern of managing some of life's challenges. Through many of my classes, threads of discovery about

myself, my family, and my friends have been rewoven to form the person I am today. I say "thank you" to all of the professors, and to my committee members in particular, that have contributed to my development.

As I have traveled this current educational road, I have been greatly encouraged by my fellow co-workers, and I say "thank you" to each and every one of them. They have listened, shared my tears, and offered endless encouragement. Now it is time for me to let them move from being 'friends of the road' to 'friends of the heart' (to borrow a phrase from Rubin, 1985). I thank them for giving me the space and time to adjust to this new place. And I say an extra "thank you" to the 25 women who shared their cherished long-distance friendship stories with me over the course of this project. Each and every one of them added to my own understanding of my self, as well as of the friends I physically moved away from. I have learned that it really is not a matter of which is harder; to be left or be the one leaving. Separation can be difficult no matter which side of the car door you are on.

Through the last few years of my development, I have witnessed my son's own development with an extra sense of the importance of becoming attached to a place. One late afternoon, at the age of ten, he was sitting on the fire hydrant in the yard looking toward the east. I went to see what he was so intent on watching and was moved beyond words. The biggest, brightest, harvest moon was rising in the night sky. I looked at him. He smiled and simply said, "Mom, those people going the other way don't know what they're missing." Sharing that moment in time and place, watching through the eyes of my child as that moon magically rose into the sky made me ever so aware that I was also witnessing growth in him. I say an extra warm-hearted "thank you" to my husband and

my son for sharing this place and for giving love, support and endless encouragement. We have all progressed together in this place and on this path of human development.

And in conclusion, I am dedicating this work to Susan Shaull, who I hope to rekindle a friendship with someday when we meet at the middle gate, on the east side. She will be easy to find for her welcoming smile will light up that place just like it did this place on my first visit here seven years ago.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Friendships are identified as important parts of the social network of individuals in that they provide companionship, assistance, and emotional support. Having long-term friends provides a sense of history and also contributes to self-identity and self-worth. Since the baby boom generation entered the job market, movement away from communities of origin and established social networks has become common (Adams, 1998). This trend places more importance on friendship networks to do tasks previously performed by family members. It also follows that more effort would be required to maintain continuity and friendships that have experienced geographical separation.

Friendships are dynamic with beginnings; middles; and sometimes, ends. Each phase of friendship is varied and complex with many possibilities of how it is played out. Progressing from stranger to acquaintance to friendship often occurs the more interaction there is over a broad range of activities. There is a tendency to maintain a relationship in which one has invested considerable time, effort, and self-disclosure as long as rewards outweigh liabilities. Friends make demands for social support in the form of time and often money. A lack of time is often given as the reason for not maintaining a relationship. Keeping friendships alive and rekindled often involves taking, making, or finding the time to keep in touch. This is even more crucial when geographical distance exists. Phone calls, cards, letters, and visits and with the age of computers, electronic mail can be used for sustaining friendships.

The establishment and maintenance of friendship patterns reinforces social networks that in turn may assist older adults in remaining in their own neighborhoods longer and in maintaining emotional health as well as assist middle-aged adults with transitions following relocation. According to Gottlieb (1994), "our social network provides feedback about the performance of our daily social roles, detects the accumulation of signs and symptoms of distress, and acts as a sounding board about whether our reactions to certain events or our general mood poses any threat to our well-being" (p. 311). Friends occasionally make suggestions about where to go for help with a problem. Social support can take a variety of forms from acquaintances, family, lifelong friends, or neighbors.

The systematic study of older adult friendships came to the forefront in 1972 when a chapter on friendship was included in *Aging and Society, Volume III: A Sociology of Age Stratification* (Riley, Johnson & Foner). This volume became widely known for its contribution to the emerging sociology of age and Beth Hess quickly became a name associated with older adult friendships. Since that time a small number of researchers have contributed to the field of older adult friendships with theories or conceptual models that are continuing to be developed. Research focusing on middle-aged adult groups however, has been scarce. There is less known about specific characteristics of adaptation and resilience during middle adulthood (Heckhausen, 2001).

Continuity theory, as developed by Robert Atchley (1989), is a theory that can be applied to the study of long-distance adult friendships. According to continuity theory (Atchley, 1991), middle-aged and older adults apply familiar strategies in familiar areas of life in an attempt to preserve and maintain existing internal and external structures.

They use past experiences to respond to and manage change. The concept of continuity presents a positive side to aging. Older adults do not necessarily have to anticipate disengagement but instead can exercise their choice to actively participate in establishing and maintaining their own friendship structures. This viewpoint offers an element of control in a time when many aspects of an older person's life often appear dictated by declining health, financial issues, public policy, and perceptions.

Statement of the Problem

In middle age the time and energy it takes to establish and maintain friendships is many times allotted to competing obligations in other social roles such as reaching the top of a career ladder. The family demands a considerable portion of a person's time. The responsibilities of middle age leave little time for friendship development or maintenance. As children leave the home, the common factors that held many friendships together disappear. Other friendships may suffer from having been too close over the years by becoming too predictable and too boring.

Geographical separations are common among older adults due to retirement, relocation, death of cohorts, and failing health. Physical separations from friends and social support networks are also common in midlife often due to career moves. Understanding how geographical separations relate to managing long-distance friendships can help in establishing means to maintain the friendship or coping strategies to deal with loss. Exploring successful ways of maintaining, as well as detaching, can enable older adult care providers in presenting opportunities to develop interpersonal skills and coping strategies. Understanding detachment due to geographical separation

will also be helpful to the friend that remains behind. There may even be a period of mild depression as each member of the dyad adjusts to the loss of regular, face-to-face contact. Studying long distance adult friendships will provide information that will help in maintaining social support that in turn may be useful for people relocating across their life courses and in particular in helping older adults be active in, and remain in, their communities longer.

Having long-term friends provides a sense of history and stresses continuity of relationships that, in turn, contributes to self-identity and self-worth. Social networks offer various degrees of assistance such as emotional support and help with daily living activities. Maintaining a sense of continuation, whether it is in self-identity or in familiar surroundings, remains important as life transitions are experienced. People expect and get different things from long-term friends than they do from intermediate and short-term friends. Long-term friends can reminisce about their childhoods. "The level of intimacy between long-term friends tends to be high, and changes in circumstances such as retirement or widowhood have less effect on long-term friendships than on other friendships" (Atchley, 1991, p. 153).

Friends have to reach a balance between what each one needs and can give. There are various strategies that can be used to maintain various types of relationships. Some of the key strategies include engaging in self-disclosure, providing support and assurance, and keeping up with the level of rewards. Spending time together and making an effort to stay in touch are also important. Another point to consider is that experiences with previous relationships and friendships may influence the progression of current and future friendships.

There are many benefits of friendship. Friends meet our material needs by providing various kinds of help and support. Friends meet cognitive needs in that friends provide stimulation through shared experiences, activities, and exchange of ideas. Friends also provide a frame of reference through which the world can be interpreted and meaning found in experiences. Friends provide love and esteem thus helping to meet social-emotional needs.

People expect and obtain different kinds of support for different stressful events from different people at different points in time. According to Gottlieb (1994), "social support protects health because it buffers or cushions the impact of crises and chronic hardships" (p. 317). Gottlieb also reported that sociologists have shown that people who are more strongly integrated in society, through connections to voluntary organizations, paid employment, and a personal network of family and friends, have lower mortality rates than more socially isolated individuals. Additionally he stated, "people who actually receive social support, or just believe they could obtain it if they wanted it, are at lower risk of becoming maladjusted or becoming mentally or physically ill than those who lack social support" (Gottlieb, p. 317). Perhaps this is a partial reason for people maintaining even minimum contact with geographically separated friends. The one contact at Christmas may be enough to maintain the belief that they could obtain help from this friend if needed.

Friendships grow and develop and appear to progress on a continuum with beginnings, periods of endurance and change, and sometimes endings. The concept of continuity is similar in that it implies an evolutionary or developmental change in a context that includes the past, present, and anticipated future. This gives continuity a

dynamic view in which a basic structure persists while allowing for a variety of change. This is pertinent in that friendships may change but tend to have persistent basic structures such as the number of people in the network and the pattern of connections, as in who knows whom, between members.

Continuity is tied to an individual's perceived past and implies a consistency of patterns. Changes are perceived to be, linked to, and fit within, an individual's history. This history contains a collection of experiences which, when examined, may disclose patterns of establishing, maintaining, and ending friendships. Examining an individual's friendships at various stages may illuminate established patterns. Relationships can be explored to see if friends maintain the same level of friendship interaction when one partner geographically separates and to see if previous experiences with separation are related to maintenance strategies for both parties. Information on these two areas of inquiry can aid in discovering and developing ways to keep support networks active into old age.

Purpose of the Study

There are two purposes of this study. The first purpose is to gain a clearer understanding of adult women's friendship maintenance across physical distances. The second purpose is to apply continuity theory to the study of adult women's friendships. Examining friendship networks that have experienced a geographical separation at various points in the adult life course can provide historical and contextual information. This information will be useful in exploring friendship patterns of individuals as they have moved through adult life and can be used with continuity theory to examine any

patterns that may exist. Understanding more about maintained dyads, and the reasons they are maintained, will provide insight into skills necessary for establishing good support networks.

Theoretical Orientation

Continuity Theory

Continuous adult development, including adaptation to changing situations, is the basis of continuity theory as developed by Robert Atchley (1989). After examining various studies concerning older adults, Atchley noticed that a large portion of older adults showed consistency over time in their patterns of thinking and behaving despite significant changes in their health and social circumstances. Lifestyle activities as well as occupational identities tended to be maintained across the retirement transition. These lifestyle activities included aspects of social networks. While one area of a person's life experienced continuity, there might be other areas that did not. A person's life has various dimensions and the prevalence of continuity may also vary. As an example, personal goals may be continuous but feelings of personal effectiveness may not.

Continuity theory was constructed around elements of adaptation in middle-aged and older adults. Aging brings changes but the persistence of general patterns is the key concept in this theory, rather than the sameness in the details contained within patterns. There may also be persistence in general personality structure. An individual develops a life perspective based on his or her experiences while progressing through the stages of life. This perspective simply requires that experiences be remembered. It does not mean that all the things that contributed to that perspective have to be continued. According to

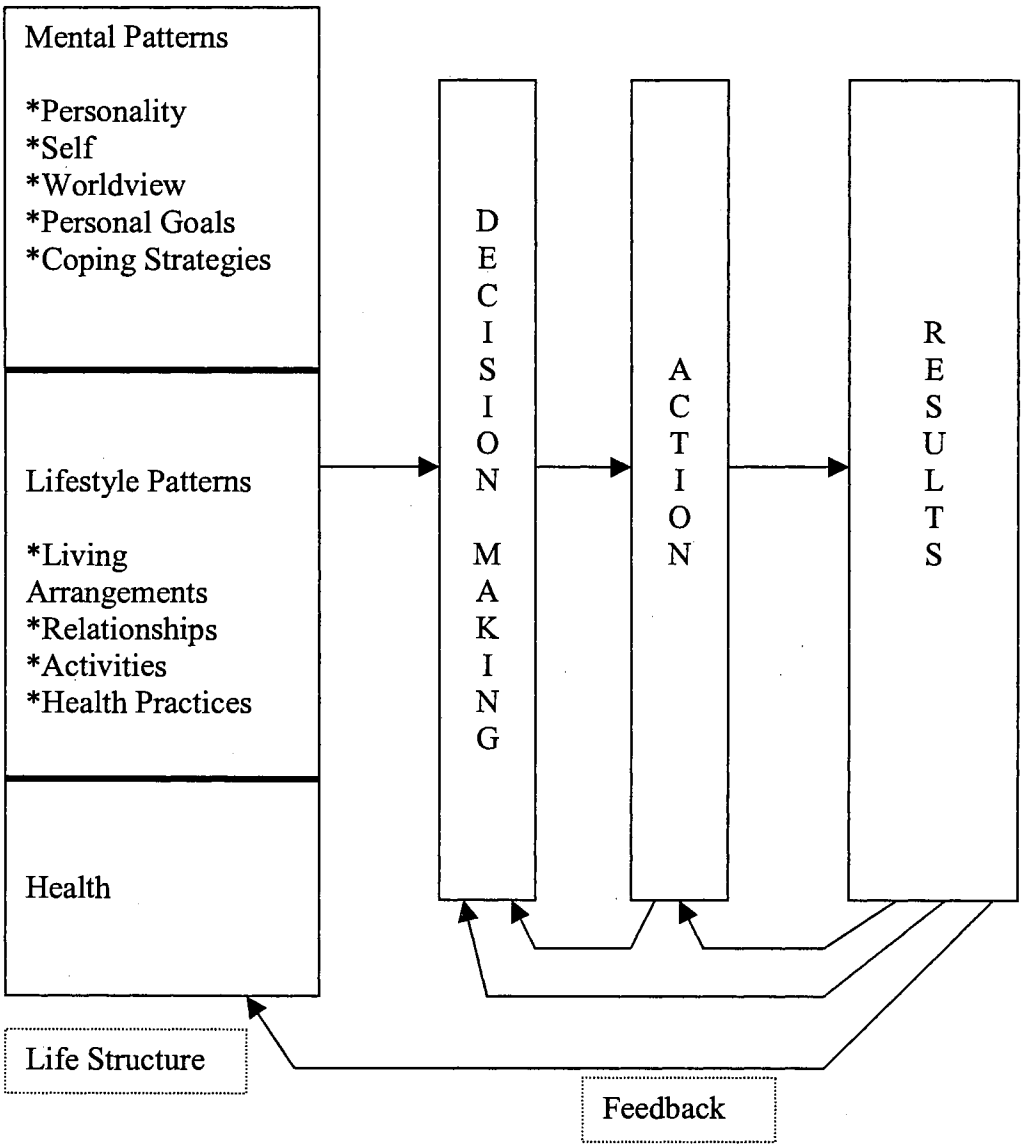
Atchley (1999), "an artist who has spent years drawing and who takes up printmaking is making a change in the details of life as an artist but is showing continuity of commitment to art as an element of self and lifestyle" (p.2). Continuity and change can exist at the same time within an individual self and lifestyle and are matters of degree.

There are two patterns that indicate continuity. The first pattern is absolute stability in which there is a lack of change. The second type occurs when there are minor fluctuations within patterns but the general patterns are maintained. Related to friendships, this could be when one member of the social network leaves but the remaining members adjust and maintain the network. When there are dramatic shifts in a pattern such as a person withdrawing from relationships because of one bad experience, this is referred to as discontinuity. This new behavior is a significant change from past patterns.

Applied to friendship, continuity theory maintains that adults gradually develop stable patterns of forming and maintaining friendships and that, in adapting to various transitions, adults engage in thought and take action designed to preserve and maintain these patterns in their general form. Continuity can have a dynamic view in which a basic structure persists over time allowing for a variety of changes. Friendships are dynamic but they may have a basic network structure. Continuity is tied to an individual's perceived past and implies a consistency of patterns over time.

Concepts and Assumptions

The specific elements of continuity theory include internal patterns, external patterns, developmental goals and adaptive capacity (Atchley, 1999). According to continuity theory, the primary goal of adult development is adaptive change in that people actively develop ideas of what is going on in the world and why. These ideas are referred to as personal constructs and include ideas about the self, relationships with others, and personal lifestyles. Figure 1 represents Atchley's model of continuity.



Note: From Continuity and Adaptation in Aging: Creating Positive Experiences (p. 5) by Robert C. Atchley, 1999, Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press. Copyright 1994 by The John Hopkins University Press. Reprinted with permission.

Figure 1

Atchley's Model of Continuity

Internal and external frameworks are developed with the ability to adjust to a considerable amount of evolutionary change without experiencing crisis. The amount of change that will be tolerated will vary individually. In the case of friendships, some individuals may experience a deep personal loss to the point of depression when a confidant becomes geographically separated due to life transitions such as a job change or relocation. Continuity theory is about adaptation and deals with the development and maintenance of adaptive capacity.

Continuity theory assumes that personal constructs are influenced by mass media and societal factors. Individuals can create their own personal realities within their social environments. This theory also assumes patterns of thought and behavior which persist throughout life, and that people tend to make decisions based on feedback from previous experiences. Following this line of thought, people may choose to establish, maintain, or end relationships based on whether prior experience was positive or negative.

Continuity theory simply predicts that most people will try continuity, what worked before, as their first adaptive strategy. It does not however, predict that applying continuity will lead to successful adaptation or aging. The results of continuity may not necessarily be positive in that there is evidence that people with low self-esteem, abusive relationships, and poor social adaptation will work hard at maintaining their internal and external constructs (Atchley, 1999). For some people having a foundation of any kind may be preferable to an unknown future.

The dynamics that produce basic story lines can be better understood by considering the concepts of continuity theory. The theory offers ways to explain why particular people have developed in the way they have and whether they have adapted

well or not. It can indicate where to look for internal and external elements people use in adapting to various life circumstances including aging-related changes. This information can be very useful to people working with older adults who are experiencing changes as well as be useful to people working with adults in general who are having difficulty adjusting to new locations. Being aware of continuity strategies and their importance in the adjustment process may enhance the efforts and effects of the adult's maintenance of social support networks.

Internal and External Continuity

The dynamics of internal continuity include the self, self-concept, and identity, all of which have parts to play in forming and maintaining friendships. According to continuity theory, developing adults come to more readily accept themselves and their friends as they age. This self-acceptance supports inner continuity. According to Atchley (1989), "people select, define, classify, and organize experiences in order to express the reality of their lives and permeate that reality with meaning" (p. 186). If change is seen as sharply decreasing a person's capacity for coherence in some aspect of identity then discontinuity can occur. Severe internal discontinuity can destroy mental health. Poor psychological health can, in turn, negatively influence friendships.

As adults continue to evolve they appear to develop clearer ideas about what gives them satisfaction and what decision-making strategies are effective. They attempt to establish an external life situation that supports their internal framework. A lifetime of learning, adapting, personal evolution, and selective investments influence an older adult's ability to adapt. In adapting they are motivated to continue to use their

established internal and external patterns. Maintaining morale in the face of discontinuity is also a measure of adaptive capacity.

External continuity is defined in terms of a remembered structure of physical and social environments, role relationships, and activities. The consistency over time in lifestyle reflects external continuity. Aspects of individuals' external structures include their physical and social environments, for example where they like to be, and role relationships as in the friends and colleagues that surround them. Other external elements include activities, as in what they like to do and mannerisms that have developed over a lifetime such as being early to bed and early to rise. Presentation of self, predictability, accurate feedback and anticipation as to how they will behave and act in the future, and their means of coping also contribute to external patterns. All of these elements influence the establishment and maintenance of friendships. For people to become friends they have to come in contact somewhere whether it is through work or leisure. How they present themselves can enhance or detract from the potential for forming social networks.

The dynamics of external continuity include using familiar skills to do familiar things in familiar places in the company of familiar people (Atchley, 1989). This can apply to strategies in making and keeping friends. Experience and practice come into play and having successfully established one friendship may make it easier to establish a second one. Continuity of environments is also important to adaptation. Having familiar contact points helps keep friendships intact. External continuity increases the possibility that feedback received from others about the self-concept can be accurately anticipated. It is also seen as an important means of coping with physical and mental changes that

may accompany aging. External continuity reduces the ambiguity of personal goals that come with changes such as relocation, widowhood, retirement or the empty nest.

Internal continuity is an important part of individual mastery and competence. It is essential to a sense of ego integrity and helps meet the need for self-esteem. Friendships can also help to meet these needs. Motivation is an effective means of meeting important needs. External continuity is motivated by desire for predictable social support and in later years provides a basis for social security. People are expected by others to present themselves in a way that is obviously tied to and connected with their past role performances. Being aware of an individual's framework of ideas can aid in the understanding of an older adult's decision making, ego integrity, self-esteem, and their perception of their own important needs. Having reliable, long-term friends assists with internal and external continuity. Experience and practice come into play. Having success at establishing one friendship can, potentially, make it easier to establish a second one.

Discontinuities in communication skills can cause discontinuities in the core of identity. Interpersonal skills or the lack there of, can influence relationship building. If a person's identity is based on what job he or she does, then when he or she can no longer do that job, his or her identity becomes threatened. This is a possible explanation of what can happen when a person is moved from a home with familiar surroundings to another area where everything is new. If the person has not had previous successful experiences with having to establish new social networks, relocating can be emotionally difficult.

Definitions of Terms

1. Physical separation refers to no longer having easy daily access to a friend.
2. Geographically separated means one member of the dyad lives far enough away that it would be difficult or impossible to see him or her every day. For example, it may now take a two-hour drive or a long-distance phone call to have contact with the friend.
3. The term older adult refers to a person aged 45 or over.
4. Friendship has various definitions and generally for the purpose of this paper it refers to dyads that have developed a self-identified, close relationship.
5. Continuity refers to a consistency of patterns over time.
6. Maintenance strategies are defined as behaviors and thought patterns that are used by friends to keep the friendship vital and ongoing.
7. Life events/transitions refer to events that affect the current state of affairs such as marriage, changing jobs, the birth of a child, and relocation.

Summary

Maintaining friendships presents a number of dilemmas that can support continuity or discontinuity. Several needs and wants have to be juggled and weighed: the need for dependence with the need to be independent; wanting to be completely open verses wanting to protect the self by not revealing everything; wanting to have a lot in common, but not so much that the relationship becomes boring and predictable. These issues are not dealt with just once but instead are continually negotiated. To maintain the relationship, these issues must be resolved to the satisfaction of each person. Other types

of dilemmas that must be managed to maintain a friendship include the tension between constancy and change. A person wants to believe that his or her friend will continue to be the same person and that the friendship will endure. However, the reality is that people change.

Relationships are dynamic with beginnings, middles, and ends and they change as people interact with the world. Each phase of friendship is varied and complex with many possibilities for how it is played out. Friendship maintenance requires more effort as people relocate, change jobs, and retire. The establishment and maintenance of friendship patterns reinforces social networks that in turn may assist older adults in remaining in their own neighborhoods longer and help middle aged adults who have relocated with maintaining emotional health. Geographical separations are common among middle aged and older adults so understanding how individuals and friends are affected by the separation will be helpful in planning a strategy to minimize the negative effects. Understanding detachment due to geographical separation will also be helpful to the friend that remains behind.

Researcher Subjectivity

Long-distance friendships became an issue for the researcher several years ago when, as a trailing spouse, she moved over 800 miles away from family, established friendships, and a career. It was very hard to adjust to not having easy access to physical contact with many of these special people and as time passed, the researcher began to question why some of the friends reacted differently than others. From the researcher's point of view, the friend that had been left still had all other aspects of her life still in

place whereas with the researcher, nothing was the same. The geographic separation and the ensuing desire to stay connected with close friends led to the renegotiation of friendship maintenance behaviors and to an interest in exploring how other close friendships made the transition to long-distance friendships.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The phrase "I know just what you mean" has undoubtedly been muttered millions of times both by friends and acquaintances and now it is a title of a book written by two women who have been friends for over 26 years. Ellen Goodman and Patricia O'Brien (2000) reaffirm that friendship does matter especially when lives are in transition. Their book offers many insights on friendships gathered through interviews with numerous women from all stages of life. According to Goodman and O'Brien, "friends are more likely than family to encourage change because families, after all, have an investment in stability and continuity (p. 72)." Friends encourage each other to take the next step and are there to help figure out just what is that next step.

The study of friendships has become important for several reasons. The trend toward smaller nuclear families is continuing, and retirees, as well as other nuclear family members, are increasingly relocating due to work, education, or romantic choices. As life expectancy rises, so does the likelihood of periods of longer retirement without the day-to-day contact with co-workers, the death of a spouse, and the death of cohort members. The high divorce rate comes into play as families and spouses separate and make adjustments in their support networks.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2000) issued an update on geographical mobility June of 2000 and the following numbers provide support for the importance of friendship and support network studies.

- "Between March 1998 and March 1999, 42.6 million people moved;
- 19.8 percent moved between counties within the same state;
- 17.6 percent moved to a different state;
- Moving rates declined with age: 14.1 percent for people 35 to 44, 9.5 percent for those 55 to 64, and 4.5 percent for those 65 and older;
- Renters had higher rates of moving than owners.
- The South continued recent trends as the only region with a significant increase due to internal migration, with a net gain of 270,000 people" (p. 1).

There are two purposes of this study. The first purpose is to gain a clearer understanding of friendships among women in adulthood and their maintenance across physical distances. The second purpose is to apply continuity theory to the study of long distance adult friendships. Examining friendships that have experienced geographical separation and survived at various points in the adult life course can provide insight into how relationships are adapted. Understanding more about maintained dyads, and the reasons, as well as ways, they are maintained will provide information about skills necessary for establishing lifelong support networks.

Friendship

Conceptions of Friendships

> Even the utmost goodwill and harmony and practical kindness are not sufficient for friendship, for friends do not live in harmony merely, as some say, but in melody (Henry David Thoreau, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," 1849; [Yager, p. 127])

Until asked to define friendship, everyone has an idea of what it is. There is no precise, agreed upon set of defining features. "Friend" is not a categorical label such as "co-worker" or "cousin," but instead is a relational term that means something about the quality and character of the relationship involved. Yager (1997) studied forty-six college students in regards to factors that must be present in a close relationship. The results showed that a friend is someone who can be trusted, who is loyal, accepting, caring, a good listener and dependable, just to name a few attributes. No laws govern friendships and there are few social rules about who can and cannot become friends. Brown (1981) states that there is an ageless quality to friendship in that people can make friends at any age, keep them for as long as they like and disengage from them whenever it is necessary or convenient. Atchley (1991) describes friendship as ranging from close, intense, continuous interactions to cursory, sociable contacts otherwise referred to as acquaintances. Making the effort to obtain participants' own definitions of friendship and their distinctions among types of friends before asking about other aspects of friendship has been recommended (Adams, Blieszner, & De Vries, 2000).

Friends tend to be selected from among people who are considered social equals. Growing up together, living in the same neighborhood, having similar occupations, having children the same age, having similar interests, being the same general age, and being the same gender are all factors that can create the sense of similarity and equality (Brown, 1981; Duck, 1983; Hess, 1972). The impact of gender on friendship in later life is unclear. A larger percentage of the evidence suggests that men have about as many acquaintances and friends as women but are less likely to confide in them (Aiken, 1998; Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Hazan, 1994).

Rubin (1985) asked 45 people to refer her to all those they had named as close or best friends. She contacted 132 of the named friends and found that 84 of these people made no mention of the person she had originally interviewed when asked to list their friends. This reinforces the various definitions of friend that people have and may also be an indicator of the old adage 'out of sight, out of mind.' Also, according to Rubin (1985) the depth of a friendship depends to some degree on how many parts of one's self a friend is allowed to see, share, and validate.

