

The Value of Friendship: Social Validation and Support for the Individual

by

Kara Leiko Takasaki

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Bachelor of Arts and Science in Sociology and English

Tufts University Department of Sociology

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Abstract

The decline in traditional marriage and the increasing prevalence of singlehood, cohabitation, divorce, and remarriage has irrevocably altered the landscape of American kinship. Although friendship has been shown to be an undervalued relationship in comparison to the historically and politically dominant institutions of marriage and family, during this period of relationship transformation, friendship has become an increasingly salient alternative resource of support and stability to individuals facing multiple relationship transitions over the life course. This thesis offers a qualitative investigation of the value of friendship for study participants in the context of other relationships. My results are based on 16 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 8 male and 8 female heterosexual participants aged 24-38 years residing in the Boston area. Participants described a diversity of practices and preferences for intimacy in relationships. In order to establish intimacy in the ambiguous relationship of friendship, they had to navigate intimacy throughout the process of creating and maintaining a highly individualized relationship. The voluntary investment in friendship—not compelled or obligated by collective bonds—resulted in enhanced social validation, described by participants as unique to the relationship of friendship. My findings demonstrate that friendship is more complex than has previously been shown. I also found that when friendship was a recognized bond in other kinship relationships, or acted as a supplementary resource to kinship relations, it produced enhanced benefits of support for well-being over the life course.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review	
<i>Dominance: the influence of kinship in American society.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Intimacy in the ambiguous and individualistic relationship of friendship... </i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Kin and non-kin interaction in the relationship community.....</i>	<i>27</i>
Methods.....	33
Findings	
<i>Beyond Words: Valuable and Variable Intimacy and Intensity.....</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>Friends with Social Validation Benefits: Privileged Access to the Private Individual.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Lean on Us: the Power of Sum—Friendship in the Relationship Community</i>	<i>79</i>
Conclusions.....	91
Bibliography.....	101
Appendices.....	
113	

“Friendship often ends in love; but love in friendship—never.”

- Charles Caleb Colton

Introduction

My interest in relationships began when I first recognized that we live in a couple-oriented society. I was deeply troubled by the framing of the couple relationship in popular culture and the media for all the reasons that people write about in songs and struggle with in movies about love and relationships. I reflected on my personal observations of the couple in American society and felt that “couple-oriented” society was not a sufficient evaluation of the content that I regularly consumed. To me, a more accurate description would have been “couple-saturated” society, “couple-immersive” society, or “couple-pressurized” society. Emphasis on the pervasive idea that there is only one special person that an individual can find true love with in a lifetime gave rise to inevitable worries in my mind. How would I know who that person is? What if I had already met them, or had not met them, or would never meet them? My preoccupation with the idealized marital and romantic couple led me to wonder whether there were alternatives to the couple that could provide similar benefits that we value from human interaction like love, caring, intimacy, and support.

According to the literature on relationships, friendship has been an understudied and undervalued relationship compared to the privileged social status of the marital couple. The institutions of marriage and family are founded on the marital couple. They cast an appropriating shadow over social organization, at the expense of depreciating other relationship forms (Budgeon 2008; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004) like friendship.

However, unprecedented levels of individualization, reflexivity, detraditionalization, destabilization, and secularization characterize the modern experience in American society (Bumpass 1990; Burgess 1948; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). The coalescence of these farraginous social forces has engendered an irreversible shift in the ways that people form intimate relationships (Coontz 2010). As traditional attitudes toward the structure and constitution of marriage and family relax over time, new living arrangements, family forms, and interpersonal commitments become the norm for future generations (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Trent and South 1992). Even though the “traditional” nuclear family was never historically traditional, marriage and family continue to possess the highest symbolic value of intimate relationship types. They maintain a powerful, romanticized, nostalgic influence in American culture (Kimmel 2011: 143) discussed in the academic discourse over their “decline” (Popenoe 1993a; Stacey 1993). This debate contends with social policy that regulates social perceptions about the legitimacy, effective quality, and practical purpose of these institutions in organizing and reproducing society.