Sullivan (1953) was one of the first major theorists to emphasize the interpersonal importance of friendship for psychosocial development. Sullivan ascribed a great deal of importance to "chumship," intimate same-sex friendships among preadolescents. Chumships were characterized by intense closeness and mutuality in which participants come to appreciate each other's unique personalities and needs. Sullivan further emphasized the potential for intimate friendships to promote self-concept development, mutual validation of self-worth, and the therapeutic potential of friendship. In contrast to the fairly long history of research on child and teenage friendship, systematic study of adult friendship only began in the last thirty years. In 1972, Beth Hess published a major review of the friendship studies from the 1940s through the 1960s. She made a case for integrating the friendship role with changes in other social roles across the life span.

Matthews (1986) used oral biographies to study dyads and determined three categories of orientation to friendship. The first category consisted of people who were independent (20%) and did not have close friends; they tended to identify themselves as loners but were not likely to be lonely. The second category consisted of people who were discerning (13%) and very demanding. They were selective in terms of who were

accepted as friends and as a result had relatively few friends. They were likely to be oriented to the past and not likely to develop new friendships in later life. Acquisitive (67%) people made up the third group. These people had many social contacts and actively sought new friendships and maintained old ones. They were oriented to the past, present, and the future.

Importance of Friendship

According to Aiken (1998), during the early 1990s almost one out of six Americans changed residences. Some were local moves but about one-third were out of the county or out of the state moves. "It is estimated that, during his or her lifetime, the average American moves about twelve times (Aiken, p. 235)." Adults in their twenties and thirties move at least every two years as an average due to careers and starting families.

Rubin (1985) made the point that as the divorce rate continues to increase, friendships will become a major source for meeting needs for emotional intimacy, social connectedness and intellectual stimulation. In another study by Rubin (1985), 300 people between the ages of 25 and 55 were interviewed. She was interested in how friendship outside of a marriage was related to life inside the marriage. The most common metaphor for describing the closeness of friends was the idea of kin. When the interviewees wanted to make the point of how important their friendships were and the quality of the closeness, they used the metaphor of the family. "How can I tell you what my friends mean to me? They're like family (Rubin, p. 16)." The use of this metaphor suggests the importance of the relationship and the intensity of the connection along with

a sense of belonging, continuity, and security. The sibling relationship is usually the longest relationship in one's life with many years of contact and shared experiences. When a friend is referred to as being similar to a sister or brother this is an indication of the closeness of the relationship. Siblings have roles that bridge the qualities of family relationships and friendships (Antonucci et al., 2001), but perhaps friends also have roles that bridge the qualities of siblings and families.

Siebert, Mutran, and Reitzes (1999) conducted a study focused on the research questions: Is the friend role significant in predicting well-being and is the friend role related to differences in social support and gender? Data were gathered from a five-year longitudinal study conducted in two waves with the goal of the study being to track the transition to retirement. The variable for general well-being was life satisfaction and another variable was identity which reflected the respondent's identity meanings as a friend. Identity meanings are the shared meanings one attributes to oneself in a particular role. Commitment to the role of friend was measured, as was density of network and frequency of contact with network members. Their correlations and mean comparisons statistically supported the theoretical reasoning that the friendship role is important.

Friendships Over the Life Course

Most individuals build their lives around friends as well as families. Friendships may not have the same significance throughout life but these relationships are developmental resources at all ages. It is also important to note that developmental changes in individuals may trigger changes in relationships and that these changes extend through the life course (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Social networks are the most numerous

during midlife. People are typically married, likely to have children, still have parents living, and are in the workforce. A person in midlife typically has the least amount of time for friendships due to having these multiple roles coupled with the dramatic increase in the pace of everyday life. The convoy framework (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1995) illustrates how attachments are made throughout the life span and that friends and family are a part of a dynamic support system through time. The impact of midlife friendships may extend into late life.

Hess (1972) identified three characteristics relevant to an understanding of how the age of partners affects their social relations. Age influences the process of friendship formation, maintenance, and termination. Friendships are also fragile, requiring continuing reaffirmation by both participants. Another characteristic of friendship is that it carries powerful connotations of 'peership' of both similarity and equality in status.

Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) in their classic study of four generations observed an increase of friend activity in the pre-retirement years which followed a period of lower interaction with friends that lasted from high school through middle age. Fiebert and Wright (1989) found that marriages had a pronounced effect on friendships. Participants "reported less time and emotional need for friendships and a corresponding shifting of priorities from friendship to work, spouse and family" (p.1129).

Brown (1981) viewed age as a temporal characteristic of the relationship. Friendships are formed, deepened and sustained across time. As people move across the life course, they witness changes in their abilities, experiences and developmental needs. He believed the basic defining characteristics of friendship were equality, reciprocity and affective involvement of each partner in the total personality of the other partner.

Carbery and Buhrmester (1998) conducted a study comparing the roles that close friends play in need fulfillment to the roles played by other network members and drew their participants from three different phases of young-adulthood. A life-span perspective was used and the phases were the single phase (romantically uncommitted), the married-without-children phase and the parenthood phase. There were thirty female and thirty male participants between the ages of 20 and 35 years old for each phase. During an initial interview, participants were asked to identify the one friend whom they felt close to who lived in the study area. Their goal was to document how the time and emotional investment in friendships are affected by the family role commitments of each phase.

Carbery and Buhrmester (1998) asked participants to rate the extent to which they received certain types of social support from their relationships with their mother, father, closest friend, spouse or significant other, and their oldest child. It was found that the importance of friends as suppliers of social support differed substantially between the phases. Neither the length of friendship nor the sex of friends varied significantly across the three phases. Ratings of companionship with friends were highest for the single phase, significantly lower in the marital phase, and significantly lower still in the parenthood phase. Spouses, as expected, were reported as among the leading suppliers of all provisions during the parenthood phase.

Gender Issues in Friendship

Gender has various influences on friendships. Carbery and Buhrmester (1998) found that participants had known their closest friend for an average of 8.1 years and closest friends were predominantly the same sex as the participant. Their analyses

revealed that females reported receiving significantly higher levels of all types of social support. Siebert, Mutran, and Reitzes (1999) reported results from their study that indicated women were more committed to the role of friend and had stronger identity meanings as a friend. On the other hand their study indicated that the density of support network was not significantly different for men and women.

Roberto and Kimboko (1989) found greater continuity in the long-term close relationships of older women as compared with older men. In their study, women reported contact with close friends from their childhood and adolescence. The men in the study reported that they maintained relationships with close friends developed only since mid-life. In another study Wright (1982), found that women's friendships require time solely for direct confrontation and shared conversations that he characterized as "face-to-face" friendships. The friendships of men, on the other hand, tend to center around structured activities of mutual interest that he characterized as "side-by-side."

Fiebert and Wright (1989) found in their study that both men and women perceived their current friendships to be stronger than those of their early adulthood. Men and women did not differ in their reported numbers of close friends, either currently or retrospectively, and their current friendships were of longer duration than those of their early adulthood. Men's friendships were found to be of longer duration than women's both currently and retrospectively, and the length of men's friendships increased with time more sharply than did the length of women's friendships.

Traditionally relocating the family was due to a change in jobs for the man. Residential mobility may threaten women's identities differently than men's. The man typically enters a pre-arranged work environment with new challenges and excitement

leaving his spouse to settle the house and help the children adjust. Women are generally the "kinkeepers" and moving away from extended family may add to the stress of relocation. "The impacts on depression of social contact and increased kin distance following a move were greater for women. Women are more dependent on social ties with kin and other network members for their psychological well-being than men" (Magdol, 2002). It appears that relocating is gendered and contributes to gender differences in psychological distress.

Network Issues

A network of social support is a set of persons through which interpersonal transactions are exchanged such as assistance with daily living. Social networks are structural and include elements of size, stability, degree of homogeneity and amount of connectedness. Social support refers to functional behaviors of people within the network. Antonucci and Akiyama (1995) used the phrase 'convoys of social support' to refer to the various interpersonal relationships that an individual experiences over the life course. They conducted a national representative study of the support networks of middle-aged and older people. Participants were asked to identify network members at three different levels of closeness. The analysis showed that there were no significant differences in size of network by age or in the number of people from whom they received support. Their results suggest that some relationships develop and grow along with the person while others fill a need at one point and fade away.

An important feature of the support process is that the social network's role changes over time. Adams (1987) observed a variety of changes, expanding and

contracting, in friendship patterns in her longitudinal study of older adults. Friends fill different functions at different stages of the support process. Different kinds of support are expected from and provided by different sources and situational cues determine whether and how social support is expressed.

The number of participants (size), the proportion of all possible friendships that exist among members (density), and the patterns of connections among an individual's friends (configuration) are important dimensions of a network. In their study, Siebert, Mutran, and Reitzes (1999) found that respondents who scored high on the education, income and occupational prestige variables appeared to be in touch with their support people less frequently. Respondents who relied on friends for support had less dense networks and called their supporters less often than those who relied on relatives for support.

Networks have many structural dimensions such as hierarchy, homogeneity, and solidarity (Adams, 1987; Allan, 1998; Fehr, 1996). Network configuration is the pattern of ties within the network. Radial networks (0% dense) refer to networks in which none of the friends know one another. Interlocking networks (100% dense) occur when everyone knows one another and partially interlocking networks occur when only a proportion of the members of the network know one another.

The pattern of one's daily life is conceptualized as the foundation for a friendship pattern and this notion concerns the intersection of social lives. Potential friends must cross paths and have an avenue for formation and maintenance of friendships (Hess, 1972; Blieszner & Adams, 1992). Proximity, available resources, and outside activities influence friendships and this is referred to as context. Changes in the life course, such as

retirement or job change, influence friendship patterns. Neighborhoods and work environments are the context in which many friendships are formed and maintained.

Structure consists of any fairly permanent social pattern and culture consists of all that participants in a context learn to believe, value, think, feel, do, use, and produce.

> Friendship, like other close relationships, exists within contexts of both stability and change. Friendship is stable in the sense that people have friends throughout their lives and probably enact friendships fairly similarly over the life course according to their personality characteristics and social skills (Blieszner, 1994, p.3).

According to Blieszner (1994), friends may be freely chosen, but the choice occurs within the context of a social structure that provides opportunities to meet some kinds of people and limits chances to meet others, making friendship not entirely voluntary.

Maintenance

Importance of Maintenance

Relationship maintenance is the area where relationships continue to exist between the point of their initial development and their possible decline (Fehr, 1996). Friendships are voluntary and are up to the persons involved to maintain (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Duck, 1983; Field, 1999; Matthews, 1986). There are elements of choice and control. Friends make each other laugh and they build up a core of stories that keep them connected (Goodman & O'Brien, 2000; Matthews, 1986). Keeping connected is a major theme in friendship maintenance behaviors. Moving from stranger to acquaintance to friendship often occurs the more interaction there is over a broad range of activities (Blieszner, 1994; Fehr, 1996).

Studies have shown that older adults choose to retain those friends who contribute positively to identity and that the perceived quality of social support is more important than quantity (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1991; O'Connor, 1995). Friends make demands for social support, time and often money. Maintenance is needed as each member attempts to ensure that the benefits outweigh the negative aspects of the friendship. Long-term friendships have difficult periods and the skill of each friend in handling anger and resolving conflicts constructively will determine the degree to which the friendship will endure.

Phone calls, cards, letters, visits, and electronic mail (email) can be used for sustaining friendships. The telephone can be a lifeline for friendships as can electronic mail in that without frequent communication it is often hard to know what to talk about and small daily events may not be worth making a long-distance phone call. Chatting back and forth with electronic mail can be managed throughout the day or week and messages can be read and written at a person's convenience (Dainton & Aylor, 2002; Boneva, Kraut, & Frohlich, 2001). A lack of time is often given as the reason for not maintaining a relationship. Keeping friendships alive and rekindled often involves taking, making, or finding the time to keep in touch. This is even more crucial when geographical distance exists. Time is of a premium, especially with middle-aged people as was discussed earlier. Very seldom do people slow down long enough to sit on the front porch, if they even have one, and just visit with neighbors and friends.

Friends have to reach a balance between what each one needs and can give. There are various strategies that can be used to maintain various types of relationships. Some of the key strategies that have been identified include engaging in self-disclosure,

providing support and assurance, and keeping up with the level of rewards. Spending time together and making an effort to stay in touch are also important. The birthday card and the annual Christmas letter give reality to the relationship and serve a psychological function in that they affirm the continuity of life by providing a residue of connection and affection with memories of shared histories.

According to Duck (1983), there are two elements to relationship maintenance. Strategic planning can occur where the individual actively pursues the maintenance of the friendship. On the other end of the spectrum is the haphazard approach where the relationship is allowed to continue by means of routine everyday activities and conversations. Duck (1983) found that simply having a conversation with a friend was more important than the actual topics discussed. The first type of strategy would support the maintenance of the relationship if geographical separation occurred whereas the second type would more than likely result in the ending or fading away of the friendship once the routine environment was removed.

Differences in personality and social orientation will factor into a person's friendship style and influence maintenance behaviors. Past experiences may also alter and shape patterns of friendship behavior. Goodman and O'Brien (2000) interviewed several people who stated previous experiences with friends had altered their behavior. One person had a college roommate who was her best friend until the roommate found a boyfriend and then rejected her. "That experience changed my pattern of friendship ... even telling this story, I remember in a physical way, how it hurt" (Goodman & O'Brien, p. 139). She has never since had a "best friend."

Atchley (1991) has contributed much to the friendship area of study. He has found that fair-weather friends can be counted on only so long as times are good. Breaches of confidence, non-reciprocated affection or self-disclosure, invasions of privacy, and critical remarks violate implicit norms of trust, respect, and reciprocity. These can strain a relationship. Getting social support when needed has positive effects on a person's sense of well-being. According to Atchley (1991), "the informal network, through its everyday socializing, can give older people individualized support that stresses continuity of relationships, and can also provide immediate response to crisis situations" (p.155).

Adams (1988) conducted interviews with 70 women in a middle class suburb of Chicago. Each respondent defined friendship, listed her friends according to her own definition, and then answered a series of questions about each of them. The data demonstrated that a change in friendship activity does not bring about a change in psychological well-being but rather that the reverse was true. A change in psychological well-being brought about a change in the number of local friends. The women's emotionally close friends tended to live outside their community. This suggests that older people benefit from interaction with friends they have chosen freely rather than from developing contrived local friendships through an organized program.

Continuity and Change

Continuity and change are simultaneous processes. Individuals change in some ways while they remain stable in other ways. Change can be brought about by change in the external environment as well as from within the self. Continuity results from the memory of past experiences and habitual patterns that have been proven to work

efficiently in social situations. Continuity can also be achieved by selecting fairly consistent social environments, perceiving situations as consistent even when they are not, and by ignoring situations that confirm what we expect (Kimmel, 1990). "If one looks for continuity (as with Freudian lenses), it will be observed. If one seeks change (as with behaviorist lenses), it also can be found" (Kimmel, p. 408).

Robert Atchley (1989) described continuity as a dynamic process within a basic structure of life with internal and external aspects. According to continuity theory, adults attempt to maintain and preserve the basic structures of their lives as they grow older. Atchley stated that people apply familiar strategies to daily life and use their past experiences to guide them.

One line of research suggests that social relationships are continuous life-span developmental processes, emerging from early social relationships of infants with their mothers to family and friendship relationships among the elderly (Antonucci, 1990; Blieszner, 1989). The Berkeley Older Generation Study looked at friendships between the young-old and the old-old and found far more continuity than change in the amount of contact with friends (Field, 1999). Results also indicated that over time there was no significant change in the perceived ability to make new friends or in the prevalence of old friends. There was no significant change in the location of the closest friend or in the gender of the closest friend. The meaning of friendship did not change and it appears that closest friends were maintained almost without change, while relations with less close friends were allowed to decline.

Matthews (1986) noted that only in a few of the cases she studied did interviewees remember having actively ended a friendship. Most often contact dwindled

and the relationship simply faded away when changes occurred in a dyad member's life. Transitions did not mark discontinuities in the friendships in that, with the discerning group, once friendships were established, transitions were not seen as relevant. For the acquisitive group, transitions were important but they expected to maintain old friendships while adding new ones.

The elasticity of friendships may become evident during transitions. Some friendships may expand and allow for change and others may not. Some may have room for individual change and others may not. Life transitions such as relocation or job change often require a reorganization of social activities and personal relationships. Individuals may differ in how they approach this reorganization depending on various elements. These elements would include whether the transition was self-chosen or imposed and whether the need for change was gradual or sudden. Some individuals may choose to withdraw from existing relationships while others exchange old relationships for new ones. Others may be able to adapt their old relationships to their new circumstances and add new relationships.

Life transitions may trigger an imbalance between what people have and what they want. Weiss (1974) conducted a study of couples that had moved to a new area from at least two states away. He found that after a period of time without friends the wife experienced severe distress and developed a sense of marginality and loneliness. Women needed access to a social network and a community of friends with whom to exchange information and create social events. Marriage did not fill this gap. Six categories of relational provisions were identified from this study. The six categories are attachment, social integration that provides a shared interpretation of experiences,

opportunity for nurturance, reassurance of worth, a sense of reliable alliance, and obtaining guidance.

The context in which friendship takes place influences its content and dynamics so when the context is altered, the relationship may be altered as well. An example of this is when a friendship develops with a co-worker and then one or the other person changes jobs or relocates. The nature of the relationship may change due in part to the lack of daily face-to-face interaction that was easily available within the workplace.

During transitions temporary friendships may arise. Rubin (1985) refers to these people who pass through with no expectation for staying around forever as "friends of the road." These are people who share time and place for a certain amount of time and the contact is what keeps the relationship alive. On the other end of the continuum are "friends of the heart" where the connection is more solid. The relationship centers on "a sharing of self in ways that can be sustained apart from the accident of geography or historical moment" (Rubin, p. 106). Maintenance behaviors may be different for these two types of relationships and each has a place in assisting people through life transitions. Decisions on whether to stay connected or not may need to be made.

When a long-term relationship is an element of a transition involving geographical separation, each member of the dyad may need to make adjustments. According to Rubin (1980) severe reactions to moving may be understood in part as a grief reaction to the loss of a close friend who has provided companionship and support. Feelings of loneliness, depression, irritability, and anger are common responses to such a loss. One or both members of the friendship dyad may experience some degree of stress. One or both may need to create new relationships, decide whether and how to maintain

contact with established friendships, and cope with feelings of loss and loneliness. Social skills and coping strategies are personality characteristics that may influence adjustment to losses. Renegotiating relations with family and friends after a geographical separation may also be necessary.

Patterns in Friendships

Blieszner and Adams (1994) developed an "integrative conceptual framework for friendship research." The basic framework proposes that individual characteristics are related to friendship patterns and that the interactions between them vary by structural and cultural context. Interconnections among social positions make up social structure and include such things as how people should act, role demands, and the appropriateness of spending time in various types of context. An individual's daily activities, both routine and unpredicted, make up the behavioral motif.

Blieszner and Adams (1994) further found evidence of three interacting elements operating in friendship patterns. Structure was the first element and consisted of a hierarchy of friends, social position similarity, number of friends, and the proportion of them who know one another and the pattern of connections between them. The second element was phases and included the formation, maintenance, and dissolution of friendships as well as clusters of friends with networks. The third element was interactive processes and included thoughts, feelings and behaviors involved in acting as friends.

Fiebert and Wright (1989) conducted a study of 14 men and 14 women between the ages of 40 and 55 years exploring midlife same-sex friendship patterns in an

American sample of married faculty members. "Analysis showed that both men and women spend less time now with their close friends than they did formerly, and the strength of relationship and expressed self-disclosure were perceived to increase with time" (p. 1127).

Importance of Geography

Understanding the effect of geographical separations can help in establishing means to maintain the friendship or in coping strategies to deal with loss. Understanding successful ways of maintaining as well as detaching can enable older adult care providers in presenting opportunities to develop interpersonal skills as well as coping strategies. When a life long friendship undergoes a geographical separation, issues surrounding attachment and detachment arise. There may even be a period of mild depression as each member of the dyad adjusts to the loss of regular, face-to-face contact. Having an established and solid social support network can decrease anxiety.

Relocation can rupture relationships and unravel identities. Each move is a 'first' move even if a person has moved multiple times because at the time of each move he or she was at a different age and a different life phase. Strategies that helped with adaptation at the last move may help again but new ones may also be needed. While in the old location the person undoubtedly had special places he or she liked to go to feel at peace and places he or she liked to share with friends. Bridges will need to be built from there to here. Social identity can center around work and traditionally moves are made for the man's job enabling men to opportunity to have continuity of identity that in turn lessens the degree they are affected by the move (McCollum, Jensen, & Copans, 1996).

Familiar rhythms of work days, activities with friends, and children's school days are integral to sense of self and a geographic move interferes with the timing. There are potentially stresses of role change and role loss. According to McCollum, Jensen, and Copans (1996), it may take several years for women to develop new friendships following a move and older friendships can be sustained but with some effort. Individuals may struggle through the transitional pain until a state of equilibrium is reached. Friends may feel a sense of estrangement due to no longer sharing daily experiences with each other. An individual's space and place may still be significant even though there is currently high-speed transportation and electronic mail.

People expect and get different things from long-term friends than they do from intermediate and short-term friends. Long-term friends are the only ones with whom older people can reminisce about their childhood or early adulthood. "The level of intimacy between long-term friends tends to be high, and changes in circumstances such as retirement or widowhood have less effect on long-term friendships than on other friendships" (Atchley, 1991, p.153). Building 'kinship' with friends is a slow process. Once it is in place these relationships can be vital support systems. With demographics such as more mobility, more divorces, fewer children, and more widows, friendships will become even more important.

Summary

The study of friendships has become important for several reasons. More and more extended families are geographically separated; divorce rates continue to remain high; and the potential for widowhood also remains high. There is no precise definition

of "friend" and often the meaning of "friend" changes with circumstances. According to Matthews (1986) not everyone has the same orientation to friendships. Some people have many friends that they consider close while others just have one or two at the most.

Attachments are made throughout the life span, and friends are a part of a dynamic support system that changes as other significant roles change. When the context within which the friendship was maintained is altered, as in a geographic move, the friendship undergoes some degree of change. The amount of time and energy invested in the relationship often determines the amount of time and energy put into the friendship following a move. The elasticity of friendships will become evident during relocations. Adults attempt to maintain and preserve the basic structures of their lives especially when their external world is changing.

The literature review indicated that research with individual same-sex friendship relationships in adulthood is limited. Studies have previously focused on the structure of support networks such as numbers of relationships, who knows who, and whether they are kin or non-kin. Few have focused on the process involved in maintenance when the relationship experiences a geographical separation. Friends face complex issues that can be expressed best in their own words.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study explored the experiences and perspectives of women who were maintaining long-distance friendships having established the friendship while in close geographic proximity. Friendship histories provided information as to the circumstances involved in establishing the friendship. The nature of the friendships and the adaptation of relationships immediately before and following relocation were investigated. Maintenance behaviors that were effective in keeping the relationships going were documented in the words and stories of individuals with long-distance friendships.

Previous research (Adams, 1988; Gottlieb, 1994; Rubin, 1985; Siebert, Mutran, & Reitzes, 1999) has established the importance of social support networks in the physical and mental health of individuals. The strategies used by individuals to maintain long-distance friendships were investigated through guided interviews. Themes of friendship maintenance behaviors before and after relocation emerged based on Merriam's (1998) technique for category construction. Additionally, the perspective of whether it is harder, to be the friend leaving or to be the friend who was left, was explored.

Research Design

This study was exploratory in nature and involved qualitative research. The researcher's goal was to explore the perspectives of women maintaining long-distance enduring friendships following geographic relocations. According to Merriam (1998), the key concern in qualitative research is understanding the phenomenon of interest from

the participant's perspective, not the researcher's; and the key philosophical assumption for qualitative research is based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds. There is very little literature focusing on the transition of or the maintenance of long-distance, enduring friendships. More information and different perspectives are needed; thus, this study is exploratory in nature and will involve qualitative research methods. Friendship is a personal matter, and qualitative research methods will capture the experiences of individual relationships. As characteristic of qualitative research (Merriam, 1998), the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. While fieldwork is typically involved in this type of research, the participants in this study were given options of locations for interviews. Ten of the interviews were held in the homes of the participants; two interviews were held in the offices of the participants; ten interviews were held in the researcher's office; and three were held in the researcher's home. Options were given in an effort to provide a comfortable atmosphere to enhance the potential for sharing information about special friendships. Table 1 summarizes interview locations.

Table 1

Summary of Recruitment Methods and Interview Locations

Variable	N	*Percentage of Sample*
Recruitment methods:		
Website	2	8
Radio	4	16
Participant Referred	4	16
Newspaper	3	12
Researcher	12	48
Interview Location:		
Participant's Home	10	40
Participant's Office	2	8
Researcher's Home	3	12
Researcher's Office	10	40

Qualitative methods used within a theoretical framework allow researchers to discover naturally arising meanings among members of a population under study. It is anticipated that themes that emerged will contribute to future construct development in the area of long-distance, interpersonal friendships. Exploratory research provides a bridge to descriptive research and presents facts and ideas that can later be utilized to develop characteristics and issues of a specific population (Miller, 1986). It also provides ground for further study in emerging areas of concern, such as the support networks of the aged where their extended family is no longer in the same community.

The events leading to and following a geographic separation with a friendship are potentially difficult and emotional. Qualitative methods create the opportunity for rich data about the ways the relationship changes as it adapts to the separation. This research

will document, in the participant's own words, friendship behavior as friendships transition following a geographic separation. As in many qualitative studies (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998), the sources of information used for this study were interviews. Interviews were guided by a questionnaire, with the key word being 'guided' in that there was no set order to the topics allowing the interview to proceed in a conversational manner. Additionally, the participants received a copy of the question guide, which was developed after a review of the literature and in regards to the researcher's interest, prior to being interviewed to allow them to begin thinking about the issues. Also, having time to read over the questionnaire they could then decide if they wanted to follow through with the interview, as well as what they chose to share.

Research Questions

1. What role has types of communication (i.e., e-mail, letters, phone calls) played in the maintenance of long-distance friendships?
2. What factors influence the degree of effort put forth to maintain friendships over long-distances?
3. How do two people stay close friends following a geographic separation?
4. What factors come into play during the early transition period of relocation?
5. Which is harder, to be the friend leaving or to be the friend that is left and why?

Sample

Participants in this study included 25 women between the ages of 45 and 85 who identified themselves as women who have experienced relocation and are maintaining or

have maintained long-distance friendships. "Sample selection in qualitative research is usually nonrandom, purposeful, and small" (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). The sampling for this study was purposeful with 12 participants volunteering to share their friendship histories after hearing about the study from the researcher or an acquaintance of the researcher. Snowball sampling also occurred with one participant referring two additional interested women and two other participants each referring one additional volunteer. The remaining sampling frame was the population of women in a mid-west area who had access to the local newspaper, the university library website or listened to a local National Public Radio (NPR) station. The sampling unit was individual women. Twenty-eight interested women contacted the researcher and received copies of the interview guide. Twenty-five of them followed through with requesting interview times, were accepted as participants, and completed the study. The remaining three women did not follow through with requesting an interview.