In a highly individualized society, studying the way individuals practice and think about intimacy and care is exceedingly important to understand sociable interactions and stability in all relationships (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). It is now more acceptable to choose rewarding intimate relationships irrespective of the form they take (Cherlin 1990). Some studies found that intimacy is a fundamental social need (Sanderson, Rahm and Beigbeder 2005) and that practices of love and caring are essential to individual well-being and relationship satisfaction (Perrin et al. 2010). This research suggested that love

and intimacy had larger ramifications for the overall well-being and continuation of society and culture and that useful future research on these themes would investigate relationships from the perspective that love and intimacy play an equal role in the lives of men and women. In addition, some social scientists posit that research on relationships should approach analysis of intimacy with the awareness that it is multidimensional (Jamieson 1999; Monsour 1992) and cannot accurately be measured under a singular definition and scale.

For young adult cohorts, the regulations and boundaries around relationships and intimacy have greatly slackened (Cherlin 2003; Norton and Glick 1976). Young adults are more aware of the limitations and personal costs of traditional marriage. They are also more accepting of intimate relationships and family forms that cross household confines (Heath 1999; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). Each successive generation is exposed to a greater proportion of diverse family forms and greater frequency of relationship transition and instability in the marital couple. It becomes increasingly unlikely that the study and structure of the life course will revert back to its heteronormative schema centered on the lifelong marriage of a young couple and its subsequent nuclear family (Furstenberg 1980). It is equally improbable that the institutions of marriage and family will regain their absolute authority over sex, intimacy, child rearing, transfer of resources, and division of labor in intimate relationships (Coontz 2004).

There is a preponderance of literature on relationships that has focused on the study of kinship and the non-kin romantic relationship. However, some social scientists have

recognized the importance of studying the overlooked and undervalued relationship of friendship (Sanderson et al. 2005). Friendship provides support to individuals in periods of social turmoil and disconcerting transformation of intimate relationships (Coontz 1995a; Coontz 2004). It can provide stability and assistance to alternative family forms, and it can mitigate the negative effects of frequent and volatile relationship transition and change over the life course (Caldwell and Peplau 1982).

The research on intimacy and friendship is heavily focused on gendered intimacy and proving or disproving sex-role theory (Hochschild 1973; Meeker and Weitzel-O'Neill 1977; Peplau 1983). There is already a substantial amount of evidence and theory that impugns the usefulness of sex-role theory as an accurate research framework (Caldwell and Peplau 1982; Duck and Wright 1993; Jones 1991; Kimmel 2011; Wright 1982; Wright 1988). In addition, social constructionists provide a significant critique of the inequality imposed on gender differences in friendship, by suggesting that these differences may be constructed by the presence of gender norms requiring individuals to “do friendship” as a part of “doing gender” in American society (Burns 2002; Duncombe and Marsden 1993; Migliaccio 2009; Radmacher and Azmitia 2006; Walker 1994).

Since the literature had shown gender to be an exceedingly pervasive aspect of relationships deserving of extensive and disproportionate study of its influence, I knew that if I specifically focused my interview guide to elicit gendered content in my interviews I could undoubtedly do a gendered analysis for this thesis. However, I did not want my investigation of the value of friendship to be primarily centered on the gendered aspect of it. Research has shown that there are comparatively more similarities between

sexes and more differences among sexes in relationship and intimacy practices (Burleson et al. 1996; Perrin et al. 2010; Wright 1982). Assuming this premise, I was curious about intimacy in friendship and wanted to study friendship as a relationship phenomenon, created and necessitated in the context of other relationships. I offer the extensive review of friendship literature on gendered intimacy and sex-role theory because the studies on intimacy in friendship are primarily focused on gendered intimacy and sex-role theory. I address these studies for the purpose of providing background on the type of intimacy that these studies have focused on in the past, rather than to highlight their findings on gender differences or similarities. Furthermore, I thought that a study that did not explicitly initiate the pursuit of gendered content in interviews with an equal amount of male and female heterosexual respondents would be more revealing of the centrality and prevalence of gender effects in friendship should they arise without prompting or if they were relatively absent from participant responses. Therefore, in my literature review I acknowledge the predominant focus of gender in the literature on friendship, and I set up my study sample with a conscious awareness to follow gender threads in interviews if participant responses led in that direction.