The collection of participants for the study was obtained in four different ways. The Public Information Officer at the researcher's place of employment volunteered to support the project by issuing a press release (Appendix A) that appeared in three locations. The local newspaper carried the release and produced three volunteers; the local NPR station broadcasted a snippet of the release two different times on the same day that produced four participants; and the release was posted on the website at the researcher's place of employment which resulted in two volunteers. The fourth recruiting strategy was word-of-mouth in that the researcher had contact with several women who met the criteria and who volunteered when the study was explained to them. The

remaining four were acquired by the snowball effect (Merriam, 1998) as stated above. A summary of the recruitment method results can be found in Table 1.

General demographic information was gathered during the first part of the interview. The participants ranged in age from 45 to 85 with the average age of 59. Six participants were in their 40s; nine were in their 50s; five were in their 60s; two were in their 70s; and three participants were in their 80s. All participants were Caucasian. Participants were asked about their current marital status and seventeen participants responded that they are currently married and four are divorced. Additionally, two women have never married and two are widows. Ten women stated that they are employed outside of the home; five have chosen not to be employed over the years; eight have retired with one now pursuing a graduate degree; and two are self-identified trailing spouses who have been unable to find jobs in their professional fields at their last move. Additionally, 12 reported that they have brothers and no sisters; six have sisters with no brothers; three have both brothers and sisters; and four have no siblings. Six participants have children under18 years of age in the home, and nine participants are grandmothers. Table 2 provides a summary of the participants' demographic information.

Table 2

Summary of Women's Demographic Data

Variable	N	*Percentage of Sample*
Age:		
45 – 49	6	24
50 – 59	9	36
60 – 69	5	20
70 – 79	2	8
80 – 89	3	12
Marital Status:		
Married	17	68
Divorced	4	16
Never Married	2	8
Widowed	2	8
Employed:		
Employed	10	40
Not Employed by Choice	5	20
Retired	8	32
Not Employed	2	8
Siblings:		
Sisters	6	24
Brothers	12	48
Sisters and Brothers	3	12
Only Child	4	16

Participants had moved as adults from one time to 10 times with the average number of moves being five. Five participants had moved five times, five had moved three times, and two had moved 10 times. A total of 109 friendships were perceived as being maintained varying from once per year, via the annual Christmas card, to a weekly phone call. Maintenance ranged from one friendship to eight being maintained with seven women maintaining six long-distance friendships, five women maintaining two, and four maintaining three and four maintaining five friendships. The average number of friendships being maintained was four. Participants reported a total of 34 friendships that were no longer being maintained due to the geographic separation. This ranged from zero to seven friendships with 10 women stating they no longer maintained one long-distance friendship, five not maintaining two and six stating they maintained all of their long-distance friendships making zero that are not maintained. These various factors played different roles in respect to friendship maintenance. Table 3 summarizes moves and maintenance data.

Table 3

Summary of Women's Moves and Friendship Maintenance after the Move

Variable	N	*Percentage of Sample*
Adult Moves:		
1 to 3 moves	8	32
4 to 6 moves	10	40
7 and over moves	7	28
Friendships maintained:		
One	1	4
Two	5	20
Three	4	16
Four	2	8
Five	4	16
Six	7	28
Eight	2	8
Friendships not maintained:		
Zero	6	24
One	10	40
Two	5	20
Three	3	12
Seven	1	4

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through individual interviews conducted by the researcher. Creswell's (1998) guidelines for interview data collecting were applied in this project. Participants received a copy of the "Friendships Survey" (Appendix B) prior to the interview. At the beginning of the interview both the researcher and the participant signed the consent form after discussing the contents. All participants were given the option of completing the questions before the interview or simply using the questions to give them an idea of what would be covered during the interview. Five of the participants chose to complete the questions beforehand, and as a result their interview times were considerably less. Several of the participants stated they attempted to answer the questions before hand, but decided it would be much easier to "just talk" about their friendships.

The participant was instructed to contact the researcher to arrange an interview time once she had reviewed the question guide and decided she was ready for the next step. Participants were given options as to where they preferred the interview to take place. Ten of the participants chose to come to the researcher's office after work hours, and ten invited the researcher to come to their homes at times when no other persons were present. Two interviews were conducted in the participant's office after work hours, and three were conducted in the researcher's home when no other family members were present. Participation was voluntary, and as such the researcher felt it was beneficial to give the participants options on time, place, and date. All but five of the interviews were held after five o'clock on the weekdays. One of these five was conducted on a Sunday afternoon, and the remaining four interviews were held on

Saturday mornings. The researcher did not find that choice of location influenced the interview process other than to enhance the participant's comfort level. Interviewing in various locations was familiar to the researcher due to previous social work experiences.

Interviews were semi-structured and in-depth and were individually conducted. Participants were asked to define friendship and to explain how a person could move from being a casual friend to a close friend. Then, the volunteers were asked to talk about their various moves and friendship behavior with each move. The women were then asked to share histories of their long-distance friendships. They were asked to talk about how the friendship had been formed, how it made the transition to being a long-distance relationship and what the current maintenance behavior entailed. Additionally they were asked to explain which they thought was harder, to be the friend moving or be the friend that was left behind. Lastly, they were given the opportunity to offer advice on maintaining geographically separated friendships

Interviews lasted from an hour and forty-five minutes to three and one-half hours with the average interview lasting two hours. At the beginning of each interview five to 15 minutes were taken for introductions and pleasantries. Fontana and Frey (1998) stated that it is important for the researcher to establish rapport since the goal of unstructured interviewing is understanding. The purpose of the study was then discussed and the Consent Form was explained and signed. The interviews were tape-recorded with permission from each participant.

The interview protocol was semi-structured (Merriam, 1998) with a mixture of open-ended questions and specific questions. Friendship histories varied, and as an individual began talking about a significant area in the relationship, probing questions

were used to explore the area in greater depth. In an exploratory study participants are expected to have varying experiences to contribute to the study. In this particular study, participants are various ages, have relocated various times and from various places, and are at various stages in their lives. They also are expected to have different personalities that form and maintain friendships to varying degrees and in varying numbers. Allowing the interviews to be semi-structured permitted the researcher to access participants' perspectives of their friendship transitions while giving the interview a direction.

Verbatim transcription of recorded interviews provided the database for analysis. The interviews were tape-recorded and participants were made aware that the recording would be transcribed and the researcher would be the lone transcriber. It is suggested that doing one's own transcribing provides an additional opportunity to become intimately familiar with the data (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) also supported the step of transcribing interviews stating that raw data in qualitative research is quotations and the preferred method to obtain these data is full transcription of the interview. Participants were given the choice of proofing their individual transcripts once they were transcribed.

The average transcription took six to eight hours. Once the transcription was complete, the researcher put it aside for approximately a week and then reviewed the transcript while listening to the tape to enhance accuracy. Merriam (1998) made this recommendation to new transcribers; due to the importance of the interview data, the researcher elected to follow the advice. This may have been an unnecessary step since 22 participants chose to proof their transcripts themselves. For those that did not choose to proof, this was a method of checking accuracy in the form of member checking which is

a method used to support validity according to Merriam (1998). An additional benefit was that the researcher reviewed the data again and ultimately became more familiar with content of the interviews.

Information requested in the process of the interview could potentially illicit emotional feelings and reactions as participants share their experiences about moving away from close friends. To counter this potential, participants were given the option of not answering a question or stopping the interview altogether. Six of the participants cried or came close to crying during the interviews. One had just recently had a close friend move away and had not quite come to terms with the loss. Two participants were self-labeled "trailing spouses" and were having difficulty in adjusting to having followed to a location with no jobs or even a prospect of a job in their professional fields. Both stated they found themselves resenting their husbands and that in itself made them feel guilty. Two participants cried when sharing stories about family relationships. The remaining participant became emotional when sharing information about her last relocation and the fact that no one had responded to her attempts at maintaining friendships. In all of these occurrences, the participant was given time to recompose, a tissue, and options as to how to proceed. Every effort was made to put the participant at ease.

Instrument

Participants in the study received a copy of the question guide entitled "Friendship Survey" (Appendix B) prior to the interview. This question guide was intended to give the participant an opportunity to think about the issues and/or to actually

donate time to answer them in writing. The guide was developed after much thought by the researcher about what it was she actually wanted to learn, a review of the literature looking for informational gaps, and a pilot study. The instrument was then presented to the researcher's dissertation committee and approved. Lastly, the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board approved the "Friendship Survey."

A pilot study was conducted with a draft version of the "Friendship Survey." Five women over the age of 45 who had relocated several times and were acquaintances of the researcher volunteered to be interviewed. The protocol that was previously described was followed in the pilot study. The five women were given the question guide a couple of weeks before their individual interviews with the instructions to think about the questions and potential answers. The researcher initially planned to have the participants create a time-line of their friendships, but with all five women this task was confusing and time consuming. When the benefits were weighed against the cost in time and energy as well as the potential for taking the focus away from the primary intent of the study, the researcher, after consultation with her advisor, elected to remove the timeline section from the questionnaire.

Based on the pilot study, the request for information was changed from 'provide information about your family' to 'describe your support network' to include all relationships that might compete for time. In place of the timeline exercise, instructions were to complete a series of short answer questions about each relocation, for example: year of move and reason for move, close friendships that did not survive the move, and enduring long-distance friendships. The wording on another question was changed from "What are the reasons for not maintaining the friendship" to "Think back to that

elsewhere thus impacting the amount of effort placed in maintaining long-distance friendships. To put the number of moves and potential long-distance friendships into perspective, the participants were asked to provide information about their individual moves including the reason for the move and how many friends were left at each move. The participant then was asked to name friends that did not survive the move and then friends that did make the transition.

In Part II: Friendships That Did Not Survive the Relocation Transition, participants were asked open-ended questions regarding friendships that were not maintained following a move. Reasons for not maintaining the relationship along with strategies for adapting to the loss of the friendship were requested. The participants were also asked to explain how the experience of moving away from friends influenced their later approach to friendship formation and maintenance. Examples of questions in this section are:

- Think back to that transitional period following the move and discuss possible reasons that the friendship did not survive.
- Tell how you coped with the loss of this friendship.
- How did losing this friendship due to the move influence your approach to friendship at your new location?

Part III: Enduring Long-Distance Friendships included more in-depth questions to be answered about each individual friendship that was maintained and/or is still being maintained. The participants described how the friendship was established and indicated the status of the friendship at the time of the move and the status after the move. Reactions to the move by both members of the dyad were asked about as well as if there

were any going away parties or gifts. Questions addressed issues regarding any discussion of plans to maintain the friendship after the move, whether there was a period of no communication, and if one member was perceived to have put more effort into the maintenance than the other. Examples of questions in this section are:

- Briefly explain how you met and became friends.
- Describe how you came to terms with not having easy access to this close friend after the move.
- Was there a period of time after the move when either one or both of you did not actively maintain communication?
- How is the friendship currently being maintained?
- What specific things can you refer to that have enabled this friendship to make the relocation transition to become an enduring long-distance friendship?

The Friendship Survey served as a guide. Many of the participants elected not to complete the questions prior to being interviewed stating that they thought it would be easier just to talk about their friendships. As the project progressed, the flexibility inherent in qualitative research allowed the researcher the option of using probing questions to explore issues in greater depth. Three main issues were broached with the participants and included a history of each friendship, how it was being maintained now, and how the transition was managed from close to distal proximity. Within each of these issues, individual data prompted additional inquiries that varied with the data itself.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, one approach is to collect data through interviews and findings are a mixture of description and analysis (Merriam, 1998). While there are software programs available to manage data collected qualitatively, there are concerns about their use. Merriam (1998) stated that many authors have expressed concerns about the use of computers to assist in the analysis of data. Concerns included how to choose the best program, what trade-offs exist, and that software programs may distance the researcher from the data or introduce errors. Due to a current lack in general consensus in support of using computer programs, the researcher elected to analysis the data manually. Part of the process of analyzing data is to identify recurring themes that run through the data and also use concepts from the theoretical framework of the study. When data collection was completed, all interview tapes were transcribed by the researcher, and edited versions received from participants, data analysis began. The researcher conducted the analysis using category construction guidelines presented by Merriam (1998).

Category construction began with reading the first transcript and making notes and comments in the margins. After working through the entire transcript in this manner the researcher reviewed the marginal notes and assigned keywords. For example keywords included: *email* (electronic mail); *Christmas cards*; *phone calls*; *re-connecting*; and *adapting/coping*. This process was completed with the next three transcripts keeping in mind the list of keywords from the previous transcripts and the specific interview questions. Next, the lists were compared and a two-page worksheet (Appendix E) was created whereby each friendship discussed had a separate line. Then columns were

created for keywords that represented topics of importance to the study. Column titles on the first page were: *phone*, *email*, *visits*, *letters/cards*, *knows family*, *re-connect*, *support network*, *last contact*, *lapse*, and *comments*. Columns on the second page included: *friend's reaction* (to separation), *your reaction* (to separation), *impact* (on friendship behavior), *positive/negative aspects* (of maintaining), *reciprocal*, *parties/gifts*, *plans discussed* (for maintenance), and *issues around visits*. Once the worksheet was constructed all 25 interviews were reviewed and charted.

Some issues could not be condensed to a few words to place on the worksheet. Two additional steps were taken to address this. Issues dealing with a participant's coping strategies were added to the bottom of the worksheet as were brief notes about each move and included: where to where, why, friends left. Secondly, as the four initial transcripts were read through again, quotes deemed of interest to the research topic were accumulated on individual pages with keywords assigned in an attempt to come to a sense of the number of times a particular topic was mentioned by the participants. Pages were made for the following keywords: Reciprocity, life stages, neighbors as friends, sisters, mother/daughter, email, visits/element of geography, visits/primary or secondary reason, visits/with spouse and children, visit/alone, visits/family and friends in area, Christmas cards, trailing spouse, advice, and harder to leave or be left.

To make it onto the worksheet, the topic had to have been included on the question guide or have been mentioned on two of the four initial transcripts. Three topics met the secondary criteria and were: reconnecting, knows family, and visit issues. The number of individual quotes with these topics warranted their inclusion. The next step was to examine the specific data in relation to the research questions and in relation to the

overall data. Some keywords could be grouped together to form a sub-category. An example of this was grouping issues dealing with communication into the sub-categories of oral and written communication. Phone calls and visits would fall into the oral grouping and email along with cards and letters would fall into written communication. Both oral and written communication could be merged and placed under "Friendship Maintenance Behavior" resulting in narrow topics being grouped into broader sub-categories then into main categories.

The categories were reviewed an additional time and were found to reflect the purpose of the research by answering the research questions. The categories were also examined and determined to be mutually exclusive in that individual topics could appear in only one of category. Categories were examined by two independent sources and were determined to be specific enough to gain a sense of the topic. Categories were further reviewed for whether or not the concepts were congruent as far as being on the same level of abstraction and it was determined they were. Merriam (1998) suggested these strategies be used to determine the efficacy of the categories.

Each long-distance friendship was listed individually and then reviewed according to the categories established as described above. For example, friend 1 used email but did not use phone calls as a method of staying in communication. In this case, email is checked and phone is not. This process was followed with each friendship discussed by each participant. Due to the individuality of the participants and the variety of experiences, not all categories were found in all friendships.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis in qualitative research and for this study. Additionally, the data collected was what the participants chose to share. "In this type of research it is important to understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening" (Merriam, 1998, p. 203). To this regard, Merriam (1998) offers several strategies to enhance internal validity.

One of these strategies involves member checks in which the data and tentative interpretations are taken back to the participants whereby they are asked if the results are plausible. The researcher gave each participant the opportunity to proof, and/or edit, her individual transcript as a step toward enhancing the accuracy of the data provided. At the conclusion of a majority of the interviews, the researcher offered a summary of the interview in regards to maintenance behaviors and transitional strategies and gave the participant the opportunity to respond in agreement or to clarify. On two occasions responses were at first corrected but each time the person was quiet for a while and then she concluded that the researcher's interpretation was accurate.

It was further suggested that the researcher involve the participant in various phases of the research. In addition to paraphrasing and summarizing the interview at its end as discussed in the Data Collection section, the researcher took the opportunity at the close of the interview to ask the participant if there was anything that had not been covered that should be covered. One result of this procedure was the inclusion of the question "Which is harder, to leave or be left?" in the remaining interviews.

Additionally, the participant was given the option of how she wanted to share the data, either by writing the answers or talking about them. The majority opted for talking about friendships. Allowing participants to proof their individual transcripts would also fall into this strategy.

A third strategy employed by the researcher was to include a section on researcher subjectivity in the study report as well as with the participants. The researcher spent ten years as a social worker and learned early on that a person will feel more comfortable sharing things about themselves if there is a perceived equal exchange. On a few occasions, participants inquired as to where the researcher was heading with particular questions and the researcher offered a brief explanation. Generally, this would arise when discussing reactions to losses of previous friendship maintenance behaviors and around the area of grieving which is a very personal issue. The researcher would briefly explain her friend's experience with this and that it was important to the researcher to hear about all types of reactions, good and not so good. While this could potentially lead to the participant giving a different answer, the researcher felt it was a risk worth taking to continue to build rapport that in turn would encourage continued sharing. This again, was a judgment call.

The last strategy to enhance validity involved the final report being read by two people, one a participant in the study and one a peer of the researcher who is currently working on a qualitative dissertation having successfully defended a qualitative thesis a few years ago. This strategy is to examine face validity. The remaining strategy is triangulation and was not met by this researcher in that the only data source was the interview data and the only investigator was the researcher.

"Reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static. Reliability in a research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results" (Merriam, 1998, p.205). This was an exploratory study involving a small, nonrandom sample and as such, generalizability was not a concern. While the Friendship Survey could be used repeatedly, the chances of arriving at the exact responses from a different sample of participants are slim but the chance of arriving at some of the same conclusions is good. The women in this study were self-selected and were in a mid-west university town and if a different population was sampled, the outcome could vary.

Reliability in regards to the instrumentation and to the interpretation of the data can be applied to qualitative studies. The researcher practiced self-critique in that immediately after each interview, the researcher reviewed the experience and tried to evaluate the process. Thoughts included such ideas as whether more clarification statements need to be included, whether the researcher presented an unbiased approach to the questioning, or whether the exchange of information could have been smoother. As the interviews progressed the researcher became more comfortable with the interview process and agenda. The first, 11th and 21st interviews were reviewed by the researcher for content and all research questions had been asked. While the order may have differed slightly, this was the result of the specifics of individual friendships and was to be expected. Some participants chose to take each friendship and work through the questions while others preferred taking each question and answering it for each friendship before moving on to the next research question. Both strategies provided similar data while at the same time enhancing the flow of the data gathered.

An additional step addressing reliability was the use of two outside coders. One outside coder is a recent Human Development and Family Science PhD graduate and conducted a qualitative study for her dissertation project. The second outside coder, in the field of Human Development and Family Science, recently defended a dissertation and is quantitatively oriented. Inter-rater reliability for the first section was .83, the second was .79, and the final measure of internal consistency was .81.

"The question then, is not whether findings will be found again, but whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (Merriam, 1998, p. 206). The above mentioned strategies to enhance validity and reliability were put into practice in an effort to present results that were consistent with the data collected during this research study. To contribute further to the credibility of the results multiple, rich, thick descriptions are provided in the following "Results and Interpretation" chapter.

Assumptions

1. For purposes of this study, it was assumed adults have experienced stressful separation in regards to moving away from close friends. These events may engender positive and negative adaptation.
2. It was assumed challenges arose from the event(s) that precipitated the need to adjust friendship maintenance strategies.
3. It was assumed retrospective biographies would be close to factual.
4. It was assumed that the best way to understand experiences is to gain information from the individuals.
5. It was assumed that perceptions are valid.

Limitations

1. The use of a small, purposive sample limits the generalizability of the study results.
2. Interviews were conducted at different times and different locations, which may have led to inconsistencies in verbal and nonverbal behaviors that, in turn, may have influenced responses.
3. Data for this study were collected primarily from interviews. There were no documents to analyze or observations of interactions with friends.
4. Not all people are equally articulate.
5. Interviews provide indirect information filtered through the views of the individual.
6. Some refinements in interview question wording as the project progressed may have produced different responses.
7. Coding procedures and interpretations may have been subject to researcher bias.

Summary

This study was exploratory in nature and involved qualitative methods. Experiences with transitioning from proximal to distal friendships were explored through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and were recorded in participants' own words. Methods used in developing this study and the resulting codes from the data analysis have been presented in this chapter. Issues of validity and reliability were also addressed along with assumptions and limitations. Results and interpretations are presented in the

following chapter. Each category and sub-category is presented and supported by data collected.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results of this study suggested that while geography may alter the way a friendship is maintained, it does not necessarily change the perception of emotional closeness between the two friends. Friendship maintenance behaviors prior to a move included interactions at various points of contact such as: the neighborhood; a workplace; an educational arena; or children's activity functions. Shared histories as well as the stage of life each member of the dyad was passing through also appeared to impact the way a friendship was maintained. Experiences with prior moves, making plans on how to maintain the friendship after the move, sharing feelings about the separation, and sharing going away parties or gifts also seemed to influence the transition to long-distance friendships.

The transition period following a move can present a state of imbalance for the friendship. Maintenance behaviors appear to vary with some women experiencing enough contact to perceive the friendship as holding the same status as before the move, others reporting experiencing less contact but regular enough to perceive that the friendship was still good, and yet others reporting the status had decreased following the move to the point that the friendship faded away into the annual Christmas card routine. Additionally, some friendships ended after the geographic separation. Reciprocity played more of a role in some of the friendships than in others.

The annual Christmas card appears to be symbolic of the intactness of the friendship bond and at the same time seems to represent the inactive status of the

friendship. As long as there was a perceived avenue to have contact with the friend, the potential for rekindling the friendship was present and often displayed with many of the women in this study. Class reunions, the availability of email, visits to the area, and the annual Christmas update were such avenues. Many of the women experienced both moving away from friends and having friends move away from them and presented different perspectives for which was harder. Before exploring friendships being maintained following a move, the various definitions of friendship will be presented.

Definition of Friendship

> A friend is having someone with whom you can talk about dreams, problems, love, life, and everything in between.
>
> I think it is real important in order to have a friendship, it has to be reciprocal. You can't have a one-sided friendship.

The results of this study suggested there are varying definitions of friendship. Characteristics of friendships ranged from sharing secrets with someone to enjoying someone's company in an activity. Providing a definition of friendship was not always an easy task. Several of the women paused a few minutes before answering. Sharing appeared to be one of the primary characteristics of friendship, whether it is sharing secrets, news, health concerns, interests, dreams, or gripes and complaints. It was noted by one woman that a person's definition of friendship could change over time:

> In my younger days a friend was someone with whom I had fun. As I grew, a friend was someone with whom I had fun but could share thoughts, laugh, cry, and even sit in silence.

Evidence of a friendship was being there no matter what, through good times and bad times. Having shared interests and having shared experiences were also listed as

indicators of friendship. Several women listed reciprocity as a necessary factor stating that there should be give and take on both sides. Another woman stated that friendship is a voluntary relationship.

One participant mentioned that a friendship can be dormant for a while and be rekindled, "true friendship can lie fallow, then rekindle as if the break never happened, no matter how much time has gone by." Several women also made statements referring to a friendship as being unconditional:

> A friend is someone who likes you no matter what...that loves you no matter what...warts and all, through thick and thin.
>
> A friend is someone who basically is there when you need them, when you have egg on your face and look bad.

Other characteristics mentioned included: enjoying someone's company, having fun with someone, and being available to help and to listen. For a condensed list of the responses, refer to Table 4.

Table 4

Characteristics of Friendship as Described by Participants

- Sharing secrets, news and health concerns.
- Hanging around together a lot. Enjoying one another's company.
- Genuinely caring for one another.
- Always there when you need them.
- Open to talking about dreams, problems, love, life, and everything in between.
- Acceptance, respect, and affection and shared experience.
- Sharing the same values, dependability, honesty, caring, nurturing, and intelligence.
- Reciprocal, give and take. Can't have a one-sided friendship.
- Likes you unconditionally.
- Listening to you complain or gripe and still likes you.
- Trust, intimate exchanges, generosity, and a shared sense of humor.
- Being able to feel comfortable under different sets of circumstances wherein you can discuss problems, opinions, lifestyles, and understand each other.
- Always welcomes a phone call no matter what time it is and is easy to talk to.
- Being available to listen or help.
- Enjoying the same things and doing things together
- A bond that is made between two people over time that will last through any situation, good or bad.

Casual to Close Progression

> A casual friend shares a limited part of my life...we interact positively when we happen to run into each other. Our paths cross, we enjoy talking and we depart. Friendship is an interdependence. It's not one way. A best friend is reliable, there, even when she lives 700-1000 miles away. She has been a close friend during difficult times or momentous change for one or both of us.

When discussing what the difference is between a casual friend and a close friend, several of the women noted that a casual friend is someone who has not been known for long. Others suggested that a casual friend is someone who shares a limited part of a person's life with no planned meetings. 'Hello' and 'how's the family' comments are exchanged when they happen to run into each other, but the relationship does not move beyond being acquaintances.

Acquaintances, however, may progress beyond being casual friends. Development of a close friendship appears to take several elements with shared time together being mentioned most often. The results of this study suggest that there needs to be time to prove to one another that one is trustworthy and dependable, time to share everyday life experiences, and time to develop intimacy in which each person shares comfortably more personal parts of herself.

> There has to be some type of regular contact in there and it has to be something where you allow yourself to be more intimate with that person, sharing things that are not necessarily your best all the time.
>
> You share part of yourself with them and they share part of themselves with you.
>
> It takes that sharing and sending out tidbits and seeing if you can trust them with that and when you know you can trust them with the little things then you can trust them with the bigger things.

One woman further suggested that building a level of dependency where both members of the dyad need to share various aspects of their lives with each other is an aspect of

becoming a close friend. Having the opportunity to spend time together and having things in common were also mentioned as contributing to the development of a close friendship.

While responses from participants suggested that the element of time plays a major role in moving from a casual friend to a close friend, it is often more than just time. There were comments made in regards to having spent time with a person in which no friendship developed further, suggesting that there are various elements involved in moving toward a close friendship and not just the amount of time spent together. Additional determinants of the strength of the friendship included:

Being there for them through thick and thin;

How well you can rely on them in a time of emotional or physical need and how much fun you can have with them;

Taking the time to learn to know one another, keeping in touch and devoting time to the relationship with some degree of regularity;

Effort devoted to making and keeping the friendship.

Developing a close friendship that may survive a geographic separation appears to involve various aspects of time as well as having the opportunity to meet and establish the friendship. A list of comments regarding progressing to close friends can be found in Table 5. It appears from this study that the paths of two people need to cross frequently which means they need to cross initially. The following section will discuss various points of contact where long-distance enduring friendships have started and grown.

Table 5

Strength of Friendship Comments by Participants

Casual friend:

- Haven't known very long.
- Say general "hello's" and "how's the family" but nothing more.
- Shares a limited part of your life, our paths cross, we enjoy talking and we depart.
- Probably wouldn't go for help with a problem.

Strength of a friendship determined by:

- Being there for them through thick and thin. Reliable.
- Length of time acquainted, openness, and experiences together.
- How well you can rely on them in a time of emotional or physical need and how much fun you can have with them.
- Taking the time to learn to know one another, keeping in touch and devoting time to the relationship with some degree of regularity.
- Effort. Both people have to be determined to make, then keep, the friendship.
- Shared experiences and having things in common.

Moving from casual to best:

- By sharing life experiences, by being there, basically.
- Building a level of dependency, needing to share with the other, missing that person when frequent contact is not made and feelings of kinship
- Shared intimacy.
- It takes time… to share experiences and build trust.
- Having common interests, family, entertainment, religion, every day happenings… and time.
- Chemistry as well as opportunity to be together.

Development of Friendship

The results from this study suggested there are several elements that influence the degree of effort put forth to maintain friendships over long distances. Having regular contact is a primary element in that two people need a venue to actually meet and spend time together so that a friendship has an opportunity to develop. Neighbors, co-workers, fellow students, and other mothers who were attending activities with children were mentioned as sources of close friendships. Additionally, many participants stated that the amount of time they had available to cultivate a friendship depended on other competing factors such as being newly married or a new mother.

> When you had depended on your children's activities to provide a source for building friendships and you move when your children are older, it's much more difficult to make friends. You don't know the parents of the children that your children are meeting in school. So then you kind of depend on work to bring friends into your life. Sometimes it's just work friendships and sometimes it will spill over depending on political, religious, and other points of view.

While the length of time it took to develop a close, sustained friendship varied, there needed to be regular contact over enough time to gain trust and to share confidences. Several participants shared a great deal of time in various activities together and expressed feelings of kinship with friends. Results from this study suggest that maintaining friendships over long-distances requires energy and effort which is more likely to be expended on friendships with strong foundations.

Points of Contact

For a friendship to develop, there first needs to be a venue where there is contact and initial exchanging of small pieces of information. The contact needs to be regular

enough for larger and more intimate pieces of information to be exchanged. Neighborhoods, school environments, the workplace, and children's activity functions were mentioned as the primary places where friendships had been developed.

> Most of the time when we moved I was not working because the kids were younger. My social friends were through my children, the school, and my neighborhood. That's the way it is until you work outside the home and then you cultivate another set.

Results from this study indicate that neighborhoods offer opportunities to develop friendships. For women who, for whatever reason, do not work outside of the home, neighbors can prove to be good friends. One participant worked outside of the home after her son graduated from high school, but until that time her primary friends were people who walked through her neighborhood. Initially the friend-to-be would stop to comment on the flower or vegetable garden as she completed her daily walk through the neighborhood; eventually the stopping became routine and the friendship continued to develop into dinners at each other's home as well as various other outings.

> She was an older woman who lived at the end of the street. She always felt like she could stop and talk to me and tell me about her family. She had three children and she had problems with them. And she would always say, "I always feel so much better after I talk with you." I don't know what I was doing other than just listening. We shared vegetables and talked.

One participant stated her lifelong best friendship started during a snowstorm when she and her daughter walked over in a deep snow, unannounced. The woman's daughter and the future friend's son were friends in school; and after a few days of being housebound due to the snow, they decided to visit. The two women ended up talking away the afternoon and making plans to visit again. As in the cases above, there was more than one element. Being a neighbor and having children that knew each other contributed to the formation of this friendship.

Another woman developed a close friendship with a woman some 20 years older than herself who lived across the street. She further commented that the woman reminded her of her own mother and they actually got along better than she did with her own mother. When a move separated them, they exchanged letters weekly and called occasionally. In this particular case, after about three years, the one who moved away returned to live in the neighborhood. Being a neighbor does not necessarily alone lead to a close friendship but it can be a starting point.

Other participants named neighbors as good friends, but stopped short of calling them best friends. Several of these friendships were maintained through the annual Christmas card and the occasional visit back to the neighbor, at which time visiting was happenstance depending on whether contact could be made upon arrival. In another instance, a friendship between two neighbor women developed into a closer relationship after one of them moved away.

> We had great neighbors. I guess you would call them friends, too. They weren't best friends but they were close friends. We probably keep in touch with them more than almost anybody and we just went to visit them. We called them when we were in town and they invited us to lunch and it was just like going back 12 or 13 years... like we were just living across the street.

> I just had people leave from the neighborhood. Three houses in a row. This was our little neighborhood group. And it wasn't like we were all best of friends but we were best of neighbors except for one woman. Actually she and I have become better friends since she moved away.

While several of the women interviewed maintain contact with their former neighbors, others remain close to women with whom they shared educational experiences. With one particular woman, three of her closest friendships were formed while she was in college as an undergraduate, and these friendships moved with her through time. They have regular visits and are involved in various aspects of each other's

lives. Another woman returned to work on a bachelor's degree after she had children and made a lasting friendship with a fellow student who was also a nontraditional student. They were each other's support through the program and that has carried over into their faithful efforts to maintain contact over long-distances. Shared history appears to be an element in creating a strong bond that will survive geographic separation.

Friendships formed in high school appear to be relationships that can survive across the miles. Several women interviewed commented on best friends from high school that have either been constantly maintained or have faded away at some point and been rekindled through class reunions.

> We were best friends in high school but grew apart once in college. We decided to attend our 20th high school reunion together and have been in closer contact since then. We email each other about once every two weeks. She lives about 400 miles away now, close to where my mom lives so I get to visit her when I visit mom.
>
> We were close friends in high school and then we went to nursing school together and then entered the military together. We lost track of each other while in the military and then we found each other at the 30th class reunion for our nursing school.

There seems to be something about shared experiences during high school and college that motivate old friends to locate each other and attempt to re-establish a bond that was strong earlier in life.

Additionally, several women mentioned that they still maintain friendships from pre-school and elementary school days. It would seem that in childhood friendships were also supported by neighborhood contact and parental friendships that, in turn, increased the total number of contacts for these women. This extra contact possibly contributed to their forming a strong bond that could withstand a physical distance later, even if in later life they had nothing more in common.

> She and I were childhood friends and went through school together. Our mothers were best friends and we lived in the same neighborhood. While we were in another state I would visit her when we came back to visit my parents. What has enabled that friendship to survive is that my father still lives four houses from her so I can physically visit her as often as I like.
> Somehow the memory of our friendship when we were young keeps us going. We now have little in common.

Again, perhaps this is an issue of needing or wanting to feel connected to someone, some place or some time. Having shared the same place during the same time appears to give people something to talk about, which in turn provides the opportunity for further development of the friendship. Reminiscing about the "good ole days" can be a tool in rekindling the friendship as well as a tool for moving into the future. Having a shared history provides a sense of being understood that newer friends cannot relate to as well.

Educational arenas provide opportunities for friendships to form; but it appears that additional elements, such as living in the same neighborhood and sharing other activities or experiences, help. These early friendships for several of the women interviewed have gone through phases of little or no contact to more contact and back to little contact depending on what other things are going on in their lives. The bond is never broken completely, just perhaps stretched a little thin at times.

The workplace was an additional venue for developing friendships that would withstand geographic separations. The workplace potentially offers regular and daily contact with people who could become friends as they share non-work related information throughout the day. Several women interviewed remarked that friendships started at work but then carried over into after work activities and often included family members. Having children the same age and husbands that could find a common ground appeared to help with maintaining the friendship when visits were made back to the area.

Two of the women mentioned that their sons and the sons of their friends from work have maintained their own friendships following the moves and have talked about being roommates when they go to college. This tie between the sons provides an added topic for communication between the mothers.

> Several of my good friendships started at work. Two of them I did more with outside of work and they still call occasionally and write regularly. One is the best friend that I have had for the longest time. She worked across the hall but we were in constant contact with similar issues to handle. We have that shared history and bond. She knew my husband too. She was very much aware of everything that had gone on when my husband was dying.
>
> She was a co-worker who I gradually got to know. She had a dry sense of humor that took awhile to appreciate. We did things together just the two of us and then sometimes as a foursome with our husbands. Then we had babies and it was harder to do things but we still stayed close.

For one of the women interviewed, the workplace meant the military and different duty stations every two to three years. She implied that circumstances around certain duty assignments had an impact on friendship formations:

> There is something about being on an island that makes people closer. You go without a lot, endure a lot and you can't help but feel closer to them.

For her, there were limited choices of potential friends; but there were often many opportunities to share in activities such as camping, rappelling, and flying. A sense of camaraderie was there but also an even stronger survival element that bonded many friends. The approach to friendship maintenance appeared to be a little different with moving around so much and interacting with other people who have also moved numerous times. Leaving friends became a fact of life as did thinking that it was not really good-bye, but more like 'I'll see you again on the go around." Having shared experiences at different duty stations provided a common background to rekindle the relationship when circumstances permitted for this woman. She has retired, has returned

to college, and has contacted all of her good friends from her military days to rekindle their friendships.

Another woman was involved in a start-up company with a great deal of stress and formed close friendships with three of her fellow team members. This group did activities together outside of work on a regular basis and often included family members. The company did not make it, and the group separated before this woman actually moved away. One of the friends no longer keeps in touch, but the other two do through email and occasional phone calls. Sharing a stressful environment can provide an atmosphere of people working closely together for the same goal, and developing close relationships can be a by-product.

Several of the women interviewed formed friendships with women at their first place of employment right out of college. Some of the friendships remain close; but just as many have faded away with job changes, marriage and families that followed.

> She was a co-worker at my first real job out of graduate school. We also spent weekends together doing fun things. Then our lives took different turns and we drifted apart.

Sharing children's activities with other women is the fourth point of contact that was repeatedly discussed during the study. Several participants mentioned they had met friends through their children. A few stated that their pre-school-age children were the means for starting friendships in that the children became acquainted at a daycare or church, and this carried over into the mothers meeting and talking while the children played.

> It must have been one day in the summer and the boys actually got together and started to play. They hit it off pretty well so when I would go down to pick my son up we would just sit and talk. And you know how kids will play; and they don't want to leave just yet and so you're sitting there talking to the mom. We

in an altered form, across many state lines. However, a negative aspect of depending on children's activities for friendship development is that children change interests often; and then turn into adults, often leaving mothers to find other sources for friendships or ways of maintaining the friendships that were supported through contact at regular children's activities.

Developing friendships that withstand geographic separation takes time and energy as well as a place where there can be enough contact to establish a bond between the two people. In this study, participants reported bonds were formed through neighborhoods, school and college environments, in the workplace, and through the activities of children and spouses. Typically, the bond was reinforced with additional activities outside of the primary place of contact. It appears that the more opportunities for contact, the more prone the members of the friendship dyad are to adapt their friendship maintenance behaviors to enable the relationship to remain active following a geographic separation. In addition to having frequent contact at access points, it also appears various elements of time are factors in both developing and in maintaining friendships and will be explored next.

Aspects of Time

> It's really important that you have the time to share experiences. I think about this, in the last 10 to 15 years of my life where I don't feel like I've made many friends and I think a lot of it is because having children, hardly having time when you have your career, hardly having time for your own family, it's hard to make time to share with somebody else that's outside of your family. It's more quality time than amount of time. But you have to have that time to spend together. I think that's the number one criteria.

Time is a small word with a great deal of meaning. In discussing friendship formation and maintenance, three primary aspects of time kept surfacing. One was the aspect of how much time it takes to establish the friendship before the move and how much time it takes to maintain it before as well as after the move. Establishing and maintaining friendships takes time. The second aspect revolves around the stage of life a person is in when the friendship is formed as well as the different stages of life the person goes through as the friendship is maintained. Examples of stages of life include early childhood; young adulthood in college and being; middle adulthood with new careers, husbands and children; and then older adulthood with grandchildren and retirement. A friend may have more time to put effort into a friendship at different stages of life as indicated in the results of this study. For example, a newlywed may focus most of her energy and effort into establishing the husband-wife relationship, and a new mother may not have the time or the energy to actively maintain a friendship. Moving through time or the actual passage of time is the third aspect mentioned by several women in relation to having shared many experiences with particular friends. In several cases women noted that feelings of kinship developed in part due to the amount of time spent together and, in part, due to the length of time they had been friends.

Several of these friendships were formed during college days when dormitory life was shared for three or four years. One woman in particular formed close friendship bonds with three other women while in college. They were neighbors in a dormitory and spent many hours together studying and having fun. They spent occasional weekends at the homes of their various parents, and to this day they remain close friends even through

none of them live in the same town. As college students, they focused their energy and attention on the friendship.

> I have newer friends, but they haven't stuck as tight; and I think that comes from when we were all in our early 20s we had the luxury of time to really get to know one another.

As they married and had children, the women in this study had less time available; but the bond was well-established early and apparently could continue to exist even with little contact at various times. One woman suggested that as a newlywed a person does not spend as much time making friends but instead is focusing on establishing a life with her husband.

As people progress on life's course, circumstances change that can potentially lead to changes in friendship behavior. Several women noted that having children can impact how a friendship is maintained.

> Your children have a huge impact on the friendships you make when you are young adults. If you are lucky, the parents of your children's friends share your interests and values. Otherwise, once the children grow and change friends, so do the parents.

If the friend has children of a similar age, then activities may evolve around the children while allowing the friends to share some time together. On the other hand, a few of the women stated that having a family and children limited the amount of time and energy available to maintain a friendship. One woman explained that, during visits with friends, if children were along it was often difficult to have time to have a deep conversation with just the friend; but she also was aware that if the family was not along, there would be no opportunity to even see the friend.

While many of the women formed close friendships through work, several reported they had more time to share activities and confidences with friends after divorce,

after retirement, or after widowhood. All three of these life stages can impact friendship behavior. A couple of the women who were divorced stated that when they were married they participated more in couple friendships that ended with the divorce. Several of the women who are now retired also commented, that since some of their friends had retired as well, they all had time to spend with each other and on the friendship.

There was one woman who reported a very strong friendship group in which each of the four close friends rotated visits throughout the year that her husband was dying. Each month one of the friends would come for a week to help however she needed. This experience reinforced the bond between them to the point that she made the decision to move closer to some of them after her husband died. In this case, having such strong friendships may have lessened her efforts to maintain the close friendships she left behind; but her need for comfort and companionship was filled by this strong circle of friends. Circumstances change for both members of the dyad, and a couple of the women noted that they are aware of this and look at friendships accordingly.

> From time to time I still reassess individual friendships. Changes in people's lives result in changes in their friendships...qualitative changes in friendships. For example, children grow up and we talk about them less, partners change and we track those and like or not like them. We grow old and health concerns become more prominent in conversation.
>
> Of course the expectations change. You change as you age, so the friends have to change companionably along with you as you age if they are to stay friends. Sometimes, friends are just expedient. They are the people who are there rather than the people you would choose to be there. But always a few rare individuals come along who are important to you and who stick with you forever.

While retirement might provide the time needed to maintain friendships, for some women, it often comes with other situations that may involve time, for example, having

grandchildren and/or elderly parents. Several of the women interviewed reported having grandchildren as well as their friends having grandchildren.

> There's been things with her grandchildren a lot. They do a lot of traveling to see sons and their families. I haven't seen her in two years because of the way our lives are right now. They may be home one week and then off to one of the children's the next week, and the next week they may be keeping the grandchildren while the parents go do something.

There were five women who did not have grandchildren of their own that commented that their friends with grandchildren aimed their travel, energy, and effort in that direction.

> But I still kept in touch with my friend, but not as much as I would have liked to. But we were both busy with young grandchildren.

> I don't think they will ever visit here. They have children and grandchildren and spend their time and money in that direction.

When this occurred, it appeared that the women without grandchildren elected to not put as much effort into those friendships. This may have been due in part to not having grandchildren as a common ground for a topic of discussion during communication.

In addition to competing elements for time such as grandchildren, relocating appears to have additional impacts on friendships in older adulthood and appears to present issues in finding and forming new friendships at the new location. Several of the participants had the perception that it is harder to make friends as you get older.

> I just think, as we get older, it's much more difficult to make friends and maintain friends. Make new friends I should say.

> As for making new friends, I think I have learned that it's harder to make good friends as you get older and I don't know why this is. Maybe it's because people have their support networks already.

> The older you get, the people you meet already have established friendships and they're real guarded about who they let in to be their friend.

> Now in middle age I think the older you get the harder it is to make friends even if you are stationary, let alone if you're pulling up roots and resettling.

Whether it is harder to make new friends as a person gets older or the perception is that it is harder, it appears maintaining long-distance friendships needs to be promoted.

When relocation is added to the time constraints of various periods in a person's life, it seems to follow that maintenance behavior will vary as well; and friendships that stand the test of time may also stand the test of relocation. Having things in common helps even if those things compete for the limited time available to stay in touch. For example, the grandmothers in this group of women understood and accepted less time for friendship maintenance because they were grandmothers themselves. It seems to come back to the perception that the friendship is there if needed and that the friend may be gone but not forgotten.

In addition to the period or phase of a person's life influencing the establishment and maintenance of friendships, the length of time the friendship has existed also plays a role. Several women suggested that having opportunities to share time and space with a person repeatedly helped provide an atmosphere for a friendship to develop.

> There are people that you have known a long time; but for various issues and reasons you may not develop as close a friendship, be it trust, be it level of friendship, and it never moves on. It's not reciprocal. You both don't need the same things at the same times. But in my case where I've had these very close friendships it has evolved over time but there was an instant acceptance among all of us.

> We were dependable for each other and that helps cement bonds as well because you respect one another and you appreciate what they have to do and as a friend you want to help lighten the load. When I call in the cavalry, they all appear. We have moved through time together.

The results of this study suggest that shared time and space were not the only elements needed to establish a close relationship. There had to be something in common and an appreciation for the other person.

Feelings of Connection

As the friends move through time together, they reported sharing the ups and downs; and the bonds between them often become closer and tighter. When answering the question about how a person gets from being a casual friend to a good friend, one participant remarked that it involves:

> Building a level of dependency, needing to share with the other, missing that person when frequent contact is not made and feelings of kinship.

Some friendships appear to have qualities similar to those of sisters. Several women interviewed commented that a particular friend was more like a sister.

> I would trust her with my life because we were little girls together. I feel like I know her totally and that she loves me. Friends you had when you were little are more special because they are like extra sisters. And you don't have to see them very often to know you have this tie.
>
> She knows my family. I know her family. She knows my siblings. She just fits in like a sibling. She is just enveloped into this group and this extended family that I have.
>
> After my time of adjustment, I'm satisfied with our contact of three or four times a year. We both call and send cards. I still feel like we'll have a bond for life, that we are more like sisters.
>
> She's seven years older than I am. We're just like sisters. We're just as close as sisters. As a parting gift I gave her a plaque about sisters. I was an only child.

Feelings of kinship appear to arise from spending time together during the formative years, including the friend in family activities through the years, and generally from having traveled through time with the person.

This always appears to go in the other direction in that several women remarked that their sisters were also close friends.

> Sis was a great friend. Her son lives here, and that's the only way Sis could get her husband to retire and move back here. That was wonderful for us. I got to be with her a lot.
>
> I guess she and my sister are my best friends but of course the relationship with my sister is different from my relationship with her. My sister and I were best friends all of our lives. My parents are dead, so she's sister, mother, father...she's my everything.

Sisters were not the only feelings of kinship expressed by the participants. A couple made statements about being close friends with their mothers and having friends that were like their mothers.

> We would just sit and visit and talk. She was like visiting my mom. She was a real comforting person.
>
> When I was younger, growing up at home with my parents, I would say, probably, that my mom was my best friend. In high school I felt very close to her.

An additional woman stated that her children refer to one of her friends as "Momma Sue" because she is the first person her children would call if something was wrong. This particular friend is not married and has no children but "she adores my children. She frets after them and worries about them just like I do."

The results of this study suggest that friendships are influenced by elements of time in various ways and in various degrees. There first must be time in which the friendship can be established as well as time in which it can be maintained. As friends progress through their individual lives, their circumstances change and demands on their time change; and, ultimately, decisions on how much time to allot to long-distance friendships are made. Some are much easier to make especially if the bond remains tight and the perception of others may be adjusted. Behavior may also be adjusted so that the

bond is minimally maintained while believed to be intact. There are other elements besides time that figure into the issue of maintaining long-distance friendships and will be presented in the following section.

Early Transition Issues

There are several factors that come into play during the early transition period of geographic separation in regards to friendships. Experiences with prior moves may or may not impact behavior during the pre-move phase. There may or may not be going away parties and/or gifts. Plans to maintain and how to maintain friendships may or may not be discussed. Friends may share their feelings about the impending separation or they may not. Reactions to the separation may be strong or not and shared or not. Moving away from friends can be a stressful time, and events leading up to the separation may influence the transitional period between the move and the re-establishing of a pattern of maintenance behavior.

Impact of Moving

Having moved several times, having experienced being left, and having a personal understanding of the moving phenomenon can potentially influence interactions prior to the actual separation. Of the women interviewed, 18 had experienced previous moves due to husbands being in academia, husbands working for the government, husbands or parents being in the military, or themselves being in the military or in academia. Within academia, faculty may move around in search of tenure and the right fit for their interests and background. Within the military, duty assignments are changed

regularly. Likewise, within federal government departments, advancement often means relocating. In all of these cases, the spouse and children follow the primary wage earner, and friends become separated by physical distance. Some of the interviewed women stated they grew accustomed to moving and adjusted fine, although others came to dread the thought of moving again.

> In the military you just move so much that there are too many people coming and going. I was fortunate in that I never stayed in any one place particularly long enough to really have all my friends in one place. They're all scattered, and I'm kind of use to dealing with long-distance friendships.
>
> I moved 15 times before I went to college. This is a really big psychological factor among military dependents. In general, you don't usually put yourself out there as much. You're not as accessible. My parents really stressed the idea that I wasn't leaving somewhere but instead was going somewhere to a new exciting adventure and they were always painting it in the positive light. 'You're going to make new friends. You're going to have old friends. So you're going to have more than the person who never moves.' I really held onto that my whole life until the very last move that I made just a few years ago. It just doesn't hold up.
>
> I was happy. I had friends. I really didn't want to move but went along as the attending spouse. The same thing happened with the next move. I was working and enjoying what I was doing. So when the idea of moving again came up, it was difficult to psych myself up to leaving.
>
> We have moved so much now that I know how to adjust to a new neighborhood and place. I have had several neighbor friends over the years. I have tended to stay in touch with them for a few years after the move but then it would fade away and by that time we had moved again and there were new neighbors to stay in touch with.

If both members of the dyad have experienced moving, there seems to be more of an effort to maintain the long-distance friendship. They have walked in each other's shoes, as the old adage goes, and have perhaps gained an appreciation for keeping that bond connected.

> I worked part time for several years. Then I had a friend that did just like I did, and she didn't keep in touch when she moved away; and I thought, 'And now you

> know.' So I have good intentions of trying harder to stay in touch with my friends.
>
> We moved away first, and later she moved away; so basically we have moved away from each other. Since she moved, we've kept a lot closer touch. She's come down here for various reasons, and we've gone up to visit them. We email all the time and send Christmas presents back and forth to the family.

Another woman takes a slightly different approach to experiences with other long-distance friendships and stated she tries not to use the successful long-distance friendship to gauge other friendships:

> I guess I use this friendship as a model for all the others. And I have to confess, since no other can quite match it, I have to work at not expecting the same closeness I have with her with my other friends. As I have said, it takes two people to maintain any friendship; so I try to keep in touch with others, but can't expect them to be this particular friend on the other end.

Although every relocation experience may be different, these women appeared to adapt their pre-move behavior based on their own experiences, whether it was move number two or 20. These experiences would carry over into interactions between the friends as part of the pre-move transition period. A few of the friendship dyad members took a more proactive approach and actually discussed how the friendship would be maintained; but more often than not, maintenance was left to chance. The following section will present more information regarding this pre-move element.

Discussion of Maintenance Plans

Relocating takes a great deal of planning from finding a place to live to requesting the forwarding of medical files. The results of this study suggest that friendship maintenance plans are rarely discussed during the pre-move, high activity period. Seven of the 25 women remarked that they discussed plans for keeping in touch with some of

their friends. Plans were discussed with all close friends by only four of the women interviewed.

> It varied with each friend. With my closest friends, we discussed plans to see each other at least once or twice a year. With others, we didn't discuss plans specifically. We just expected to see each other once in a while, to call, and to write, and we did for the most part.
> A definite plan was made with all close and good friends either by expressing that we would write or visit.
>
> With my best friend across the street, we promised to write; but there were no other plans to maintain.
>
> Yes, we made plans to visit when she comes to visit grandchildren and then when I go to visit grandchildren. She now lives on the way to where my son and his family live.

It appears that plans were mostly discussed with friends that were considered best or close friends.

The majority of the women interviewed left the maintenance of their friendships to chance, often assuming that they would automatically keep in touch with each other. Several mentioned that they just believed the friendships would be maintained, that keeping in touch was a foregone conclusion.

> My best friend and I were determined to stay in touch. We never really discussed how we would do it; we just immediately started writing back and forth.
>
> We just assumed we could maintain contact; and, for the most part, we have. I don't know that we all knew we would stay in touch. I think we all expected to stay in touch.
>
> No plans were discussed. It was left to chance, but we knew we would stay in touch.
>
> We did not discuss plans. We just knew the friendship would definitely continue, and it did. It has become stronger.

Expectations and assumptions that contact would continue appeared to be the primary approach to pre-move planning for friendship maintenance. Leaving friendships to

chance may have been an early coping mechanism in that continuity could be perceived if the reality of the potential for major changes within the friendship was not verbalized. Sharing feelings and reactions about the impending separation also seemed to be limited, perhaps for the same reason.

Separation Reactions and Feelings

In discussing reactions and feelings about moving away from friends, there were similarities among these women. Some friends cried together, yet others left things unsaid. Some of the friends moving away reacted more strongly than others as did some of the friends that were left. Some were angry with the spouse for instigating the move, and others had moved so frequently that reactions were no longer as strong.

Separating from something or somebody can lead to feelings of sadness and loss. Relocating leads to friends losing their avenue for regular face-to-face interactions and often to the loss of sharing the little day-to-day happenings that serve to keep the friends actively involved with each other's lives. Friends have favorite places and favorite activities that create fond moments, and these are missed as well.

> She cried. I cried. We were very sad and emotional, but I knew I could find them if I needed them.
>
> I missed two friends greatly after a move. I recalled them in favorite music, in books, and in memory. I cried.
>
> I grieved and I cried. I wanted to be a part of the activities going on in her life.
>
> I was extremely sad. I missed each one a lot, and I thought when my best friend moved away that I'd die.

Sometimes expectations for reactions to the separation were not met. Possibly the other friend had her own issues with separation that had not surfaced within the friendship before. One woman remarked:

> She was the person that I was the closest to. When I told her about the move, she really didn't say too much and I was kind of taken aback. I was disappointed in her reaction, and it took me awhile to get over that; and I remember fussing to myself. I almost had to grab her to get her to say good-bye. So I think of the people that were hurt that I left, I think she was the most hurt. Her attitude was ... 'I'm just not going to talk to you about this.'

Other women commented that they or their friend had become accustomed to people coming and going and no longer reacted to geographic separations from friends.

> She is kind of schooled into taking it. She use to be married to someone in the diplomatic core, and we have all had the experiences of coming and going a lot.

> I have missed each of them but after having moved so many times, it is no longer a big deal. One good friend married military, and they had moved all over the country. She was getting tired of moving. She did not react to my moving. She was military.