Researchers have also noted that race, ethnicity, age, class, sexuality, and marital status, among other factors affect friendship patterns (Kimmel 2011: 326). The scope of this investigation of friendship was not focused on the breadth of factors that affect friendship patterns, but on the intensity, variability, and complexity of the way that relationships were valued in comparative context, interaction, and definition with one another. The study of friendship makes a valuable contribution towards enriching the

current literature on relationships and the revealing of complexity in human interaction. By studying the alternative relationship of friendship in the context of a community of relationship types (Pahl and Pevalin 2005; Pahl and Spencer 2004), a comparison of undervalued friendship to idealized kinship relations can reveal respective strengths and weaknesses of both relationships and clarify the influential pathways and dynamic interactions between them.

This thesis is a qualitative investigation of the value of friendship in the context of other relationships. I compared the definition, description, and interaction of relationships from interviews about participants' relationship communities. In agreement with social scientists who found that verbal communication, expression, and disclosure were essential to intimate friendship and to valuable relationships as a whole (Burleson et al. 1996; Caldwell and Peplau 1982; Giddens 1993; Hacker 1981; Monsour 1992; Parks and Floyd 1996; Sanderson et al. 2005; Sapadin 1988, William 1985). I find that participants believe that expressive intimacy is the most effective form of human interaction to navigate intimacy and negotiate relationships. Participants regularly referred to emotionally expressive disclosure as an indication that an individual was offering the opportunity to establish intimacy or to negotiate the degree of intimacy in a relationship.

However, participant accounts of the actual process for establishing intimacy were more complex and comprehensive than the description of a singular event or even multiple acts of emotionally expressive disclosure. Establishing and negotiating intimacy in friendship was an intricate and sensitive process for participants. Participants needed a significant amount of face-to-face time to verify compatibility within a relationship

before considering it an intimate relationship. The ambiguous nature of friendship required participants to navigate a diversity of practices and preferences for intimacy in order to create each unique friend relationship. Participants valued friendship for its social validation. This social validation emerged from the investment required to create and maintain each specific relationship.

The value of individualism in American society has increased the value of friendship and intimacy. While friendship has been specifically acknowledged in the literature for its individualistic qualities, the study of intimacy has not received comparable attention or recognition for its characteristic of individual adaptability and variability. In this study, the value of intimacy for participants was also contingent on its individualized nature. Participants chose friends based on their specific needs for intimacy. They gave numerous accounts of withdrawing, avoiding, or ending relationships that they felt did not have reciprocal exchange, which seemed necessary for trust—often synonymous with intimacy for participants—to be established. In participants' relationships, satisfaction was enhanced by their adaptability to fulfill or complement an individually specific compatibility or need for a friend.

I also found that when friendship existed as an additional bond in kinship relations it often strengthened the relationship and made it more meaningful for the participant. Friendship also acted as an alternative or supplementary resource of support to kinship relations, and produced enhanced benefits for well-being over the life course by alleviating pressure on any one person or dyad. Friendship alleviated pressure on other relationships by providing diverse compatibilities, perspectives, and opportunities for the

individual to rely on. It also encouraged individual growth and strengthened support during transition and change over the life course.

I investigated the interaction between friendship and other relationships to provide greater insight into the nature and value of friendship. I argue that the negotiation of various forms of intimacy within the relationship, an aspect less essential to kinship relations that are regulated by public bonds, provided unique social validation to participants. In addition, many participant responses demonstrated that friendship in a relationship community produced enhanced benefits of support and well-being for individuals over the life course. My findings corroborate the literature that shows friendship to be an individualistic and ambiguous relationship. They also bridge the literature proposing alternative frameworks for the study of relationships, and are important to consider for their relevance to changing attitudes towards practices of intimacy, caregiving, and relationship forms in the U.S. These findings are also consistent with the reasoning that argues for appropriate and effective social policy that would provide support for social change in family demographics and a restructuring of institutional practice in the workplace and labor force.

Literature Review

The increase of diverse family forms in American society makes friendship increasingly important as an alternative resource of support to individuals during change over the life course and throughout multiple relationship transitions. Similarly, the study of kin and non-kin interactions in an individual's relationship community becomes increasingly significant in regards to the combined resource of multiple relationship types that have the ability to alleviate pressures on the couple and nuclear family, which face more solitary pressure and private obligation than ever before. I study the value of friendship in the context of other relationships to further investigate the way that it supplements and complements other relationship types.

Dominance: the influence of kinship in American society

Family and marriage are powerful historical and political institutions in American society. Social researchers have traced the history of the American family from the frontier pioneer experience, to the urban family in the Industrial Revolution's city

(Burgess 1948), and through the venerated nuclear family post World War II. They concluded that the institutions of marriage and family have been in a state of constant change for all of history (Coontz 2000; Coontz 2004). Kimmel (2011) says:

The family has proved a most resilient institution...[It has] survived...the geographic dispersal of extended kin...New family forms abound...People who divorce often remarry quickly...they still believe in the institution, just not the person they married!... Though the family feels like one of the most fragile of social institutions, it is perhaps among the most resilient...American families have changed dramatically over the course of our history, and the family form continues to adapt to changing circumstances. (P.142)¹

Kimmel's quote highlights the resilient transformative adaptability of these institutions.

Yet, it remains undisputed that the magnitude of drastic and significant change these institutions have undergone in caregiving, child rearing, household and family forms, sexual practices, familial and gendered interpersonal relations, distribution of resources within diverse marital arrangements, formation and dissolution of intimate relationships, and public attitudes about the level of legitimacy attributed to these changes (Coontz 2004; Thornton 1989) has never before been concurrently witnessed within the relatively short time period of a few decades (Popenoe 1993a; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001).

It is important to recognize the value judgments framing these demographic trends because they attest to the socially engrained authority that marriage and family leverage on the American collective consciousness' construction of intimacy and its legitimate source in relationships. These judgments are exemplified in the policy and academic polemic, referred to as the "national family wars" (Popenoe 1993b, Stacey 1993). The discourse debates the decline and deinstitutionalization of marriage and

¹ In 2007 the marriage rate was 7.5 per 1000, the lowest in forty years and cohabitation increased from 1.1 million in 1977 to 5.5 million in 2000 (Kimmel 2011: 142).

family. More precisely, it contends with the institutional role of “traditional” marriage and family reproducing American culture and structuring American society, directly through the socialization of future society constituents, children, and indirectly through institutional symbolism. David Popenoe is often cited as the pundit for supporters of traditional marriage and the nuclear family. Popenoe (1993a) claimed:

Recent family decline is more serious than any decline in the past because what is breaking up is the nuclear family, the fundamental unit stripped of relatives and left with two essential functions that cannot be performed better elsewhere: childrearing and the provision to its members of affection and companionship. (P. 537)

Critics of this stance, (Coontz 1995a; Coontz 1995b; Coontz 1999; Cowan 1993; Glenn 1993; Houseknecht and Sastry 1996; Stacey 1993) also known as the “diversity defenders,” impugn Popenoe for his nostalgic rhetoric. They claim that he glorifies the nuclear family, which was representative of a select minority of the population during a short period of time², rather than presenting an empirically sound argument based on an accurate reading of demographic family trends over time (Coontz 1995a; Coontz 1995b; Coontz 1999). The diversity defenders propose that the multiplicity of family forms becoming more widespread suggests a greater variety of family manifestations and flexibility in pathways of intimacy, caregiving, and emotional support beyond the marital couple and the nuclear family.

In recent decades, relationship statuses like friendship, unmarried couples, singleness, and cohabitation have increasingly gained acceptance as alternative means to

² The conceptualization of the “traditional” nuclear family form in the 1950s and 1960s was an inaccurate portrayal of the American family because it only represented white, suburban, and middle-class families (Coontz 1995a; Coontz 1995b; Coontz 1999). It did not represent the majority of the population exhibiting distinct family types affected by race, ethnicity, class, and socioeconomic status (Kimmel 2011: 149).

provide intimacy, sex, caregiving, and family in the life course. Marriage does not possess the same primacy in these areas as it did in the 1950s. As nontraditional family forms become the norm, and traditional attitudes toward marriage and family in the life course continue to weaken, young adults will be more likely to experiment in living arrangements (Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Trent and South 1992). For example, first marriage and remarriage rates declined in young adults (Bumpass, Sweet and Cherlin 1991; Glick 1984; Norton and Glick 1976; Norton and Moorman 1987), but this decrease was offset by an increase in cohabitation. Cohabitation and childbearing outside of marriage is increasingly common in the United States. 40 percent of cohabiting couples also raise children and expect to marry their partner (Bumpass, Sweet and Cherlin 1991). The growing prominence of this family form has moved some states to formally recognize the ties of non-marital families (Seltzer 2000). Singleness has also become more acceptable as a legitimate way of life.