There were several women interviewed that chose not to share their feelings at the time of separation but did after the newness of the change had settled into a different pattern of interaction with the friend.

> I remember being very angry and sad; bereft, in fact. But I got over it. I did not share this with the friend at the time, but now that years have passed we have talked about it.

> I called her after I looked over your questions. We had a very nice conversation and shared a lot of memories. I didn't know how much she missed me until now, and that made me feel very humble.

Similarly, friends that have been left have had strong reactions to the separation. In some cases it seems a place was associated with the friendship and serves as a reminder that the friend is no longer close by.

In other cases, the person has missed the normalcy of an established routine. Driving by a friend's home after she had moved away appeared to be an issue for a few of the women, ones that moved as well as the ones that were left. Another woman longed for the normalcy of her life prior to moving and envied her friend.

> She says she still hasn't gone by our house, and we've been gone since 1995. She never went to the activity we did together without me, so she stopped going there. So she missed me. When I first came here, I missed her too because we did get together quite a lot.
>
> But I look over there at her house, and the new owners have a van the same color as hers. So you see the van in front of the house, and you forget that she's not there... and I miss her (cries).
>
> I recall being jealous that her life and her children's lives were normal and I was starting over from scratch with everything new. Nothing was normal.
>
> When she remarried and moved away, I was upset. She was part of almost every day, and it left a big hole.

With several of the women, friendship separations occurred during normal life transitions, such as graduating from high school or college and moving into the next phase of life. The women were often sad to go their separate ways, but they were also excited about new adventures and new roles. High school friends tended to attend different colleges and gradually lose track of each other. Several of the women remarked that, upon finishing college, leaving friends was not a major issue because they were starting new jobs and often were either newlyweds or soon to be married.

Two of the women had stronger reactions to their friends leaving, in part because within a very short period they had lost several friends. One had lost a friend to cancer and two to relocation. The other one had three different friends move away within a three-month period and remarked:

> But if you end up someplace where you make friends then they move away...I said to my friend who moved away, "Oh, when you left and two other friends that were my support here left, it was devastating. It was very hard on me."

Reactions vary, and whether or not they are shared with the other party varies from person to person and friendship to friendship. Prior experiences factor in as do personalities. Some people may be more comfortable sharing emotions while others manage situations better by not acknowledging the emotions openly. Sometimes going away parties provide an atmosphere in which individuals can respond in their own manner.

Going Away Parties and Gifts

Going away parties and gift giving do not seem to be commonly practiced anymore. When there were parties or gifts, they tended to be group-oriented. Five of the women commented that they had received individual gifts, and four received gifts from a group of co-workers, neighbors, or scout troops. While going away parties or gifts appear to be a way of formalizing a good-bye, and possibly easing the transitional issues of separation for some people, it does not appear to be a norm.

> There were no going away parties or gifts. In the military, you just move so much that you would be driven to drink. Too many people coming and going.

> I was surprised that you asked that. I hadn't thought about it. That's something I don't think of as important to me. Like a couple of times when leaving a job I had the choice of a party or a gift. I've always taken the gift.

Going away parties seem to present an opportunity to celebrate the friendship and an opportunity to set the stage for maintaining it in the future. Gifts appear to be a means of symbolizing the importance of the friendship, and it appears to be the thought that counts more than the gift itself.

She gave me candlesticks and I still have them. They are on the mantel.

One friend gave me two tree ornaments and they always hang on the tree. Another friend gave us polar bear figurines and we still have them. And I have received other going away gifts, but I don't remember what.

One very close friend gave a going-away gift. It was a bowl in the shape of the state I was moving from. I still have it and use it from time to time.

Several of the women interviewed stated they not only received gifts but gave gifts as well.

She and I exchanged gifts when she got a job after college and moved away. We had been nontraditional students and supported each other through the program. She gave me an angel. She knew I collect angels. I gave her a pair of butterflies which is what she collects.

We exchanged gifts. We gave them our pair of bunnies and she made a plaque that said "Welcome Friends" for me.

With each of these women, circumstances other than just the impending friendship separation may have contributed to the gift exchange. Moving the bunnies may have been perceived as being more trouble than they were worth, and giving them to the friend had an added incentive in that there would be an extra connection between the friends as long as the bunnies were alive. As for the gifts exchanged between the graduating students, they too may have served a dual purpose, one for surviving the program and one for remembering the friendship that developed as a by product.

Two additional women stated they left items behind that had meant something to them, perhaps as a means of maintaining the emotional bond with the person being left.

I had a set of tart pans made out of metal with ruffled edges that had belonged to my mother. I gave them to her and I said, "You'll make more use out of these than I will." She still has my tart pans, and she says she uses them all the time. So we have that connection.

> One time at Christmas we had a reindeer in our front yard, and they thought that was great. So when we left, we gave them Rudolph. They have never forgotten that.

There appears to be some significance to leaving something behind that serves to maintain the feeling of connectedness. Although driving by empty houses may cause some people to feel sad, having a visual reminder of the friendship helps others to feel connected. In both instances it may be a case of being gone but not forgotten.

> Lots of time I would leave a plant, one of my plants. I would just tell them I wanted to leave something and I took them a plant. It's caused some teary moments. Because you are really leaving part of yourself when you grow something and cultivate it. They knew I cared, or I wouldn't be leaving one of my plants.

Most of the participants did not receive going away gifts or parties. A few had parties given by neighbors or co-workers with few individual gifts. A couple of women actually exchanged gifts with their best friends and chose gifts that were symbolic of the friendship, for example, a plaque with a poem about sisters. Another participant gave a friend a duplicate of an angel statue so that they each could look at the angel and think of each other. Perhaps a more positive description for these types of activities would be 'I'll remember you' parties and gifts instead of the more negative description of 'going away.'

Connection Issues

Moving away from friends can be hard. It is important to find the maintenance behavior that works for each friendship enabling the friends to stay in touch. It may take time to see whether the friendship will survive the relocation and to see what new parameters for maintaining it across the distance will develop. Participants all stated that, in order for the friendship to survive, both members of the dyad will need to work on

making it happen. If the effort in maintenance is perceived to be too heavily one-sided, the person may decide the friendship is not worth the effort, and it may progress to a Christmas card only friendship. Various elements come into play that enable or hinder friends in filling their need or desire for connections with friends both near and far. Adapting and coping strategies, the role of reciprocity, the rekindling of friendships, and potential impact on future connections are discussed in the following section.

Adjusting to the Separation

When a friend moves away from a friend, the results of this study suggest they will initially cope with the separation in some manner and eventually adapt the way their friendship has been maintained by altering behaviors and/or perceptions. Geographic separations precipitate a change in the friendship behavior mainly due to the friends not having easy access to daily interactions. Several women remarked that while the first few months were busy with getting established in the new location, they also greatly missed their friends.

> It feels bad especially when you're first here. I couldn't believe it. I was homesick for a place I wanted to leave. This was a move we made on purpose. I couldn't believe that. Everyday the mailbox was empty and there were few or no phone calls. You just feel terrible, and it hurts very much.
>
> I was so homesick when we first moved for phone calls and daily walks and talks with her. After about eight months I started to work out and this really helped me to feel better. She and I used to walk three miles together daily.
>
> When she moved away I kept busy with surface friends and wrote letters in the days before long-distance telephoning was routine. The telephone became a life-line to keep me out of depression. She was always there for me.
>
> There is a definite void for about 6 months. Then the void seems to fill with the contact you have even if only by email or letter. It then turns into a 'miss.' The first 6 months seems to be the worst part of 'missing' the person, for me.

It appears that family issues may influence coping strategies in several ways. Feelings about leaving aging parents may override feelings about leaving close friends. Additionally, focusing on children may serve as a protective mechanism by providing a socially acceptable reason for not maintaining contact with old friends or not attempting to establish new friends locally.

> It was really hard on me to move away from parents, children, grandchildren, and friends. There were times when I missed everyone a lot, but it got easier as time passed. On the bad days, I would think of her and wish I could see her.
>
> Leaving was very hard. I was content there. I went with my husband. I had a young child at that time and was moving into a new phase of my life as a mother when we moved; and I didn't make any close friends for a long time because I was just doing mother things.
>
> I was more depressed about my children's hard adjustment. I put my friendships on hold for a while.
>
> I felt like I was doing okay in coping with the big move in leaving family and our dream home so the one friendship did not seem so major. There were no positive or negative aspects to letting it go.

A few women were able to put their friendships into perspective with leaving family and an area they liked. They were trying to cope with several losses in addition to the friendship. The friendship is only one piece of the relocating issue.

Other women made remarks about how losing a friendship and/or moving led them to question themselves or their identities. Individual roles and the role of the friendship needed to be reworked to adjust to the new circumstances.

> But losing friends makes you wonder about yourself, wonder why it happened, and what you could have done differently. At that point, you have to ask yourself if it is worth it. Sometimes the answer is a resounding "Yes;" and others, it is not.
>
> Personally it has been very difficult for me as a trailing spouse. With our move here I felt completely displaced. I remember identifying and empathizing with the Five Civilized Tribes which were relocated during the 1830s. I thought about what it must have been like for them, to be forced from their homeland and to

> have to settle and begin a new life in a new land. I left a relatively large city that I loved, rich in culture, history, etc., and a job that I loved, to move here which I found small, extremely conservative, with nothing to do, and worse yet, no program or person in my professional field within a 60 mile radius. I actually went through an identity crisis. 'Who was I?'
>
> The move before this one was hard because I had established more of my own identity and had my own close friends. When the job situation forced the move, my husband was the one who wanted to leave. I was content to stay. But this most recent move has been the hardest for me because I didn't get a job right away.

Over half of the women were trailing spouses in that moves were primarily made due to their husbands' careers. Five of the women had careers that were interrupted, and others had to re-establish their identity with a new neighborhood. One woman stated she did not work prior to the move, but she found herself withdrawing from her friends after the move and focusing on her children's adjustment.

As these women coped with being separated from friends, friendship maintenance behavior adapted to the distance. The majority of the women who were considered 'best' friends at the time of the move digressed to a lower status after the move. However, there were a few friendships reported by these women that actually gained strength following the move.

> She remains someone I share much of the happenings of my life with by phone. We have gone from being the casual acquaintance, mothers of two friends, to best friends perhaps for two years in the same town and now long-distance; and we solicit advice and opinion from each other often. Our friendship grew richer and deeper after she left. That leaves a lot open to question, doesn't it?

In another instance, the friendship had started to fade prior to the move because there was no consistent means of communication. After the move, the one friend purchased a home computer with electronic mail access, and now they email daily. This has enabled them

to share the smallest snippets of their lives; and as a result the bond is perceived to be much stronger now.

In the early period after the move, contact between some friends seemed to be more frequent and then tapered off as a new pattern for maintaining the friendship developed. Several women commented that, initially, contact was at least once a week with it tapering off to once a month as time passed. Although the new pattern is most likely less contact, this pattern appears to be acceptable perhaps because it becomes evident that the relationship is continuing even with less contact.

> After about our second year apart, our letters slowed down... a lot. But we were both so busy. I think it was very mutual.
>
> By now after 30 years, we have settled comfortably into our patterns. Sometimes we can go several weeks without being in touch but invariably when one of us finally calls the other, it's such a relief to hear the other's voice and to catch up in long, long, calls.
>
> When we were in Florida that first year we were back and forth on the phone and we wrote to each other all the time. Now, a couple of weeks might go by but that doesn't count as a lapse in communication.
>
> When the move first happened, we probably talked 2 times a week. But now, over the years, it's probably about once a month. She's the type of person who sends you a letter and you open up the letter and there are all these cute cartoons. She sends little gifts. For our birthdays we always search for that special gift that is very personal.

Another approach that had similar results was to have less contact immediately after the separation and then slowly develop a pattern of maintenance.

One woman appeared to have assessed the situation, made a decision to purchase a computer, and then found an avenue for communication that worked for herself and the friend. Another friendship dyad had a difficult time in the beginning getting on the same page. One would try with little response, and then the other would try with little

response. She was not willing to let the friendship go and finally took a course of action that got the friendship going again.

> There was a lull in communication when I first moved. She was busy, and I was busy trying to cope with the move. It's funny, but after I decided to get a computer and email, our contact increased and our friendship actually grew stronger. We now email daily and share the little day-to-day snippets. I just wasn't willing to give up 38 years of fun, visits, shopping, sewing, and quilting because of a move I made and because of the life style changes.
>
> She is a childhood friend who I have known for 39 years. When I first moved away she tried to stay in touch but I did not communicate for awhile. I just didn't want to talk. I was involved with my children's adjustment. Then she stopped communicating, and I felt like it was one-sided and she didn't have time for me. So I didn't respond either until things changed at home for the better. The boys were happy so I was ready to rekindle this friendship. I found the perfect card to express my feelings. I wrote a long letter explaining all my emotions, and I got a great response from her in a letter.

A couple of women seemed to have developed a philosophy about moving that appeared to aid them in adapting to their new location.

> Every time you move, I think you leave a little bit of yourself every place you are. I like to think that I bring something with me, too, and I think I do. You can't move a lot and not bring something and then take something.
>
> One neighbor in another state told me, 'You know you and your friend just learn to bloom where you're planted' and I thought ... 'You're exactly right.' From then on, I just bloomed wherever I was planted. If you don't, I mean, you are only hurting yourself. And now I miss moving and meeting new people. It just got to be a way of life.

A couple of other women seemed to have gained a self-awareness of the situation with one deciding being alone was okay and the other deciding to be more proactive in keeping friends. Another woman took a practical approach by recognizing that change is inevitable, whereas a fourth participant opted to cope more abstractly by dreaming about leaving.

> I am a person who never expects much from anyone. I have always preferred to be alone; and each time we move, I am alone for awhile without friends until circumstances come along to make friends.
>
> In the military there is a lot of meeting and saying good-bye. I thought, 'That's it; they're done. I'll never see them again.' And that was traumatic to me to have to go through that because of the type of job I did. But as I got older and more mature, I began thinking about it more. I thought 'This was crazy. These are a lot of good people, good friends ... keep them!'
>
> I don't know that there's any special way other than accepting that's that and go on with the new. I guess I have always accepted that change is part of life. I put a lot of effort into maintaining the long-distance friendships, lots of phone calls, letters, and as many visits as I could do.
>
> As a trailing spouse you have no support network in place. You are lonely, depressed. You wish you have never moved. You try to be strong (after all, you have a child to raise), and you dream about leaving.

All four of these women came to relocation from different directions. One preferred being a stay-at-home mom, whereas one had had a career in progress before the move. The other two had never married. However, one had moved around a great deal while the other one had moved a few times but had friends move away from her as well. Of these four, the woman who had come to the conclusion that change is a part of life was in her late 70s and had experienced the goings and comings of many friends.

From the results of this study, there appear to be several coping strategies that aid in adjusting to being separated from enduring friends. Some friendship dyads put a great deal of effort into maintenance early in the transition, whereas others took some time to cope with not having the friend close by; but in the end both strategies lead to the parameters of the friendship changing to less frequent but regular contact. These friendships adapted to the distance after both members of the dyad reciprocated enough to develop a new pattern for maintaining the friendship.

Reciprocating

In order to have a close friendship, it appears that two people need to be perceived by each other as actively maintaining the relationship. Reciprocity appears to be more important early in the formation of a friendship as well as in the early transition period following relocation. If the effort to maintain the relationship does not meet expectations of one or more of the dyad members, the friendship may not survive the separation.

> I think I didn't respond quickly enough to her letters or phone calls, or maybe I said I couldn't call that frequently. For some reason she just dropped me. I don't know. Now I don't even get a Christmas card or picture of her children and you know I was there when her babies were born. I miss that...not knowing what has happened. I've written notes on Christmas cards like 'Well your daughter must be old enough to drive now' and I didn't get a response of any kind.

It was suggested by one of the women interviewed that the friend who was left take the initiative in establishing contact for about the first six months, "as it takes a mover that long to settle in." As people grow older, often their lives become more complicated with family, work, and other things so it is not always easy to remember who called whom last. From what these women stated, reciprocity is not as important with well established friendships in part because effort is perceived to even out in the long run. Another participant reinforced this statement by saying, "When they are not reciprocating, don't assume it is about you. Something stressful may be going on in their lives or they may, too, be too busy in this too-busy world."

When describing how a friendship moves from casual to close, one participant remarked, "Friendship is an interdependence. It's not one way." The relationship appears to develop around exchanges, whether it's having dinners at each other's homes or sharing confidences.

> There has to be some type of regular contact in there; and it has to be something where you allow yourself to be more intimate with that person, sharing things that are not necessarily your best all the time. And also listening and supporting them when they are not at their best.
>
> Effort determines the strength. Both people have to be determined to make, then keep, the friendship. Both have to want to get to know the other better, then to maintain."

Another aspect of reciprocity mentioned by participants was the number of tries at maintaining the friendship they would make. The number of tries appeared to depend on the closeness of the relationship. A majority of these women stated that if they were trying to establish a friendship or trying to maintain one when they first moved, they would usually try two or three times and then stop.

> We visited them when we went back to the area a number of years. They never made the effort to come see us, so I just let it go.
>
> If you have children and you move hundreds of miles away, it takes a great deal of effort to see each other. I did it for perhaps three years after I moved, and she did not put much effort into the friendship. Now they are 'Christmas Card Only' people.
>
> I'm not sure there's a set number of tries but after awhile and it doesn't happen, I just say 'well... Christmas cards will do.
>
> There are people I have made friends with over the years in which I have put a lot of energy into the friendship. For some of them, the ball is always in their court. Okay. Then there comes a time when I have to say 'I won't put anymore energy into it' because I'm simply not interested in friendships that are not reciprocal.
>
> The majority of my close friends are long-distance and that's hard. That takes time. It's an effort so I guess after a time you do say 'Hey, is it worth it?' if it's not being reciprocated. What it may come down to is one Christmas card a year.

It seems that many of the friendships that do not remain active after a geographic separation become 'Christmas Card Only' when the effort to maintain is not perceived to be equal. What this allows is the potential for the relationship to be rekindled at some point in the future. If the annual card exchange continues, at least each of the friends will

know where the other one is and in most cases, that they are still alive should they want to contact them in the future.

The results of the study also suggest that if the relationship was a best friend one, then they would try a little harder to establish a pattern in communication. If there was a lapse in communication, it appeared that the close friend would be given the benefit of the doubt and further efforts at communication would ensue. It appeared to be important to explore why there had been no contact before assuming the friend no longer wanted to maintain the relationship.

> Because we have maintained a friendship for 20 years, it would be so unlike them, so out of character that I would spend more time investigating the reasons behind their dismissal of our friendship.
>
> It's something that comes with these long term friendships because we have known each other so long that we don't have to decide whether it's worth it. It's not always reciprocal. There are many different times when it's not reciprocal. But that's okay. We all take our turn and it balances out.

And if the friendship was one that was deemed worth keeping even before the move when the effort to maintain it was not equal, the effort to maintain may continue following the separation:

> Most of my friends initiate contact with me more than I do with them except for one particular friend. I am doing most of the calls with her but I was also the one doing most of the work on that relationship before I left.

The amount of effort it takes to write a letter or make a phone call may be weighed differently based on the perceived value of the friendship. Reciprocity may or may not be a factor at different points in a relationship.

One woman was more specific in her approach to keeping in touch with long-distance friendships. She remarked:

> One initial letter or note and then if I didn't get a response from the letter sometime during the year, probably at Christmas, I would send a card. Then if they didn't respond, the name didn't get thrown out but ... it got put on a different list.

Sending the annual Christmas card seemed to be the last maintenance behavior. If it was not reciprocated after a couple of years, further attempts at contacting would be left to the friend who was not responding. However, as long as the annual card exchange was maintained, the friendship potentially could be rekindled in the future.

Rekindling

Relocating away from friends or having friends move away appears to leave a void that needs to be filled either by adjusting the friendship or by finding another person with which to fill it. According to the results of this study, friendships that have faded into the background have the potential to be rekindled, filling the void. Two of the participants had changes in their situations in which they felt a need to find a friend. One in particular had lost three close friends within a three month period due to death or relocation. Another woman never married, had just retired and moved to attend graduate school. In both of these cases the women looked back in time and found people with whom they had once been best friends and contacted them. One was successful with her attempts.

> Then I moved down here on my own and nobody's around and I'm a little bit lonely. I thought maybe I would try and get a hold of her. I did, and I went through everyone; and I reconnected with anyone that hadn't been connected. These old friends just like me, and I don't know why.

The second woman also put a lot of effort into trying to re-establish connections with several of her old friends but was unsuccessful.

> But when our nursing class had their 30th year reunion, both of us wrote to the secretary trying to find each other. And come to find out she had been in a town not that far from here. I heard from her two or three times; then I heard she was moving out of the state and I had not heard from her since.
>
> As I was looking to re-new this friendship from my high school days, it became clear as we emailed that it wasn't going to happen. She was caught up in her family. She has her husband, children, and grandchildren. So that never came back. I think maybe too many years had passed.

A possible explanation for the difference may be that the first woman had established friendships while she was in the military and both members of the dyad were accustomed to having friends scattered around the world. In the case of the second woman, perhaps to be 'like it used to be' there needed to be involvement in day–to-day activities and more than electronic mail contact.

Several additional women talked about reconnecting with friends from the past through high school reunions. Although this does not directly address relocating away from friends, geographic separation did occur at some point. Reconnecting with old friends was mentioned numerous times and warrants a brief overview of the comments. These women had found various ways to re-establish contact with old friends including searching the Internet and class reunions.

> People started emailing me. They weren't people I had lost touch with in any way. They were people where our relationship was kind of dormant like once a year Christmas cards. I would get their email address or they'd get mine. Then I would start emailing them and our relationship would get more active because we would actually be having more communication.
>
> I don't think I found her until our 20th high school reunion. I had totally lost her. And at this last reunion (the 40th) she says to me 'If I hadn't seen anybody else but you at this reunion, I would have been completely happy.' I was totally blown away by that. So she is close, but she's not close. I don't know her everyday circumstances, and she doesn't know mine.

Additional reasons for trying to re-establish contact varied in that a couple of the women just wanted to know what had happened with their friends. One woman remarked, "Some of the friendships faded for a number of years but revived when curiosity made us find each other again." Several of the women interviewed are now retired or divorced and have more available time to re-establish and maintain friendships.

Another woman was part of a group of friends in which another member had moved away and was making little effort to stay in touch. The remainder of the group gathered together and decided to call the one friend who had basically withdrawn from the group.

> Two of my friends and I got together awhile back and called our friend whom we had not heard from in ages and said 'You shmuck, why haven't you been staying in touch with us?' And I don't know, she started talking about one of her children having an ear infection. Sometimes the longer it is that you haven't communicated, the harder it is to start again.

As mentioned earlier, the stage of life a person is in may contribute to the amount of energy available to devote to maintaining a friendship. The friendship connection may never have been completely severed, but the switch was off for awhile. One participant made a statement to that effect.

> When one has, particularly early on, family or other commitments, it becomes less close but it's still there. Sometimes later on in life, if something happens so that your paths cross again, and you have contact again, you pick up sort of where you left off. She is one like that.

There were also incidents mentioned in which friendship maintenance 'ebbed and flowed,' depending on life's circumstances at the time; and in times of stress or need the friendship was looked to for support. The shared history provides a foundation for contact throughout life.

> You make good close attachments with some people; but when you leave or when events transpire or whatever, you regroup back to your main-stay. This circle of friends has added to and diminished over time. There have been spans where we've all missed each other for a year or so at a time... haven't been as close. It ebbs and flows, but it always comes back.
>
> I remember my grandfather telling me when I was growing up that if you can count your really good friends on one hand, you're really very lucky. I have friends all over the place, but I know what he is talking about. He's talking about those you don't have to talk to for 20 years but you can pick up the phone and they'll recognize your voice. They still remember the players and the stories and the things that are important to your life and still have that unconditional support and your best interests at heart.
>
> She and I have been friends forever. We went to second grade together. There have been times when we slacked off and didn't stay in touch very much; and then last year was our 50th class reunion, and we got to see each other for a little while. She said, 'Let's keep in touch,' and so I got a letter from her the other day. We write to each other every once in awhile so we try to pick up where we left off.

Results from this study suggest that geographically separated friends commonly have the perception that if circumstances changed and they relocated back in same area as the friend, the friendship would pick right back up. The perception that the friendship is dormant or on hold and can easily be rekindled may be a coping strategy in that the distal friend can maintain her self-concept as being capable of having friends by perceiving that she does have friends even if they are 1000 miles away and rarely heard from.

> In my own situation when I've had really good friends or best friends...say growing up with a person and then we haven't spent time together for 20 years and I go back and we get together to visit, it doesn't take long before you feel like you haven't been apart very long. Unless there's some sort of major tragedy or rift that occurs, I think you're always best friends.
>
> I still have her. And right now I wouldn't call her a 'best friend;' but if I was living closer by, it might develop more into a 'best friends' situation.
>
> We exchange Christmas cards. That's all we do now. But I would say if we got back together we'd probably get to be friends again. Start doing more things together.

> The transition period was an eye opener. Life goes on no matter what you're experiencing. We finally caught up with all that had been going on in each of our lives and feel that later in life when family life settles down we'll reconnect with that life-long relationship.

It would appear that when two people have shared a common background there is something to talk about and the possibility exists for a long-lasting friendship even if miles are between them. These past experiences can potentially impact current friendship behavior, and both types of experiences can impact future establishment and maintenance of friendships.

Future Friendships

Friendship maintenance behavior was discussed from past and current vantage points. Past experiences have influenced current behavior for some of these women, and further discussion suggested that experiences with friendship maintenance has impacted current thinking and potentially future strategies for establishing and maintaining friendships. Successes and failures appear to come together to impact future friendship connective behavior.

When separations have not gone as expected or desired, some of these women adjusted their behavior regarding friendships in a self-protective manner. Some tended not to attempt to make new friends for a while.

> I was, for a time, more cautious in developing any friendship that could very easily be a close one. There is always the word 'move' that can be awakened. Amazing how much a small word can cause a big turmoil in a person's life.

> I focused on establishing my new career and used my energy in that direction. Several years after the move, I finally allowed myself to make friends. I was simply too busy to make the time it takes to grow friendships.

> I really haven't put myself out there. I've kind of held back and hoped something works out. I pretty much rely mostly on two of my long-distance friends as far as friends to confide things in.

Two of the women had specific experiences which led both of them to alter their approach to certain aspects of friendships. One was betrayed by a trusted friend and is determined to be more cautious in regards to trusting someone. The second woman invested a great deal of time, money, and energy in making a special gift and a special trip to present it, and was hurt when it was not appreciated the way she had hoped. She stated she is now less likely to give of herself like that again.

> I was greatly shocked and hurt when she betrayed me. I won't trust anyone that way again so maybe that has impacted my approach some. I haven't made, other than a few casual friends here at school, friends since I retired. Nobody gets that close to me... so yes. That made a mark. I won't give anybody else that kind of access to my life. She was the longest one that I was physically in one place with. We were on different islands, shot at, ships to serve, and she's the one that got me.
>
> With losing this friendship, I didn't try as hard to keep in touch and spend as much money on others at new locations. I had made her a baby gift and made the trip to take it to her, and she didn't even say thank you or send a thank you card.

Another woman experienced disappointments in several friends and as a result has done a self-analysis. She stated she has adjusted how she thinks and feels about having close friends as well as how she hopes to approach future friendship possibilities.

> After this last couple of moves, I am now much more independent. I have built up my own inner resources and am more happy to spend time by myself so it doesn't hurt me so much if I don't have a bunch of friends. I don't get lonely as easy. But also, since moving here I'm trying to be more open when someone invites me to do something and not to turn them down for any reason. I know I need to be receptive so I can develop some friends. I try to have way lower expectations than I use to have. I try to take into consideration that they are busy too; it's not me personally.

Perhaps the impact is greater on friendships that were more one-sided to begin with, the move serving to make it harder to maintain the perception that it was equally important to

both members of the dyad. When people have not experienced relocation for a considerable amount of time, they may have higher and/or unrealistic expectations. Disappointment can lead to hurt feelings and to re-evaluating oneself and friendships in general as indicated from the above discussion.

Yet, another woman stated she has come to realize that she needs to be careful not to judge other friendships based on her very successful relationship with her long-distance best friend. She makes the following comment:

> I guess I use this friendship as a model for all the others. And I have to confess, since no other can quite match it, I have to work at not expecting the same closeness I have with her with my other friends.

This particular friendship seems to have thrived regardless of the physical distance between them. They visit a couple of times a year in person, share the same interests professionally and can talk for hours on the phone and do so quite frequently. This friendship seems to have found the right mix for a highly successful friendship.

In addition to positive and negative impacts, a few of the women stated they did not believe any of their moving experiences had impacted their current friendship behavior. Others stated they had come to a better understanding of maintaining long-distance friendships.

> I don't think my moving experience has impacted my establishing new friendships. My best friend has been my husband, and he has moved with me.

> I don't think it really had a profound effect one way or the other as to making new friends. The impact of moving depends on whether you are uprooted or if it was your choice. All friendships that I considered close survived the moves, but some changed to less close.

> I have come to realize that everyone adjusts in their own way and in their own time. It is important to be patient with them and with yourself.

> I learned to stay in contact, listen, do things together, help when needed, and to talk about what is important in our lives.

Friendship behavior that has been successful appears to be repeated, and friendship behavior that has not been successful appears to be evaluated and adjusted for the next friendship establishing opportunity. Past, present, and future friendship behaviors appear to be intertwined and maintained through various types of communication. Communication is a major component of maintaining any type of relationship and will be discussed in the next section.

Communication Factors

> Overall I think it comes down to contact. It's like real estate – location, location, location. Well with friendship it's contact, contact, contact.

> Infrequent contact with closer friends is just a given. The constraints of time and money for long-distance travel inevitably limit face-to-face contact in my experience. The phone, also expensive, is my lifeline to distant friends. The frequency with which I either phone or visit is a pretty good gauge of my involvement in the friendship.

Letters and electronic mail (email) are forms of written communication whereas telephone calls and face-to-face visits are forms of oral communication. Friendships may be maintained with a combination of methods with perhaps one or two being the primary methods. For example, one participant stated it was too hard to sit down to write a letter, so she was going to call the person and say, "Send me your email address." There would seem to be some perception that writing a letter is different than writing an email. Many of the women interviewed remarked about the importance of communication and several commented on how easy it was to stay in touch with email.

Electronic Mail (Email)

The use of electronic mail (email) was found in a majority of the friendships under study. There were a few exceptions, however. The participants over the age of 80 were the only women who did not have access to a computer, and five women had access but did not use email to communicate with friends. One in particular stated, "Email is kind of impersonal. I like to hear their voices because you can tell more about what's really going on." On the other end of the spectrum were women who thought email was an excellent tool to stay in touch with their friends and become closer to them.

> The biggest impact on friendship, as far as I am concerned, in the last 25 years has been email. That has rejuvenated people who I had totally lost touch with. It's improved my family communication a zillion percent. I've talked and talked to other people, and they've said similar things.
>
> Since the Internet, we've gotten a lot closer. We can send a message a week or two or three a week if something is happening. We email each other once or twice a week or we send jokes or something and we've grown closer because of email.

Several participants indicated they wished they had a computer and/or that their friends had email and would use it.

> She doesn't call very much; and I know if we had a computer, we could stay in touch more.
>
> I am sure with my friend in Seattle, if she would get it, that it would increase our communication.
>
> I think what happened was her life was really crazy at that time; and this was before email really, and she still doesn't have email. Drives me nuts!
>
> Email is such a marvelous thing. I have a friend that moved to Phoenix a year-and-a-half ago. We're having a hard time keeping contact. She's techno-phobic and won't do email.

Although most participants used email to communicate with friends, some were not always happy with the results. When the friend on the other end did not respond the way that was expected, it appeared that a return email was not as forthcoming.

> It's sometimes just so hard to talk about the depressing stuff in each and every email. I know she's like me, but who wants to hear all that negative stuff?

> When I first moved here, I was very homesick for the place we left. I would write long, long emails because I wasn't working. So I would write all kinds of things. Probably moan and groan about being in this new place. I would write a two-page email message and then her response would be a short paragraph back. I think I must not have gotten the emotional feedback that I needed from her at the time through the email, so we just kind of quit corresponding via email.

An additional element of email mentioned by various women in this study was the flexibility that email gives the person on the other end of the cable. An email message could be sent at any time, read at any time, and replied to at any time as opposed to oral communication that is a more spontaneous interaction often with little time for deep thought processing. Some positive aspects of email include:

> It's easier than a phone call because you can pick your time to answer and have time to think about it and deal with it. You may want to call eventually. You don't put people on the spot either. You can have time to think about something, and it's pretty neat really.

> Email has really made a difference. When she was sick we'd call each other; but you can't call each other long-distance everyday. And when my mom was sick or when my friend was sick, you never knew if someone was sleeping or awake or up to talking; so we would email. With email, you can pop one off and read it when you want to.

It also appeared from the responses given during interviews that, although the content of some messages was on a personal level, jokes or other types of electronic messages aided in maintaining the perception that the friendship was alive by reinforcing the connection through communication.

Cards and Letters

> We usually send some kind of a birthday card or at least an email greeting on the birthdays of everyone in the family and visa versa.
>
> She keeps me up-to-date on things and she always sends me clippings. If there's something in the paper that I would be interested in, she would cut it out. She has a great habit. She parks them under her bed. She puts the clippings there so she won't lose them. So every so often she cleans them out and sends them to me. I read them.

Although email is playing a major role in maintaining long-distance friendships, cards and letters continue to be exchanged as well. Letter writing appears to be a generational activity. Women in their 70s and 80s in this study tended to write letters and only make occasional phone calls. The expense of long-distance calling along with the perception that technology is too difficult to learn in order to use email are additional reasons women in their 70s and 80s may continue to send postal letters.

> I don't have friends that I haven't stayed in touch with because I write to them. If I left it up to them, a lot of them I would never hear from.
>
> At first the calls were frequent and the visits were often, but as time went by both became less frequent. At first she put more effort into keeping in touch while I tried to adjust. Then we both got busy and hard to catch on the phone. Mail became, and is still, our major means of communication.

The annual Christmas card, however, did not appear to be a generational occurrence. Perhaps the younger women mailed fewer cards, but they still mailed them. The annual Christmas card appears to be the link that serves to keep the friendship connected as well as an indication that the friendship has faded from its status when the two friends were in the same location. The majority of the participants stated they send and receive Christmas cards from friends across the miles. Christmas letters within the cards were mentioned several times.

> I haven't seen her in 25 years; but we continue to exchange Christmas cards, which now include Christmas letters.
>
> We do not communicate very often, but I don't think either of us has forgotten a birthday or Christmas with a long letter and always a phone call or two in between.
>
> Over the years I've not kept in touch with a lot of the ones I thought I would or only once a year. We send Christmas cards and we update each other at Christmas. Once a year is how I've really maintained most of my long-distance friendships.
>
> We always write at least a note. It takes awhile to get out all of these cards but it's worth it. I'm not crazy about Christmas letters. They are generally too long and too braggy. What I do with Christmas letters is put them aside until after Christmas, make a pot of tea, and read all of my Christmas letters.

One participant stated she receives a different type of Christmas card content. One of her friends sends a card along with newspaper clippings. Instead of a letter per se, each member of the family reads through the comics throughout the year and finds a particular comic strip that epitomizes either one of their personality traits or something that happened to them. She stated, 'It's funny because you read these and it's right on, it's exactly like that person.' To be a little different from the annual Christmas card, another participant reported that, instead of Christmas cards, she picks another holiday and sends all of her friends a card then. There is so much activity around Christmas, and other holidays are less active; so receiving a card at that time, she believed, would be more special.

Reciprocity also appeared to be an issue with Christmas card sending and receiving and played a role in the maintenance of the friendship. One woman remarked that her first attempt to maintain several friendships was to send the annual Christmas card and include her current address along with a short note about what was going on with her.

> We corresponded for a long time. Then she married, and we just sort of went to Christmas cards; and Christmases came and we didn't sent cards.
>
> I think the first year, I sent Christmas cards; and the second year I sent cards and didn't hear back. So I stopped sending cards.
>
> I just know that someone who makes an honest effort to come see us when we move away we will also make an effort to get together with them. But after awhile and it doesn't happen, I just say 'Well, Christmas cards will do.'
>
> I hear from a lot of casual friends at Christmas. I had thought it could be because I sent them a card first each year. But I'm always late and so I hear from these people often before I send a card; so I figure it's both ways when that happens.

Several women noted that when friends stopped sending cards, they considered the friendship was deemed no longer worth the effort and stopped sending cards as well.

Telephone

While electronic mail and postal mail have their place in maintaining long-distance friendships, the telephone still remains the means of choice for some participants.

> One of the things that helps maintain that relationship is again, the ability to pick up the phone and pick up a conversation where you left it off. You don't have that lag time and you don't have those pauses where you don't have anything to say anymore. We still have stuff to say. We are still curious about what's going on with each other, and that never went away.
>
> My best friend lives half a country away, but we keep in touch by phone routinely. She is the one who is always on the other end of the telephone and the one I call when I really need somebody.

Several of the women interviewed remarked that, initially following the move, there were more phone calls back and forth. As time passed, however, calls tapered off to about every month or so. This could be in part due to the expense of long-distance calls and in part due to both friends adjusting to not having the other one close by.

Several women remarked that they preferred hearing their friends' voices over other forms of communication. Email is used irregularly by a few of these women for mainly short messages or jokes, but they report having "good visits" over the phone on a regular basis. Additionally one woman commented that sometimes she is not in the mood to listen to a long conversation but does anyway and is usually glad that she did.

> I'm not really crazy about using the phone probably because I seem to attract people that want to talk a couple of hours. It's kind of a problem. At one point I was rejecting that person because it takes a long time to keep the contact up; but, boy, do I feel good when I've done it.

Another person commented that she found it easier to share confidences over the phone rather than in person:

> I think you can almost speak more openly and frankly, sharing the joys and disasters that befall you, if you talk on the phone and don't have to look the friend in the eye. Maybe you can whine and wince better without seeing the eyes roll, as it were.

This particular woman remarked that her friendship had actually improved because of the geographical distance. There may be something about feeling more free to speak your mind if you cannot see the reaction of the other person. This phenomenon could also be a possible explanation as to the popularity of email.

While there appears to be shortcomings with most means of communication, these women tend to use various combinations of communication methods and often have to resort to leaving messages but still rely on the telephone to cross long-distances.

> I had to learn to rely on the phone and be okay with leaving a message rather than talking in person. I think what has kept our friendship alive all this time is the ability to talk to one another when we need to. Long distances don't take that away from us.

> She moved away first, but we were able to keep adjusting our friendship and seeing each other every so often and talking on the phone. It's easier than a letter. The brevity of the contact doesn't take away from the value of it.

It seems from this study that email is used the most, but many of the women prefer speaking with their friends. Email may be less expensive than telephone calls, but phone calls may be more cost effective than airline tickets. It would appear that even sporadic phone contact serves to reinforce the perception that the friendship and friend is cared about and will suffice when face-to-face contact is not possible.

Face-to-Face Visits

Several of the participants suggested visiting with the friend face-to-face as regularly as possible as part of their advice on how to maintain friendships over long-distances. A few of the participants make special trips alone to visit friends on a regular basis. One visits her friend for a week every year without her spouse or children. Another one vacations with her friend at various locations. It helps that her husband does not enjoy traveling. Some of the women noted that when they attend conferences or meetings in areas where a friend lives, they try to make arrangements to visit with the friend while there. Visiting the friend may be a secondary reason for traveling to the location, but being able to visit no matter what the reason is seen as a good thing.

> It was on a Saturday afternoon and the phone rang and I answered it. She said, 'Hello there, this is Jane;' and I said, 'Where are you?' and she said, 'Right now I'm in your neighborhood, and how do I get to your house?'... I nearly dropped dead. I said, 'What are you doing there?' and she said, 'We're coming to see you.' She is just a delightful, lovely person. I hadn't seen her since 1995, and they were traveling west and took a detour just to see me.

This unexpected visit was a terrific boost for this elderly woman. She was able to visit with her friend and reminiscence for an afternoon. They took pictures, and she has those to remind her of this friend who took the time to detour from a trip west just to see her. Another woman interviewed did a similar thing by calling on an old college friend when

she and her husband traveled through the area where the friend lived. They actually spent the night in the friend's house, and they had not seen each other in nearly 20 years. She reported that they talked into the night and started again early the next morning. It, apparently, was like time had stood still.

Two of the women interviewed reported having friends that now have regular business in nearby towns; and because of this, they are able to visit with the friend in person every month or so. The one friend always comes to the woman interviewed; the other dyad members meet wherever the traveling person wants to meet, whether it is locally or in the nearby city. What is interesting about both of these cases is that neither of the women interviewed has any plans of visiting the home of her friend. This seems to be acceptable to both friends; perhaps because one woman does meet the friend in the nearby town, and the second dyad has one person who is able to travel freely with the other one constrained by time and finances.

There were also cases in which some of these women have the opportunity to attend professional conferences in locales that present them with the opportunity to visit with friends. Some take advantage of the opportunity all the time, and others do not. It seems that many visits with friends are secondary to other reasons for being in the area where the friend lives. An exception to this is the two women who share the same professional field and regularly share rooms at conferences.

While visiting friends as part of a business trip generally means spouses and children are not along, visiting friends is often complicated by having spouses and children along.

> It's awkward when my family is around my friends. My friends are separate, sort of, from my family. We don't do things as a family with these people.

> My parents are very understanding. It's when I take my husband and my children back for a visit and want to spend a half-a-day away from them. If it's at my parents' house, I think they just feel ... my children are fine, but my husband gets bored if I go off.

Children can be positive and negative parts of visits. If the friend has children close in age, then they can entertain each other, at least in theory. One woman interviewed shared a story where this was not the case:

> One time we were trying to visit so bad we took our dinner into the bedroom and closed the door. And the children ran outside to the windows and were knocking on the windows – 'Let us in' – and the mild-mannered friend put the shades down so that they couldn't see us. She said, 'I have to get away from them. Twenty minutes is all I need. Twenty minutes.' She's the sweetest one of all but had just had enough of the children and wanted to see her friends.

There are times when friends just want to share a few quiet moments with each other like they had before children and spouses. There may be a need or desire to share confidences or there just may be a desire to focus on one another, if only for a brief time.

> It always seems we have the children with us and there's no time or privacy to spend time together, just one-on-one.

> Now that we both have children, when we do get together we don't have the time that just she and I use to have together. At one time, we actually had the time to talk to each other and get into deeper conversations, but that time is limited now because the children are running around and dinner has to be made. Our visits tend to be different and of a different quality now. We don't have the one-on-one time we use to have.

Several women mentioned that it was important to them and to the friendship to be in the same place with them once a year or at least every other year. It may be that when face-to-face visits cannot occur, it is having the friendship established prior to children that holds the relationship together through this phase of their lives.

Besides the issue of having spouses and children along when visiting friends, another issue arises when extended family lives in the same area as close friends. Some

women reported that mothers in particular have trouble understanding that their daughters want to spend time with friends in addition to family. Some mothers invited the friends to come to their home as a compromise, whereas others simply resented the time they perceived to be taken from them.

> It's hard dividing time between family and friends on visits home. It is even hard between family members.
>
> When we would visit back home, I really didn't have time to call anybody. My mother was just too demanding. She'd ask, 'Why do you want to call them?'
>
> My mother was one of 10 girls, and they were all very close. Nine of them lived to be married and have children. I remember one time when I had the chance to go visit a cousin or a good friend and I'd say, 'Well, I'm going to visit my friend. I haven't seen her in a long time.' My mother couldn't believe I would go to see a friend instead of family. She was so family-oriented. If you're so involved with your family, you don't have time to make too many other friends.
>
> It's difficult to split time. There are guilt feelings of not spending time with your family because you do live off and have such limited time. It is even harder when your husband is from the same area. When we would visit home we would have his family, my family, his friends and my friends to try to visit. It got really tough for awhile. It was really hard trying to juggle everything, and we would all be exhausted and could not wait to go back to wherever we were.

One woman had developed an approach to manage this issue by rotating whom she visited each time and explained to those she was visiting the reason for the plan. Family would always be visited, but various friends would at least be called when in the area but not necessarily seen. Not all close friends lived in the same area as family members especially when there had been several moves. That brought up another issue of taking vacation time to visit friends instead of visiting family. One of the women had solved this issue somewhat by choosing not to tell family when she was visiting friends.

A few of the participants have close friends that are within a long day's drive, and each member of the dyad will take turns traveling during the year to visit. Visiting with

the friend is the primary reason for the trip. Several other women interviewed stated they have never had a friend visit them in their present location, implying that there has to be more to the trip than just visiting with them.

> I never had good luck with people coming to visit me for some reason. Part of it was because it was in Oklahoma, and everyone who isn't from here has all of these silly preconceived notions. I do get my nose bent out of shape from time to time.
>
> When I moved to Madison, Wisconsin, she was in Minnesota; and she and her husband would come to see us, and we'd go see them. But once we moved to Texas, it increased the distance and visiting stopped.
>
> They are pretty much westerners, so I can't imagine them coming to visit here. It would be if there was something they had to do or were just passing through.
>
> Distance can cause a very good friend to decline to one not as close. Being a friend and having a friend requires a lot of time. And it requires a certain amount of commitment, and that includes making trips to visit.

Results from this study suggest that geography plays different roles in friend visitation. One woman remarked, "Sometimes geography dictates the level of the friendship," as she was sharing how a few of her best friends at the time of a move were now casual friends indicating that proximity was an important element in maintaining the closeness of their friendship.

> When I lived on the west coast it was a little more difficult to keep in touch. Again, she was married; I was recently married. She got along with my spouse just fine. But just proximity made it difficult to see each other often, and our contact was very sporadic for a while, a long while.
>
> I knew her for six or seven years. She was my best friend there and our friendship separated because I moved. That continuity didn't flow and didn't continue even though I know I could pick up the phone and call her and say, 'I haven't heard from you in about 10 years. Catch me up,' and I could do that. She needed a lot more contact for the friendship to develop and stick.

Others believe that geography is not always seen as a barrier to maintaining friendships.

> You see, nobody sees anything in Oklahoma. So when someone wants to come to Oklahoma, I figure that the people who bother, come to see me... and it isn't all my going somewhere; that's a little more evenly balanced. So that's a stamp of whatever your friendship is.
>
> You have different levels of friends. You have acquaintances. You have your work relationships. Then you have good friends that you see more often; and then you have these bosom buddies that are there through thick and thin, regardless of where you are. Geography has nothing to do with it.

Nine of the participants have never had a friend visit in their current location. Of these nine, three have not gone back and visited with the friend. Eleven other women have had friends visit them in their current location when the primary reason for the visit was to spend time with them. These 11 have also visited their friends at the friends' locations. The remaining five women have had friends visit them, but spending time with them was a secondary reason for the visit. These same five, however, have not visited the friend at the friend's location.

Communication is a key to maintaining any relationship as evidenced by the remarks of the women interviewed. Several recommended talking on the phone regularly, whereas others sang the praises of email. Others encouraged friends to find a way to actually see each other at least once a year. Although some of these maintenance activities take money, the larger investment is in the time and energy required to stay in touch.

View of Geographic Separation

This topic was added after the first two women interviewed mentioned it. Of the 25 women interviewed, 22 have moved away from friends as well as had friends move

away from them; three have only moved away from friends, and two of these believed it was harder to leave than be left.

Harder to Leave

Of the 22 women who had experienced both leaving and being left, eight believed it was harder to be the friend leaving and offered several supporting reasons.

> I think being the one who leaves is the hardest because you are faced not only with being away from friends and everything that is familiar to you, but you have to start all over again with new jobs, new schools, new people, etc.
>
> People who are left are left with the rest of their network in place.
>
> You leave not only friends but usually family, accustomed surroundings, and in my situation, much beauty. You leave more than one friend plus security and stability. It's kind of scary.
>
> Leaving behind all that is familiar and dear to you, to go to a new location where you have to adjust to different conditions, attitudes, personalities, surroundings is a very big hurdle.
>
> Leaving is harder. I left a big support network, everyday people that you have like co-workers, your doctor, your neighbors, and those kind of people who may not be your best friend but when you don't have them, just the daily contact with people that you do know, that you have a history with, it's kind of devastating.

Several participants believed that being left is easier because the friend who is left can go on with her normal routine. The friend who left, however, makes many adjustments, besides missing her friends.

Harder to Be Left

Of the 22 women who had experienced both situations, 10 believed it was harder to be left; and another participant, who had only experienced being the friend that moved, concurred.

> Being left is much harder. You're behind. You don't get to go. When you move, it's a new adventure [in this case this participant chose to relocate and came back to an area she had lived in before] with new things to see, new places to explore, new energy and excitement. It's very hard to be left behind because their absence leaves a vacuum and a void. You have some related story to all of them or some space that they took up, and it's noticeable when it's not there because it's part of your everyday stuff.
>
> Without having the experience, I would imagine being left is more difficult in the short term. In my case, I have always left for something new, exciting, and challenging, so leaving doesn't seem that difficult. But longer term it's probably harder on me, since I don't have that support person or group close by.
>
> I had a rough time of it. Lots of depression. I avoided their house and neighborhood. You don't know if they will contact you again, even if they say they will.
>
> I think it is harder on the person who is left behind because they are left in the same setting with the same routine but their friend is not there. The one who moved has a whole new life with new experiences and new challenges to blunt the pain.
> Being left because the friend is very busy, involved with all the things and business of moving plus pre-move to travel to find a home in a new location of a job.

One participant remarked that perhaps it is initially harder to be left because the person who is leaving is initially busy with settling into the new place. However, once the friend is settled, she may start missing people. It may depend on what degree of input a person has in making the decision to move.

Another participant had begun to see the perspective of the person left and is changing her own, perhaps in part because she has no future plans to move again.

> It didn't occur to me because I thought they would still have their school, grocery store, and all their friends. But it didn't occur to me that they would look at our house and we wouldn't be there. I'm still here. I still exist; it's not like I'm gone. But I guess a reminder of that empty house is maybe a little too much to think about.

In this particular case, the participant had recently had three good neighborhood friends move away, and the reaction to being left was still fresh.

Although there are two perspectives to the issue of relocating away from close friendships, being able to accept that it may be difficult for both parties can aid in altering maintenance strategies so that the friendship can continue.

> I can scarcely remember a time when she was not there as a friend. Probably though, she worked harder at it than I did because I was still where we had met, had many other friends, and saw them a great deal. She, on the other hand, had the very difficult time of adjusting to her new location and environment, finding a job and making new friends.

Leaving good friends is hard no matter who leaves. The person who is left still has all of her familiar surroundings and friends and has the comforts of the rest of her life. The person who leaves potentially has the excitement of a new life, a new job, and new people. The trade-offs are more or less equal unless the person who left is perhaps a trailing spouse and had been happy where she was.

Summary

> Friendship is enormously important to me. If no one remembers anything else when I die, I hope there will be people who say, 'You know, she was a good friend.' I take friendships very seriously, and I think I put quite a lot of energy into them.

There were several factors that influenced the degree of effort put forth to maintain friendships over long-distances. The results of this study suggest enduring, long-distance friendships are established through various venues, including the neighborhood, school environments, the workplace, and the activities of children and spouses. At various times in these women's lives, friendship maintenance varied due to other demands on their time. Additionally, as friends moved through time, maintenance behavior was altered to match particular situations. Some women commented that they had shared so much history with particular friends that they had developed feelings of

kinship. Often the strength and length of the friendship helped to determine maintenance behavior following geographic separation.

There are also several factors that come into play during the early transition period of a geographic separation for friendships. Experiences with prior moves, both for the one moving and the one that has been left, appeared to be related to maintenance behavior approaches. Some friendship dyads discussed how they would maintain their friendships; but the majority of these women left maintenance behavior to chance, assuming their close friends would make the effort to stay in touch. A few of the women received going away parties and gifts, but the majority of them did not. Some women shared their feelings of sadness regarding leaving their friends, but just as many did not.

Results of this study suggest there are various ways that two people can stay close friends following a geographic move. Some of the women experienced a great deal of contact following the initial separation that later tapered off into a less frequent pattern. Some of the women experienced little contact following the initial separation that later developed into a more frequent pattern. Several women chose to stay busy with various activities while adjusting to the separation, yet others tried to keep the interaction going. Reciprocity was important during the initial transition period, and then the importance tapered off as a communication pattern developed except for those women for whom the lack of reciprocity resulted in termination of contact. Some of the women experienced lapses in communication with their friends, followed by some event that enabled the friendship to be rekindled. Some women also reported that they tried to re-establish contact with various old friends when their close friends did not meet their expectations to stay in touch.

Various forms of communication played a role in maintenance of friendships following a move. Electronic mail (email) was mentioned by these women a great deal. The majority used email to maintain regular contact with their friends. Some exchanged day-to-day tidbits of information with their friends, while others sent brief notes every so often. The annual Christmas card and letter appeared in almost all of the conversations when discussing how the friendship was currently maintained. It seems that exchanging the annual card represents reciprocity and contributes to the perception that the connection between the two friends remains intact. The telephone was used occasionally by most with a couple of the women choosing to use it as their primary means of contact with long-distance friends.