Acknowledgement of these trends in the institutions of marriage and family has led to alterations in the family life cycle (Glick 1977). There are more transitions in the life course than in the past. The framework for analyzing marriage and the family now includes cohabitation, marital separation, divorce, remarriage, redi-orce and other patterns of family formation in between (Cherlin 1990; Furstenberg 1980; Glick 1984; Norton 1983; Norton and Moorman 1987). Changes in the analytical framework suggest greater tolerance for deviation from a life cycle centered on a binding early first marriage. Most Americans do not believe that being married is better than being single, and they do not disapprove of those who are not married (Thornton and Freedman 1982). However,

there is no indication that these previously taboo practices, like remaining single, getting a divorce, remaining childless, and reversing gender roles, are preferable or valued over the normative options. This distinction exists because though marriage may be less common in practice, it is still highly valued in American society.

Marriage bestows explicit rewards because of its status as a long-term contract. This legal bond provides an institutionalized structure that encourages partners to share economic and social resources. Spouses benefit from economies of scale and connect to other social groups, opportunities, and resources that they might otherwise be reluctant to share or permit access to without a formally and informally reinforced relationship. There is a wealth of literature that shows married individuals report better psychological and physical well being than unmarried individuals (Birditt and Antonucci 2007). On average, marriage produces significant benefits for men and women in improved health, longer life span, more frequent and higher-quality sexual lives, higher incomes for men, greater wealth and better outcomes for children (Waite 1995; Waite and Lehrer 2003). Marriage increases happiness equally among men and women primarily through the enhancement of financial satisfaction and the improvement in health. These effects are seen to a lesser degree in cohabitants and even less in singles (Soons and Liefbroer 2008; Stack and Eshleman 1998). Cohabiting couples experience these benefits to a lesser extent because cohabitation is characterized by less stability than marriage. Thus it is unfavorable to the uninhibited sharing of social and economic resources (Soons and Liefbroer 2008).

It is important to remember that the exchange of benefits can occur outside of a marital bond, but it is the structure of the bond that incentivizes and enhances these

benefits. The diversity defenders make the distinction that it is not fundamentally or inherently beneficial for the well-being of a family to be constructed around and entirely dependent upon the marital couple. While the marital bond has certain legal powers of enforcement, it cannot enforce intimacy, love, affection, or caring. Social researchers note that marital relationships, as well as friendships and other family relations, can be both harmful as well as supportive (Birditt and Antonucci 2007). In fact, the most compelling argument for marriage is the reinforced stability of a dual-earner household that would augment benefits for its stakeholders with economies of scale, specifically for financial resources.

While it is also not necessary for the benefits of these shared resources to be exchanged through the marital bond, the formal and informal reinforcement of the marital couple lessens inhibitions and doubts about the possible risk of relationship dissolution and the loss of extensive investment in an increased quantity, quality and variety of social ties. These advantages of the marital bond positively affect well-being, and in some cases have been shown to particularly benefit men's emotional well-being and women's material well-being (Soons and Liefbroer 2008; Waite 1995). Since the most compelling argument for marriage is primarily financial, this last finding on its gendered benefits is especially pertinent to gender inequality in work and home.³

The “diversity defenders” assert that the actual controversy over the decline in marriage is about the power of its symbolism; it is an institution with its own politics and

³ See Chapter 6 Conclusions. Gender inequality in work and home and the lack of adequate social welfare policy places the burden of relationship work and emotional labor on women, and may create financial motivation for women to be married, which is especially significant for single mothers of low socioeconomic status.

history, organizing and reproducing American society (Cherlin 2003) and culture through relationships. There is a higher tolerance for alternatives to marriage, but this does not mean that people no longer value it. The value of marriage is resilient and remains high throughout shifts in trends (Cherlin 2005; Edin and Kefalas 2005; Gibson-Davis, Edin and McLanahan 2005). The problem might be that Americans value marriage too much. Americans do not only expect companionate marriage, they expect personal fulfillment and development during marriage (Norton and Glick 1976), which contributes to the idealization of the relationship.