Lastly, there was no consensus regarding which is harder: being left or being the one that leaves. The majority of the women interviewed had experienced both situations and still differed as to which was more difficult. There appears to be many variables which influence the outcome within this question, such as whether careers were impacted, whether elderly parents were left, and whether the move was by choice or necessity. Also, the outcome may vary with each move. At any rate, realizing that there are two sides to most things, it was interesting to explore this issue and gain more understanding about the feelings and reactions of the person who was left, as well as the person who left. Although each situation is different, there are many similarities surrounding the transition to long-distance friends, and it comes down to the realization that it is not a matter of which is more difficult. Separation can be hard regardless of on which side of the car door a person is.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Discussion

The analysis of these data suggested that making the transition to long-distance friendships involves several factors. The depth of the friendship and the commitment to the friendship appear to play a role in how maintenance behavior is adjusted following the relocation. Prior experiences with geographic separations, sharing feelings about the separation, going away parties or gifts, and having a plan for how the friendship will be maintained are involved in the early transition period in various ways. Reciprocity, coping and adapting strategies, and patterns of various types of communication appear to be involved in the later transition period. There may have been lapses in communication that are bridged during relocation adjustment, and past and current friendship maintenance behavior may influence future friendship behavior. All of these factors intertwine and contribute to each individual's perspective regarding which is harder: to be the friend that leaves or the friend that is left. The literature on adult friendships offers a small amount of information on long-distance friendships. The findings of this study provide insights into the maintenance of women's long-distance friendships in adulthood.

Friendship Transitions

Long-distance friendship maintenance refers to the situation in which relationships continue to exist, in some form, when the context in which the friendship was established and maintained changes to a physically distal situation. In regards to

geographic separations, the current study strongly supports the maintenance of friendships before, during, and after the transition to long-distance friendships. Goodman and O'Brien (2000) reaffirm that friendship does matter especially when lives are in transition. The current study underscores a time immediately following a move in which a person has a sense of being out of equilibrium, and experiencing continued communication with friends across the miles presents an avenue for regaining part of the balance.

Friends tend to be selected from among people who are considered social equals (Hess, 1972). Factors that created the sense of similarity and social equality necessary for the development of friendship within this group of women included growing up together, attending school together, having similar occupations, and having children the same age. Previous studies found various characteristics of friendship that were also supported by the findings of this study. In agreement with Yager (1997), friendships that survived the physical distance were relationships in which there was trust, acceptance, and caring. In some cases, the friends that were left responded immediately and consistently, which allowed the friend who had moved away time to adjust to other aspects of the move, such as helping children with their own adjustments. In other cases, one member of the dyad trusted the other one to let her know what was needed from the friendship and how frequently the contact needed to be.

The depth of the friendship depended upon length and quality of time spent together and the degree to which confidences could be shared. The results of this study suggest that the deeper the feelings around the friendship, the more likely that effort will be exerted to maintain the friendship regardless of physical distance. This assertion goes

along with Rubin (1985) who found that the depth of a friendship depends to some degree on how many parts of one's self a friend is allowed to see, share, and validate. In fact, several participants in the study remarked that friends accept a person as he or she is, good and bad, with one using the phrase "they like you warts and all."

The stronger the friendship bond, the more likely there is to be a commitment to maintain the friendship. In some cases, the women in this study used the metaphor "just like a sister" to describe how deep their commitment was to the friendship. Rubin (1985) also found this type of sentiment was used when interviewees wanted to describe the closeness of friends. The use of this metaphor suggests the importance of the relationship and the intensity of the connection along with a sense of belonging, continuity, and security. To take this point a step further, families tend to stay in touch regardless of physical distances, and many long-distance friends do the same. Additionally, several of the women interviewed noted that their sisters were also best friends, indicating that there is a similarity between bonds with sisters and bonds with best friends, both of which are generally strong enough to be maintained during periods of geographic separation.

A review of the literature revealed several discussions of networks for support (Adams, 1987; Allan, 1998; Fehr, 1996). Network configuration is the pattern of ties within the network. Due in part to the nature of having moved numerous times and having one or two friends in various locations, the majority of the women in this study would be said to have radial friendship networks in which none of the friends know one another. One woman in particular stated she had a tendency not to introduce two of her friends because she did not want to take the chance of being left out of the loop. She noticed this as a young child, and it carried over to several of her adult moves. On the

other end of the spectrum are two women who had interlocking networks in which everyone knew one another with them often being the common denominator. The remaining women had partially interlocking networks in which only a portion of the members of the network knew one another.

Two of the women interviewed for this study consistently had the same group of friends as their individual support networks through relocations, job changes, and other life events adding support to the convoy framework of friendships. The convoy framework (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1995) suggests that a person has a particular support network throughout the life span that stays connected to him or her no matter where life takes him or her. Friends are part of a dynamic support system through time. In this current study one woman had such a support system in that the friendships had been forged during college some 20 years ago and have remained strong even as different members split off in different locations. The bond is so strong that when the first child of the group went across the country to college, all four of the mother's friends traveled with the mother and daughter and stayed long enough to see that the daughter was settled and their friend, the mother, was safely on the plane headed home. An interesting side aspect of this particular support group is that four of the five women have the same first name.

The results of this study suggest that some friendships develop, grow, and move along with the person, whereas others fill a need at one point and fade away. Antonucci and Akiyama (1995) also noted this as they studied 'convoys of social support' which refers to the various interpersonal relationships that an individual experiences over the life course. Relocation appears to contribute to the fading of various friendships, which seems to indicate that one or both of the friendship dyad members were either not

meeting needs or not having their needs met. The fading of the friendship could also mean to maintain the desired intimacy level the relationship needed close proximity in order to have easy access to face-to-face contact and high involvement in the details of daily living. Additionally, other aspects of each friend's situation may have led to energy and time being taken away from the maintenance of the friendship, for instance, establishing friendships in the new location. Friendships in the current location and friendships that had faded away were not addressed to any great detail in this study. In several cases when fading occurred with friendships following relocation, the women in this study reached back to previous friendships and reconnected with childhood or young adulthood friends. Roberto and Kimboko (1989) also reported that women in their study had contact with close friends from their childhood and adolescence.

Several of the women in this study commented that there had been periods during their friendships in which there just was not time to put into maintaining the long-distance friendship because of other commitments in their lives. With relocating, becoming established in a new job and/or taking care of young children were two of the major factors competing for time. Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) noted a period of lower interaction with friends that lasted from high school through middle age, which is also generally the time the women in the current study would be caring for children and potentially working on their careers.

Carbery and Buhrmester (1998) found that ratings of companionship with friends were significantly lower in the parenthood phase. In their study, spouses were reported as among the leading suppliers of all provisions of emotional support during the parenthood phase. The current study found some support for this view, primarily due to

relocation and parenthood occurring during the same period of time. It was interesting that three of the women interviewed in the current study stated their husbands are their best friends; however, the current study did not specifically address relationships with husbands over time or the particular circumstances of support groups while at each location. With two of these women, however, their best female friends are long-distance, which may contribute to a higher level of companionship with their husbands. At the same time, however, these friendships were developed while the children were young and husbands were spending a great deal of time establishing their careers, suggesting friends were also important during the childrearing phase which does not support Carbery and Buhrmester's findings.

As women are busy with all the details of establishing the family household in the new location, relocation may trigger an imbalance between what women have and what they want. Weiss (1974) conducted a study of couples that had moved to a new area and found that, after a period of time without friends, the wife experienced severe distress and developed a sense of marginality and loneliness. Marriage itself did not fill the need for close friendships. Two women in particular in this study remarked that they had followed their spouses and had major moments of loneliness and some degree of an identity crisis. These women had left their established support networks along with jobs they liked in an area they liked. In doing so, they experience several role losses at the same time and stated they felt like they had less control of the situation than their spouses. They perceived their husbands to have the advantage with a job in hand and a potential support network in place, and two of the women openly stated they found themselves resenting their husbands for moving the family.

Potential friends must cross paths and have an avenue for formation and maintenance of friendships (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Hess, 1972). Physical distance, available resources, and interest and participation in common activities influence friendships both locally and over long-distances. Changes in the life course, such as retirement or job change, influence friendship patterns both locally and over distances. Neighborhoods and work environments are the contexts in which many friendships are formed and maintained initially; and if the connection is established well enough, maintaining them over physical distances may not alter the perceptions of being close friends.

Staying Connected

When friends become separated by many miles, keeping connected is a major theme in the relationship. According to the literature (Goodman & O'Brien, 2000; Matthews, 1986), friends build up a core of stories that keep them connected. The women in this study had many stories to share about experiences with friends, and a few of the women held onto childhood friendships in part due to the shared history with them. Having shared time and place with someone appeared to provide a foundation for continued friendships. Some of the women had spent so much quality time with their friends that kinship feelings arose, contributing to the desire and effort to stay in touch with their friends. Atchley (1991) concurred and noted long-term friends that had a high level of intimacy allowed changes to occur in circumstances with minimum effect on the relationship.

In addition to the sense of shared history influencing maintenance behavior, past experiences can also alter and shape patterns of behavior. Goodman and O'Brien (2000) interviewed several people who stated that previous experiences with friends had altered their behavior. Three of the women interviewed in the current study had a great deal of experience with relocating due to being attached to the military. One of the three tried to hold the belief that each new place offered a chance to add to her collection of friends, but she realized that any friendship formed would be short lived and superficial. She has not maintained friends from that period of her life. The second woman managed to retain two friends from her military experiences, but the depth of the relationship is not there. She continues to search for closeness in a friendship and realizes she has a tendency to smother potential friends, remarking that she desperately wants the intimacy of a close friendship. The third woman is currently in a new, less structured environment and is finding that making friends is not that easy. Her solution is to revert back to the friends she made at various duty stations and try to reconnect with them. A fourth woman, not with military connections, had taken a great deal of time to make a baby gift for a friend and the friend never acknowledged the gift. As a result of that disappointment, this woman has elected not to repeat the behavior with other friends. Successes and failures with friendship behavior appear to be in a feedback loop, and maintenance behavior continues to be adapted as deemed necessary.

There are two elements to relationship maintenance, according to Duck (1983). One is having a strategic plan and the other is having a haphazard approach. Strategic planning can occur through the individual actively pursuing maintenance of the friendship. Few friends in this study laid actual plans as to how their friendships would

be maintained after moves; however, several of them actively negotiated new patterns of maintenance behavior after moves by discussing plans to write and call frequently and arranging for a visit soon after the move. Contact information was known before the move, and this information was shared as well. In one case, an address book with phone numbers, addresses, and email addresses was received as a going away gift. On the other end of the spectrum is the haphazard approach in which the relationship is left to chance and allowed to continue by whatever means happen to occur. The majority of the friendships were left to chance at the time of the relocation in that no future plans were made with the women interviewed stating they just assumed the friendships would be maintained by staying in touch. Just what was meant by 'staying in touch' was not elaborated on during the transition or afterwards. For friendships that survived the move, apparently at some point one member of the dyad made the first contact and then a pattern of maintenance developed over time. For friendships that faded away, it is likely this assumption was taken for granted and whatever was needed to maintain the friendship over the physical distance did not occur.

Several of the women interviewed in the current study had husbands that supported their wives' friendship maintenance behaviors. Three of the women appeared to have very strong bonds with their friends across the miles to the point of visiting with them a couple of times a year as well as weekly phone calls or emails, and this interaction was encouraged by husbands. Two of the women interviewed took annual vacations with a long-distance friend, in part, they stated, because their husbands do not enjoy traveling and seemed to understand their desire to share quality time with female friends. The majority of women in this study were educated and had the financial ability to maintain,

and did maintain, long-distance friendships. This situation would differ from the results found by Siebert, Mutran, and Reitzes (1999) who found in their study that respondents who scored high on the education, income and occupational prestige variables appeared to be in touch with their support people less frequently. A possible explanation for this discrepancy may be that the women in this study were all over the age of 45, a majority had established careers, and most of their children were out of the home resulting in more time to allot to maintaining friendships.

Once a geographic separation has taken place, relationships with family and friends may need to be renegotiated. The results of this study suggest that the amount of maintenance behavior by long-distance friends was not as important as believing they would stay in touch. The annual Christmas card mentioned by almost all of the women, although just a once a year contact, served to keep the perception that the friend was still a friend. This finding goes along with studies that have shown that older adults perceive quality of social support as being more important than quantity (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1991; O'Connor, 1995).

Communication plays a major role in long-distance friendships. Communication could be simply a joke sent by email with only a personal line or two. It could be the hour-long phone call on Sunday mornings. It could be a birthday card a week late. The form of the contact did not appear to be as important as the contact itself. This finding is similar to Duck's (1983) finding that simply having a conversation with a friend was often more important than the content. In many of the cases in this study, friends were co-workers and neighbors allowing exchanges of even the minutest nature to occur throughout the day. Sharing everyday happenings was accomplished by a few of the

women in that they emailed their friends almost daily, just touching base and staying connected. At the other end of communication, actual face-to-face visits take a larger commitment in time and often money, but they are seen as a desired behavior by four of the women. Wright (1982) agreed, and found that women's friendships require time solely for shared conversations.

Although Christmas cards were a very common means of staying connected, reciprocity was an element in continuing the friendship as well. It was remarked several times that if a Christmas card was not received in return after one or two years, no further attempts to stay in touch would be made. Atchley (1991) and Brown (1981) both noted the importance of reciprocity both in establishing and maintaining friendships. Relationships can be strained if reciprocity is seen as a necessary element to the friendship and is not accomplished. However, women with long-term, well-established friendships took a broader view of reciprocity. Many of the women remarked that, with their closest friends, it all equals out in the long run. Perhaps this belief is indicative of findings in the literature (Roberto, 1997; Roberto & Kimboko, 1989) that showed there is a tendency to maintain relationships in which one has invested considerable time, effort, and self-disclosure.

The Berkeley Older Generation Study looked at friendships between the young-old and the old-old; results indicated that over time there was no significant change in the perceived ability to make new friends or in the prevalence of old friends (Field, 1999). This situation was not the case with one-fifth of the women in this study in that these women remarked that they were finding it harder to make new friends as they became older. For these women, it is even more important to maintain old friendships. Hess

(1972) helps to validate these particular women's perceptions by stating that age influences the process of friendship formation and maintenance. Friendships can be fragile, requiring continuing reaffirmation by both participants no matter what the age and may be more so when separated by geography. When the connection is quite solid and there is a sharing of self, these 'friends of the heart' can be sustained regardless of geography (Rubin, 1985).

Implications

The results of this study presented some suggestions for applying theory, developing a long-distance friendship typology, future research, and practice in the area of maintaining long-distance friendships.

Applying Continuity Theory

An objective of this study was to apply continuity theory to adult women's long-distance friendships. Robert Atchley (1989) developed continuity theory with continuous adult development as the basis and included adaptation to changing situations. Atchley found that a large portion of older adults showed consistency over time in their patterns of thinking and behaving when their social circumstances changed. Although one area of a person's life experienced continuity, there might be other areas that did not. It is the researcher's belief that this theory can be applied to the maintenance of friendships when geographic separation occurs.

Continuity theory was constructed around elements of adaptation in middle-aged and older adults with the persistence of general patterns rather than the sameness in the

details contained within patterns as the key concept. Continuity and change can exist at the same time within an individual's self and lifestyle. According to continuity theory, the primary goal of adult development is adaptive change, in that people actively develop ideas of what is going on in the world and why (Atchley, 1989, 1999).

The researcher proposes that continuity theory maintains that adults gradually develop stable patterns of maintaining friendships; in adapting to relocations, adults engage in thought and take action designed to preserve and maintain these patterns in their general form. In making adaptive choices, adults attempt to preserve and maintain existing psychological and social patterns by applying familiar knowledge, skills, and strategies. There are internal patterns of thought that contribute to internal continuity, and there are external patterns of behavior that contribute to external continuity. Continuity is tied to an individual's perceived past in that adults use past experiences to select an adaptive strategy to deal with changes. Continuity implies a consistency of patterns over time. There may be minor fluctuations within patterns, but the general patterns are maintained. Continuity theory deals with the development and maintenance of adaptive capacity (Atchley, 1993) and will be applied to the maintenance of long-distance friendships.

Internal continuity. According to Atchley (1993) internal continuity is the persistence of psychological patterns over time such as temperament, affect, experiences, preferences, skills, dispositions, attitudes, values, beliefs, and worldviews. Internal continuity refers to general patterns in thinking about the self, relationships with others, and personal lifestyles. Individuals can create their own personal realities within their social environments. These realities may be tested, however, when their social

environments change as in the case of relocation. How a person sees herself in relationship to others, and how she perceives she is seen by others, can be related to her thinking and behavior in regards to establishing and maintaining friendships. Being situated within what is perceived to be a strong supportive network fosters the belief that she is liked and accepted and even important in the lives of others. However, when a geographic separation occurs and there is little feedback or support from the network that was left, the person may reevaluate her self-concept and how others perceive her, which in turn can influence how she adjusts to the new location.

Two women in this study remarked that they had identity crises following their moves when friends they thought would make an effort to maintain the friendship did not and when they had difficulty connecting with potential friends in the new location. Three other women experienced positive feedback from their individual support networks from previous places of residence, and two referred to themselves as the hub or common denominator of the network. Each of these three women had a very positive attitude about themselves, about friends in general, about relocating, and about making additional friends in their new locations.

In each of these cases, internal continuity came into play and is an important part of individual mastery and competence. Internal continuity is essential to a sense of ego integrity and helps meet the need for self-esteem. Having the motivation, and being able, to follow through with action regarding friendships can contribute positively to the friends' self-esteem. Many of the women commented that although maintaining communication was time consuming, they always felt good when they had done it and when they received a response. How a person thinks and feels about particular

friendships and about relocating can influence how the friendship is adapted and maintained following the move. Self-esteem can be raised either by increasing successes with maintenance or by lowering expectations surrounding the friendship. Examples of lowering expectations surrounding the friendship occurred quite frequently with the women in this study in that many of them have accepted less frequent communication than they had initially hoped for but still feel valued because there is some degree of predictable contact.

Further exploration of how the concept of internal continuity might be applied to the study of long-distance friendships could include looking at concepts such as orientation toward venues where friendships develop, competence in establishing and maintaining friendships, and preferences for which friendships to maintain. These concepts refer to inner dimensions that can be tracked over time. In the current study, women formed friendships through various venues and tended to form more through the workplace perhaps because of the potential for a great deal of contact. Additionally, for the women who did not work outside of the home, their orientation was toward the neighborhood and children's activities as venues for potential friendship development. Several of the women had a more balanced orientation toward friendship behaviors and invested time and had the knowledge and skills needed to develop friendships in a wide range of venues.

Competence in establishing and maintaining friendships refers to the knowledge and skills needed to engage in a particular friendship behavior. Building trust, sharing confidences, finding common ground and activities or interests requires different knowledge and skills. Past experiences are used to identify people that are interesting

and appear to have potential for becoming a friend. In the current study, a few of the women stated that sometimes the relationship 'just clicked' from the very beginning. By middle age, these women have spent more that 40 years selecting, refining, and developing their behaviors that support friendships. This knowledge and these skills can continue to be used when people relocate either with establishing new friends or maintaining long-distance friends or both.

Relocating may also bring to the forefront issues regarding which friendships to maintain if there is limited time, energy, and resources. Friendship preference is a third aspect of internal continuity. Social norms and levels of satisfaction influence preferences and allow people to arrange friendships into a rough hierarchy. Women in the current study discussed casual friends, close friends, and best friends. Several of the women had friends, which were seen as casual before the move, develop into closer friends after the move simply because the casual friends continued to stay in touch. Although there can be a hierarchy, it appears to be tentative and as such may shift as behavior or external patterns of continuity change. Further evidence of this perspective was the discussion by several of the women in the study of accepting some friends as "Christmas card only" friends after relocation.

External continuity. External patterns refer to general patterns in behavior or taking action. Role relationships, social environments, activities and life styles are examples that can reflect external patterns. Role relationships tend to change when social environments change. For example, if a friendship was established in the co-worker environment, the maintenance of that friendship potentially will be influenced if one member of the dyad changes jobs, making the normal daily contact less frequent. When

a person moves, various role expectations will need to be adapted whether they be the role of neighbor, best friend, office mate, or mothers of children who were friends. The paths of potential friends need to cross in order to establish the friendship, and each of their lifestyles will play a part. A consistency in lifestyle reflects external continuity; in regards to friendships, consistency translates into making the time for friendship maintenance, whether it is long-distance or local. Sharing experiences helps build the connection between friends and usually means sharing time and space.

Other external elements include activities, as in what people like to do and their behavioral characteristics that have developed over a lifetime. Sending the annual Christmas card or the weekly email joke would be examples of external patterns that were very evident in this study. Additionally, sharing vacations with friends and visiting friends across the miles are behaviors that contribute to the maintenance of friendships and were mentioned in this study.

Presentation of self, predictability, and means of coping also exemplify external patterns. How a person presents herself can enhance or detract from the potential for forming social networks. One woman in this study was told by a neighbor that 'she bloomed where she was planted,' and this statement encouraged the woman to continue to seek out potential friends. Whether each member of the friendship dyad can depend on the other to initiate or respond to communication is also important for long-distance friendships. Reciprocity was mentioned many times during interviews in this study with some women's expectations being met and others not. Coping strategies may also be behaviors such as keeping busy with the children or with fixing up the house instead of actively pursuing opportunities to meet future friends.

Perceptions of external continuity stem from: being and doing in familiar environments; pursuing familiar interests; practicing familiar skills; and interacting with familiar people (Atchley, 1993). The first perception of being and doing in familiar environments is difficult to apply to long-distance friendship maintenance other than when return visits are made and time is spent with the friend in familiar places. A few of the women in this study make regular visits to see friends and several return for class reunions. Pursuing familiar interests can continue after the relocation and can provide a common ground for conversations over long-distances. Third, there may be some familiar skills used to maintain the friendship prior to the move that can be used after the move, such as knowing how to make the other person laugh or feel good about herself. One participant in the current study shared that a sense of humor was one of the things that attracted her to one of her friends and this can be continued with email and phone calls. The skill of telling jokes remained intact, however, the method of delivery was adapted. Interacting with familiar people is another aspect of external continuity; and although the venue of the interaction changes following relocation, the interaction can continue which is evidenced by communication patterns of the women interviewed.

Oral communication can be adapted to include telephone calls and sporadic face-to-face visits as opposed to daily face-to-face contact. Written communication in the form of letters and email messages may need to be added to the friendship maintenance repertoire. Most of the women interviewed were users of email, so that familiar skill could be applied to friendship maintenance. Previous experiences with separation can influence friendship skills and did so. Several of the women became resilient to relocating; yet, others evaluated their previous experiences and chose not to actively

pursue new friendships at this particular point in their lives. Additionally, one woman stated that she had tried several avenues to meet new people, from attending college classes to attending church, because she had had previous success with this approach. These elements of external continuity influence the establishment and maintenance of friendships.

Developmental goals. According to continuity theory, as adults continue to evolve they appear to develop clearer ideas about what gives them satisfaction and what decision-making strategies are effective (Atchley, 1989, 1999). Applied to maintaining long-distance friendships, the women interviewed developed clearer ideas about what they expected from their friends as well as what they expected from themselves. Some realized and accepted a decrease in communication, and others tried harder to increase communication. One woman actually decided she wanted more communication with her life-long friend, purchased a computer, and learned about email. She knew she would not be satisfied with the annual Christmas-card-only contact. It appears that most of the women came to the conclusion that the friendship still existed but at a different level; once they had decided this, even sporadic maintenance behavior was acceptable. Many also, at some point, decided that although some friendships may have faded away, they could be rekindled in the future; this approach appeared to maintain internal continuity. Continuity is a comfortable routine and a familiar sense of direction.

As part of this theory, developing adults come to more readily accept themselves and their friends as they age. This was evidenced in the definition of friendship given by several women in that friends accepted them and supported them through good times and bad times. A lifetime of learning, adapting, personal evolution, and selective investments

influence an older adult's ability to adapt. After several relocations, the women in this study learned what behavior worked with some and not others, and what they were willing to accept in regards to reciprocity. Friendships were either adapted and maintained, allowed to fade away, or consciously ended. There is an evolving body of self-information that becomes more prominent following relocating through which continuity of ideas and orientations may be re-evaluated, potentially leading to effective adaptation. Inner continuity and continuity in friendships reinforce one another. Inner continuity leads to decisions that foster friendship continuity, and friendship continuity produces experiences that reinforce inner continuity. Continuity theory is about development and adaptation.

Adaptive capacity. Adaptive capacity, according to continuity theory, refers to the ability to adjust to a considerable amount of evolutionary change without experiencing a crisis (Atchley, 1989, 1999). Adaptive capacity may vary from friendship to friendship and from relocation to relocation. One participant in the study withdrew from her friends for a while as she focused attention away from her own losses by helping her children with their adjustments to their new location. Another woman looked inward when her friends did not attempt to stay in touch with her and decided she really preferred to be alone although she really missed a couple of the friends. Additionally, another woman, who was a self-proclaimed trailing spouse, remarked that after about their third move she 'talked to herself' and convinced herself that her husband was really working hard to provide for his family and that she could either be miserable or try to adjust and be happy.

Another participant demonstrated adaptive capacity by accepting that communication would be less frequent than before the move but the friendship was still intact. Friendship maintenance behavior was adapted by both members of the dyad, and the perception of acceptable amounts of contact was altered accordingly. Further examples of adaptive capacity would be the many cases in which daily contact by phone or in person changed to weekly emails or monthly phone calls. An additional means of coping represented many times in this study was the perception that old friendships from the past could be rekindled.

This theory also assumes that patterns of thought and behavior persist throughout life and that people tend to make decisions based on feedback from previous experiences. Following this line of thought, people may choose to establish, maintain, or end relationships based on whether their prior experience with separation was positive or negative. Friendships may also be maintained through several different types of communication and the dyad will need to explore their options and find what works for their particular friendship. Several of the participants had early success corresponding with email and tended to try that method first when they relocated. Continuity theory simply predicts that most people will try continuity, what worked before, as their first adaptive strategy. More often than not, best friendships before a separation turned into good friendships after the move because of a lack of adaptive capacity. They appeared to need close proximity in order to maintain an acceptable level of intimacy. In adapting to moves, friends are motivated to continue to use their established internal and external patterns. How the patterns of the different members of the dyad interact may determine how, or if, the friendship will be maintained.

Summary. Continuity theory can be applied to maintenance behaviors in long-distance friendships. It is proposed that adult, long-distance friends gradually develop stable patterns of forming and maintaining friendships and adapt these friendships to geographic separations by engaging in thought (internal general patterns of thinking) and taking action (external general patterns in behaving) designed to preserve and maintain these patterns in their general form. Friendships are established through various venues of contact and maintenance behavior. When the normal venue for maintaining the friendships is removed, maintenance behavior may be re-evaluated and altered in some manner.

When relocation occurs for one or both members of the dyad, friendship maintenance behavior will most likely need to be adapted. If the dyad can successfully adjust to the change, the friendship may be maintained, although it may be at a different level; as time passes, it will either continue, fade away, or end. If the change is not successfully managed, the friendship may be allowed to fade away; one or both members may elect to end any attempts at maintenance. If the friendship simply faded away due to changing circumstances of one or both members, the potential to rekindle the relationship remains. Successes and failures with friendships across geographic distances may influence current and future maintenance behaviors. Internal and external patterns of thought and action combined with previous experiences help to determine if and how the friendship will be maintained.

An adaptive strategy may involve perceiving situations as consistent even when they are not in order to maintain an internal balance and supporting the belief that there is a strong friendship bond. Continuity and change are simultaneous processes. Individuals

change in some ways while they remain stable in other ways. Change can be brought about by change in the external environment as well as from within the self. Maintenance behavior may change, or the perception of the friendship may change.

The amount of change that will be tolerated within the friendship will vary individually. Some friends may experience a deep sense of personal loss. Internal thought patterns may change the perception of what the friendship is and how much contact or external behavior is needed to maintain it. If the friendship is to survive, both members of the dyad will need to adapt by finding a balance between their own and each other's internal and external patterns. Part of this process may involve developing clearer ideas about what satisfies each person within the friendship and whether or not the geographic separation will be negative or positive. The theory offers ways to explain why particular people have developed in the way they have and whether they have adapted well or not.

Typology of Long-Distance Friendships

Not everyone has the same orientation to long-distance friendships. Some people have many long-distance friends that they consider close, and others just have one or two at the most. Some friendships shared in this study were closer prior to the geographic separation, implying that proximity may be an important element in maintaining the friendship; other friends grew closer, implying that perception of closeness may be more important than proximity. The long-distance friendship biographies explored in this study can be grouped into three main categories. According to Atchley (1989), "people select, define, classify, and organize experiences in order to express the reality of their

lives and permeate that reality with meaning" (p. 186). The terms *ready access*, *general access*, and *remote access* will be used to categorize collections of long-distance friendships.

The *ready access* category represented 32% of the total friendships studied. Long-distance friendships that fall into this category are actively maintained with regular, and often weekly, communication.. Phone calls are exchanged at least twice a month; email notes are exchanged at least weekly; and face-to-face visits occur at least once a year. These friendships are perceived to be as close as the phone and friends can be reached with ease. The friendship can be quickly and easily accessed, often in a matter of minutes. Phone numbers, email addresses and regular mail addresses are easily retrieved from memory. If maintenance behavior decreases or communication lapses, the friendship may be moved into the next category which is labeled *general access.*

The *general access* category represented 39% of the total friendships studied. Long-distance friendships that fall into this category are semi-active, in that communication ebbs and flows over the course of a year. There may be birthday and Christmas cards that are exchanged, occasionally phone calls, and maybe face-to-face visits every couple of years if there is another reason to be in the area. The friendships that fall into this collection were generally closer prior to the geographic separation and are perceived to have the potential for rekindling given the opportunity. Contact information generally is not committed to memory, but can be located without a great deal of effort. Friends in this group can migrate to the *ready access* category or to the *remote access* category depending on changing circumstances.

The last category is labeled *remote access* and represented 29% of the total friendships studied. Long-distance friendships that fall into this category have either become 'Christmas card only' friendships, or have faded away or ended completely. Most often, contact dwindled and the relationship simply faded away with the annual Christmas card being the only regular contact after the geographic separation. If communication is desired with those who are not on the Christmas card list, the friend may have to go through various channels to try and locate them. An example is contacting parents or siblings of the friend and retrieving contact information. Friendships that may also be placed in remote storage are those that cannot be maintained frequently and regularly enough to keep them in *general access* due to various demands during different stages of life. For example, women who are busy focusing energy on their family and career in mid-life resulting in friendships being placed on hold with the hope that they can be rekindled at a later date. These friendships are not impossible to access, but instead they are rarely maintained. When life slows down and circumstances change, there is the potential for regaining interest in, and use of, the relationship at which time it may be moved into *general access* or even *ready access.*

These categories of long-distance friendships vary with each friendship dyad, and one person may have friends in each category. This proposed classification was applied individually to each of the 25 women interviewed to examine each of their primary orientation to managing long-distance friendships, resulting in 6 different orientations. Women with their primary orientation as *general access* made up 28%, and those with primarily a *ready access* approach made up 24%. Primary *remote access* was found in 20% of the women. Two additional orientation categories with 12% each consisted of an

even number of friendships in *ready* and *general access* and an even number of friendships in all three of the categories. The sixth category of orientation was represented in 4% of the women that had an equal amount of friendships falling in the *general* and *remote access* group.

Future Research

Although this study has served to apply continuity theory and added to the knowledge base of information regarding the maintenance of women's friendships following geographic separation, there are several areas for further research. Figure 2 presents a proposed model for long-distance friendship maintenance resulting from this study. As friendships are separated due to relocations, they adapt either positively or negatively. The results of this study suggest that some friendships survive the separation and are maintained long-term; and others are maintained for a short time after the relocation and then either fade away or end completely. Still other friendships end directly because of the separation, and others simply fade away to either be rekindled or to end completely at a later time. Friendships that have faded can be rekindled and either shift into long-term or shift into short-term and continue in the cycle. Not everyone has the same internal or external patterns of continuity in regards to friendships, and not everyone reacts to relocation in the same way. Each relocation may also be reacted to differently. Further exploration of this model is suggested. Learning more about how and why some friendships survive physical separations and others do not may lead to discovering better ways to adapt friendships to long-distances. As this information is collected, it would also be interesting to explore the different meanings and benefits of

the different relationships in regards to the *ready*, *general*, and *remote access* typology of friendships.

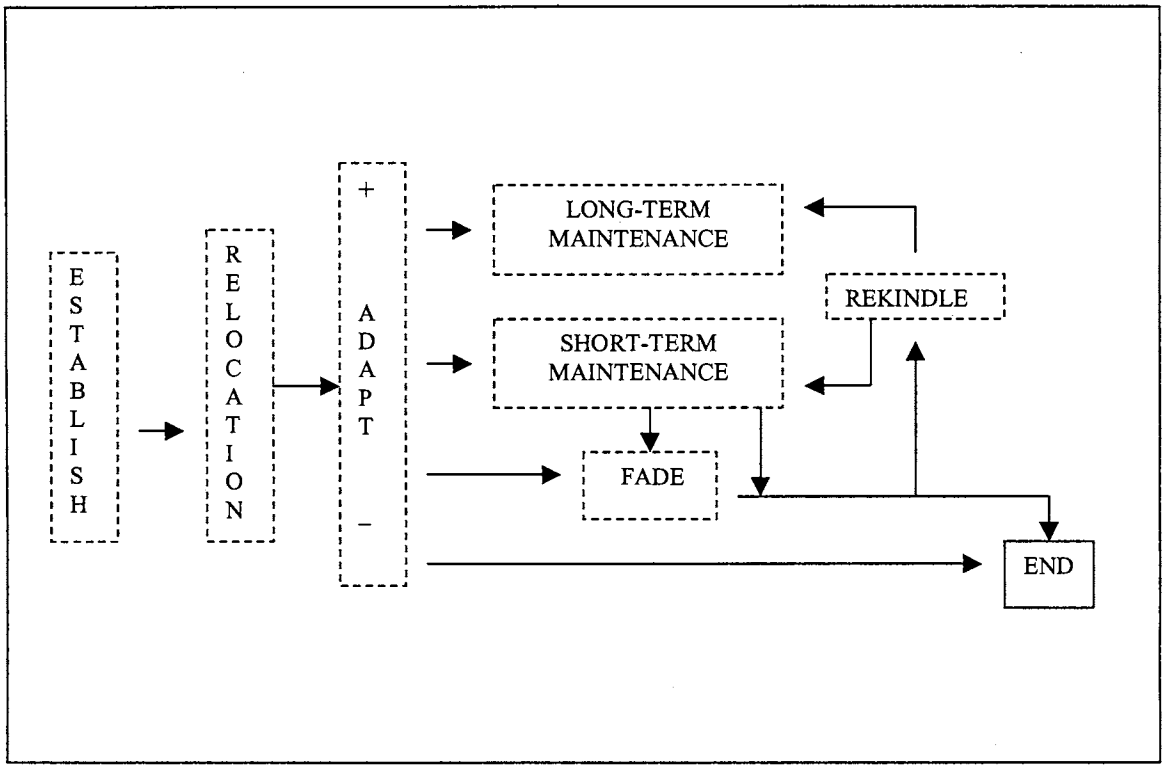


Figure 2

Proposed Long-Distance Friendship Maintenance Model

Reconnecting with old friends was mentioned numerous times; exploring the motivations to reach back to previous friendships to try to reconnect, along with how this may be accomplished, is another area of friendship that needs to be further explored. Why some attempts work and why others do not could be examined. Also, a few women in this study mentioned that their long-distance friendship improved after the friend that was left also moved. There needs to be further study regarding friendship maintenance behaviors comparing situations in which both members of the dyad have moved with behaviors of friendship dyads in which only one member has moved. Approaches may or may not differ, and learning more about the possible differences could provide helpful information to relocating friends.

The role of email and the Christmas card phenomenon are relatively unexplored areas of research in maintaining friendships. Both of these types of communication methods were mentioned numerous times in this research. Email has only been available since the early 1990s and is a new method of maintaining relationships. According to a study of Internet use (Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2000):

- More than 9 million women have gone online for the first time in the last six months;
- 71% of women Internet users say email has improved their connections with significant friends;
- 63% of women who email friends report they communicated with significant friends more often now that they use email;
- Millions have used the Internet to rekindle relationships and locate long lost friends (p.7).
- The fastest growing cohort of Internet users is women over age 50 (p.17).

The use of email between long-distance same-sex friendships is a new area for research. What type of information is exchanged? Is there a pattern to use? Two of the participants in the current study remarked that email gave them more flexibility, in part,

because, unlike a phone call which could come at an inconvenient time as well as last longer than desired, email could be sent and responded to when it was convenient. Does the element of being in control over when contact is received from a friend reflect the degree of closeness in a friendship? How do 'phone' friendships differ from 'email' friendships? Answers to these types of questions could be useful in planning programs and policies for senior citizens.

According to Gulevich (2000), American greeting card manufacturers sell more cards for Christmas than for any other holiday; and an estimated 75% or more of all Americans send greeting cards at Christmas time. The inclusion of a family Christmas letter has come in and out of fashion. In the 1980s the mimeographed family letter was briefly out of fashion, and Marling (2000) makes the following remark:

> Ah, the joys of the Christmas letter, now word-processed on red and green stationary, and chocked full of embarrassing details from the past twelve months in the lives of mere acquaintances (p. 316).

One woman in this study commented that she did not like 'braggy' Christmas letters, but receiving a card in return was significant to her. Another woman stated that electronic Christmas cards were a nice option especially if she had not received a card mailed the 'old fashion way.' More research into the practice of sending and receiving cards is needed. Just what is it about the annual Christmas card exchange that enables the perception of being connected to be so strong? Is it a conditioned response whereby the card exchange serves to reinforce the previously well-established friendship with expected sporadic contact? Is there some significance to including a Christmas letter with the card, and what processes are involved in deciding the content of the letters? The answers to these types of questions could be useful in providing support to people who

have relocated, and in particular to the elderly person moving into a residential care facility.

In addition to reconnecting, use of email, and the annual Christmas card exchange, there are a few more issues that could be explored in greater detail. How do friendship maintenance behaviors of mothers influence friendship maintenance behaviors of daughters? How do relationships between sisters compare with relationships with friends? How do feelings of kinship come about, and how do they impact relationships with relatives? Is it harder to make new friends when over the age of 50? Along with examining these questions, an area that could be beneficial to a great deal of people surrounds managing visits back to the previous residential area. Staying connected appears to be important to well-being and actually returning to familiar and favorite places can help, although visits back to old neighborhoods can also be stressful for a number of reasons. Knowing more about returning to visit could be of great interest to all parties impacted by geographic separation.

Implications for Practice

Adams (1988) conducted interviews with 70 women in a middle class suburb of Chicago and found women's emotionally close friends tended to live outside their community, suggesting that older people benefit from interaction with friends that they have chosen freely. If this is the case, efforts need to be directed toward assisting people to maintain friendships, whether long-distance or nearby. Programs that serve the older population could include components focusing on keeping the lines of communication

open, and involve such aspects as providing cards, postage, assistance with addressing mail, and the opportunity to learn and use the Internet for email purposes.

Making that initial contact or two following a separation may be difficult for some, but with a minimal amount of effort the potential for rewards is great. It is, however, important to remember that friendships consist of two individuals, and each may have a different way of accepting and managing the relocation transition. Service providers need to be aware of this possibility when assisting individuals with adjustment issues and explore the subject with the person before responding with a pre-determined approach. This information can be very useful in working with people who are experiencing changes. Being aware of continuity strategies and their importance in the adjustment process may enhance the efforts and effects of maintaining social support networks.

With relocations and friendship separations occurring throughout a person's life, opportunities for education on maintaining these relationships could be provided through other venues. One such venue could be the public library, in part because there is often public access to email through the Internet, and in part because the public library has a recognized place in the community to which people turn for various types of information. A library could analyze the needs of the local community and develop a resource kit focusing on the issues of relocating. Chambers of Commerce could do the same, or include a flyer about the library's program. There could be age-appropriate kits so that the young and old alike would have the opportunity to improve their chances of staying connected with friends.

If more in-depth assistance is needed, support groups could be helpful. Sharing moving experiences with others who had moved would provide an environment for talking through emotions. Exchanging coping strategies that worked and did not work could be beneficial. There appears to be some comfort in knowing that one is not alone in one's feelings or thoughts. Listening to others can increase understanding and help a person gain perspective, which in turn can aid in adaptation. Additionally, as one of the participants in this current study remarked, friendship maintenance is about "contact, contact, contact;" so the more knowledgeable a person is about managing contact, both internally and externally, the greater the potential for staying connected in this world of high mobility.

Summary

Exploring women's maintenance and perception of their long-distance friendships in regards to how they have endured was the focus of this study. The degree of effort put forth to maintain friendships over long distances was influenced by various factors. How well the bond that connected them was established prior to physical separation appeared to have an influence in the effort put into maintenance. Additionally, the length of time the friends had maintained the relationship, combined with remembered, shared experiences contributed to maintenance behavior.

When a member of the friendship dyad physically relocates away from the area where the friendship was cultivated, maintenance behaviors will need to be revisited. Various factors come into play during the early transition period. Future plans regarding how the relationship would be maintained may be discussed; but more frequently with

the women in this study, no plans were discussed leaving the maintenance of the friendship to chance. Maintenance behavior may also involve the sharing of reactions to the separation, thereby strengthening the resolve to stay in touch. However, more frequently with the women in this study, feelings were not shared, leaving each member to assume how the other felt; often the follow-up behavior was inconsistent with the assumptions. Many times it was remarked that the expected amount of contact was not forthcoming. Some women received going away parties and/or gifts which were perceived to represent recognition that the person would be missed, which may have helped with the early transition of the move.

After the friendship has been separated by geography, the two people stay close friends by using a variety of approaches for maintaining the friendship. Maintenance behavior seemed to develop into a pattern with the passage of time after the move. The transition appeared to have two primary patterns. In the first pattern, there was a great deal of contact, which tapered off into a less frequent pattern. The second pattern was one in which there was little contact initially after a move, but with the passage of time a pattern of contact was slowly developed. Part of the women interviewed started to immediately exchange contacts through a combination of communication methods. A majority of the women used email regularly and were thankful to have it. A smaller number of women relied on phone calls with less frequency than emails. Still even a smaller number chose to write letters or send cards; due in part to the travel delay of postal mail, contact could vary in frequency. Additionally, some of the women adapted to the physical distance by keeping busy in the new location while trying to establish a

new pattern of communication with long-distance friends or by putting the friendship on hold until they had regained equilibrium in other aspects of the relocation.

Various types of communication played a role in the maintenance of long distance friendships. Communication was an observable maintenance behavior; and the most frequent means of communication mentioned was email, followed by the annual Christmas card or letter. Email was perceived to have more flexibility in that messages could be sent, viewed, and responded to at the convenience of the friend. Women interviewed remarked that everyone was busy with other of life's challenges; although it was nice to hear their friends' voices, email messages helped to keep the lines of communication open in between oral communication contacts.

It appeared to be important to the survival of some friendships that maintenance behavior by the long-distance friend be perceived as equal to the effort being displayed by the friend that had moved away. A major thread through all of the friendship biographies was the perception that the friendship was in place even though the old way of maintaining it was no longer possible. The role of the perception in having a connected bond was further supported by numerous friendships that had been rekindled due to changes in circumstances.

There were mixed responses to the question as to whether it is harder to be the friend who was left or harder to be the friend who moved away. Both perspectives existed about equally, with women who had moved themselves as well as had friends move away being split about which situation was harder. The discussion provided the opportunity to examine both sides of the issue, and appeared to supply some middle ground for understanding geographically separated friendships. No matter the particulars

of the situation, the end result is that the two friends are no longer sharing place, and will need to adapt their behaviors and perceptions if the friendship is to have a chance for survival.

As people continue to be more mobile, maintenance behaviors for long-distance friendships will continue to be a part of the relocation experience. As technology continues to advance, staying in contact may be easier; but the number of moves, combined with the number of friendships being maintained from each move, may multiply leaving less time to manage them all. In some of these cases, patterns in thinking will be established to maintain the perception that a well-connected social support system exists. Research into friendships that do not make the transition and further research into the role of perception in long-distance friendships may lead to discovering adaptive strategies that would assist in maintaining future long-distance friendships.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Bonnie Richardson,
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Date: June 5, 2002

OSU Librarian researches long distance friendships - volunteers needed for interviews

For Immediate Release

STILLWATER—One OSU Librarian is not only helping students and faculty with their research, she is starting a research project of her own. Tanya Finchum, Government Documents Librarian, is collecting data for her dissertation and looking for volunteers to interview. Finchum is pursuing a Ph. D. in Human Development and Family Sciences. The title of her dissertation is *Friendships and Relocation: Making the transition to long-distance friendships.*

Finchum will look at the processes involved in going from close proximity relationships to long-distance ones. Leaving established social networks often means dealing with losses of various kinds. She says, "Relocating to Stillwater was a challenge to myself, as well as to the social network I left behind. Roles and expectations changed when I was no longer able to walk down the hall to chat with good friends."

"People are much more mobile these days. Often, extended family is geographically separated, so good friends fill in when various needs arise. When a person moves, friends and family become physically inaccessible and there's a transition period when it is very lonely. I'm interested in the transition process. How do people adapt to role loss and redefine relationships so they still feel connected."

Finchum is looking for women, age 45 or older, who have moved more than once, but maintain long distance friendships with those left behind. Participants will receive a list of questions prior to an in-person interview. Sessions will be tape-recorded and should take no more than two hours. Volunteers will be anonymous. Finchum begins interviewing this month and will continue until fall. If you are interested in taking part in the study, contact Tanya Finchum at (405) 744-6546 or <ftanya@okstate.edu>.

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APPENDIX B

FRIENDSHIP SURVEY

First name: _____

Date of birth: _____
Code: _____

Friendship Survey

Part 1: General Friendship Information

1. In your own words, how would you define friendship?

2. What determines the strength/depth (i.e. casual, close, best) of a friend?

3. Take a few minutes and describe your support network (i.e. daughter, sister, best friend). Include information about the type of relationship, how regular the contact is with each one listed, the amount of geographical distance between you two, and something about the strength of the relationship.

4. Think back over your life and about the times you have moved/relocated and complete the following for <u>each</u> move (remember a move is considered to be at least 200 miles).

   *age/year of move
   *from where to where
   *distance of move
   *reason for move
   *individually list close/best friends that were left
   *last contact with each friend you just listed
   *length of friendship with each friend you just listed
   *current status of each friendship

5. Name close friendships that did not survive the transition of relocation.

6. Name your enduring long-distance friendships.

Part 2: Friendships that did not survive the relocation transition

For each of the friends you listed on the previous page that are did not become enduring long-distance friendships answer the following questions.

1. Think back to that transitional period following the move and discuss possible reasons that the friendship did not survive.

2. Tell how you coped with the loss of this friendship.

3. What, if any, were the positive aspects of not maintaining this friendship?

4. What, if any, were the negative aspects of allowing this friendship to fade away?

5. How did losing this friendship due the move influence your approach to friendship at your new location?

6. What advice would you offer on the topic of maintaining long-distance friendships?

Part 3: Enduring Long-Distance Friendships

The following series of questions will be answered for <u>each</u> *of the friends named as enduring long-distance friends.*

Name of friend: _____ Length of friendship: _____

Current status of friendship: _____

Strength of friendship at time of move (circle one): casual good best

Briefly explain how you met and became friends:

How did this friend react to the news that you were moving away?

How did you react to moving away from this friend?

Were there any 'going away' parties or exchanges of gifts to be remembered by?

Did the two of you consciously plan how the friendship would make the transition or was it left to chance? Explain.

Describe how you came to terms with not having easy access to this close friend after the move.

Discuss how expectations regarding the maintenance of the friendship were met or not met. Did one of you put more effort into staying in touch? Please discuss.

Was there a period of time after the move when either one or both of you did not actively maintain communication? Please explain.

How did you let go of the old way the friendship had been kept alive?

Relocating often means adapting to a whole set of new circumstances. Out with the old and in with the new. Part of the transition involves dealing with various losses such as support networks. The role expectations of 'friend' may also be altered.

Think back to right after the move. Do you recall if you went through the grieving process in regards to the friendship and the context within which it was maintained? Please try to describe the process of making this transition.

Relocating away from a best friend can result in feelings of loss in various degrees. Both friends may actually go through the grieving process as the friendship adapts to it's new circumstances.

Think about the friend we are discussing and describe any phases or feelings you may have gone through with this friendship after your move.

Did you at any time think that the friendship would not change just because you were moving? Please explain.

To what extent did the friendship transition fit your expectations...? Feelings? (i.e. contact was not initiated often enough). What feelings have emerged over time relative to the transition period in the friendship? Please discuss.

Did you ever share these feelings with this friend in hopes of improving maintenance behavior? Explain.

Do you recall at any point thinking that if you did a particular thing then perhaps you would get the reaction/feeling you wanted? Please explain.

At any point, was there a conscientious reassessment of the value of the friendship? If so, please describe the process?

As with most transitions, there seems to come a time when either the friendship is allowed to fade away or when the old friendship goes through a re-birth with adjusted role expectations providing the opportunity for an enduring long-distance friendship...

Do you recall the parameters of the friendship changing? (i.e. contact twice a year is enough, an annual Christmas card is enough, visiting once a year, etc.) Please describe any adjustments and feelings related to them.

How is the friendship currently being maintained?

[your part]

[friend's part]
How have your thoughts and feelings about this person changed through the years?

What specific things can you refer to that have enabled this friendship to make the relocation transition to become an enduring long-distance friendship?

How has the successful adaptation of this friendship influenced you in establishing and maintaining other friendships?

Any words of wisdom for friends who may be faced with relocating …

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM

Participant Consent Form

"Friendships and Relocation: Making the Transition
to Long-Distance Friendships"

I, _____, give permission to Tanya Finchum, a doctoral candidate at Oklahoma State University, to interview me and tape record my experiences maintaining friendships over long-distances. I understand that:

- The purpose of this research study is to gather information that will aid in understanding how friendships are managed and adapted following a physical separation.
- The survey has 3 sections and includes a general background information section, a non-maintained friendship section, and a long-distance maintained friendship section.
- The interview will be tape-recorded and then transcribed allowing the issues and experiences surrounding the friendship biography to be in my own words.
- My name will not be attached to any of the information that I provide. All interviews and transcriptions will be assigned a code number and the code sheet will be kept separate from the tapes and transcriptions. The tape recording will be erased once the interview transcription has been completed.
- Personal information will be kept confidential.
- My participation is voluntary in this interview which will take 1 to 3 hours.
- I may be contacted for follow-up questions after the interview has been transcribed to clarify any statements that were unclear and I may receive a copy if requested.
- I am free to withdraw my consent and stop the interview at any time.

The interviewer, Tanya Finchum, has reviewed the above information with me and I have had the opportunity to ask questions.*

I agree to be interviewed and tape recorded for the Friendships and Relocation study and I understand I will receive a completed copy of the consent form.

_____ _____
(signature of participant) date

I certify that I have personally explained all of the above points to the participant before asking her to sign the consent form.

_____ _____
(signature of interviewer) date

*You may contact Tanya Finchum at (405) 744-6545 or Dr. Linda Robinson at (405) 744-8356 if you have further questions about this research project. You may also contact Sharon Bacher, Executive Secretary to the Institutional Review Board, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078; Telephone: (405) 744-5700.

APPENDIX D

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 5/27/03

Date: Tuesday, May 28, 2002 IRB Application No: HE0260

Proposal Title: FRIENDSHIPS AND RELOCATION: MAKING THE TRANSITION TO LONG-DISTANCE FRIENDSHIPS

Principal Investigator(s):

Tanya D. Finchum
501 Edmon Low Library
Stillwater, OK 74078

Linda Robinson
333F HES
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved *

Dear PI

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 203 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

*NOTE: Change the consent form's final paragraph to say contact the Institutional Review Board (Not University Research Services) and provide Sharon Bacher's name as Executive Secretary to the Institutional Review Board. Provide corrected copy to the IRB office before starting the project.

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 5/27/03

Date Tuesday, June 11, 2002 IRB Application No HE0260

Proposal Title: FRIENDSHIPS AND RELOCATION: MAKING THE TRANSITION TO LONG-DISTANCE FRIENDSHIPS

Principal Investigator(s)

Tanya D. Finchum
501 Edmon Low Library
Stillwater, OK 74078

Linda Robinson
333F HES
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved **Modification**

Please note that the protocol expires on the following date which is one year from the date of the approval of the original protocol:

Protocol Expires: 5/27/03

Signature :

Carol Olson, Director of University Research Compliance

Tuesday, June 11, 2002
Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 3/26/2004

Date Thursday, March 27, 2003 IRB Application No HE0260

Proposal Title: FRIENDSHIPS AND RELOCATION: MAKING THE TRANSITION TO LONG-DISTANCE FRIENDSHIPS

Principal Investigator(s)

Tanya D. Finchum
501 Edmon Low Library
Stillwater, OK 74078

Linda Robinson
333F HES
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt **Continuation**

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) : Approved

Signature Carol Olson

Carol Olson, Director of University Research Complian

Thursday, March 27, 2003
Date

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

APPENDIX E

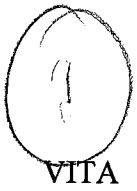
WORKSHEETS

Worksheet – Page 1 Subject Code _____

Name	Phone	E-mail	Visits	Cards/ Letters	Knows Family	Reconnect	Last Saw	Lapse	Comments/ Status

Worksheet – Page 2

Name	Their Reaction	Your Reaction	Impact	Pos/Neg.	Reciprocal	Gifts/ Parties	Discuss Plans	Visit Issues



VITA

Tanya Ducker Finchum

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: FRIENDSHIPS AND RELOCATION: MAKING THE TRANSITION TO LONG-DISTANCE FRIENDSHIPS

Major Field: Human Environmental Sciences

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Waynesville, North Carolina, the daughter of H.L. and Hilda Ducker.

Education: Received Bachelor of Social Work degree from East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee in August 1980. Received Master of Arts degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio in December 1982. Received Master of Science in Library Science from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN in December 1990. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in Human Development and Family Science at Oklahoma State University in August, 2003.

Experience: Social Worker for the Tennessee Department of Human Services in Sevier County Tennessee for 10 years; Information Coordinator for the National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials, Stillwater, Oklahoma; Assistant Professor/Government Documents Librarian, Edmon Low Library, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1999 to present.

Professional Memberships: American Library Association, Oklahoma Library Association.