People are more likely to never marry, or to change marital status several times during the life course because marriage cannot meet their expectations for blissful happiness (Coontz 2010). When marital relations do not meet their expectations for happiness, they divorce. Salient demographic trends showed that in the 1980s, half of first marriages and 60 percent of second marriages ended in divorce for young adults. 75 percent of divorced young adults were likely to remarry. Meanwhile, the number of unmarried couples and single-parent households increased, while two-parent households decreased (Glick 1984). In December 2009, there were 3.4 divorces for every 6.8 marriages per 1000 people of the total population (Tejada-Vera and Sutton 2009). These trends contribute to the instability of families⁴ and worry social scientists because the family retains the undisputed role as the primary socializing influence on children (Seltzer 2000). Early in life, parents are the primary role models for children. They pass

⁴ See Chapter 6 Conclusions for connections to social welfare policy, pro-marriage government incentives, and children's outcomes.

on human capital in the form of values, behaviors and norms (Trent and South 1992). The family, as the main reproductive organ of society, determines the way that children will practice and approach sexual behavior, attitudes, marital unions and intimate relationships as adults (Thornton 1991; Thornton and Camburn 1987; Mead 1948).⁵

Intimacy in the ambiguous and individualistic relationship of friendship

Kinship relations are held in high esteem for their role in the reproduction of American society. There is a collective understanding of the public description for marriage and the nuclear family because of the extensive literature accumulated on their primacy and significance in the public sphere. Notably, there is no comparable societal acknowledgement of the prevalence and salience of friendship in structuring and influencing individual lives in American culture (Caldwell and Paplau 1982; O'Meara 1989; Sapadin 1988), and the definition of "friend" is much more obscure. Claude Fischer (1982) said that the term "friend" refers to:

non-relatives in a largely unsystematic way; to associates lacking other, specialized role-relations; to people of the same age; to people known a long time; and to people with whom respondents had primarily sociable, rather than intimate or material, involvements. (P. 287)

⁵ In a panel study of children and their mothers from 1962-1980, it was found that the experience, behavior, and attitude of the mothers in the study influenced the behavior and attitudes of their children toward premarital sex (Thornton and Camburn 1987). Mother's attitudes play an important role in making the link between the mothers' marital dissolution experiences and children's attitudes on values regarding family formation. There are also strong effects of parental divorce, remarriage, and widowhood on children's attitudes toward premarital sex, cohabitation, marriage, childbearing, and divorce (Axinn and Thornton 1996). This panel study was furthered in 1985 to focus on the effects of parents' marital history on marital and cohabitation behaviors of their children. Parental age at marriage, experience with premarital pregnancy, and marital disruption and remarriage influenced the process of marital and cohabitation union formation in their children as young adults (Thornton 1991).

Fischer's quote demonstrates the ambiguous nature of friendship. The lack of a clear and accepted collective and public definition of friendship creates an ambiguous space where the individual must privately and individually define friendship for each manifestation of the relationship.

Unlike kinship relations that are defined by legal and public bonds, an external structure does not require or impose the mutual understanding of a similar definition of friendship between the relationship participants. Friendship is exceedingly malleable and mobile in terms of intimacy and companionship (Yager 1999). Individuals have the freedom and the responsibility to determine the nature of friendship on an individual basis (O'Meara 1999; Walker 1995); thereby endowing individuals with the ability to more effectively address individually specific needs but also giving less guidance about how to do so. The prominent aspect of individualism in friendship places this relationship category in a unique niche in the sociological perspective of relationships. Friendship possesses an intrinsic quality of enjoyment, exchange, and self-definition (Wright 1984). The nature of friendship promotes the development of the relationship in concert with the individual's personal growth (Walker 1995; Wright 1984), and provides the individual with greater opportunity to construct the identity in friendship than in other relationship forms.

The individualistic character friendship accommodates the high level of individualism of modern American society because members perform a significant act of free will in choosing their friends who, without this exercise of agency, would otherwise be strangers. Thus, friendship is a highly individualized relationship because it requires

the exercise of greater individual agency to create and negotiate the relationship. For example, the relationships of co-workers, spouses, parents, bosses, and students are more rigidly predetermined by roles with precise definitions that exist in the public sphere outside of the individual's control (Caldwell and Peplau 1982; O'Meara 1989; Yager 1999). In contrast, friends have the freedom and the responsibility to negotiate an individualized expression of the larger, ambiguous friendship category. The ambiguity of friendship liberates the relationship and simultaneously makes it more difficult to navigate. Michael Kimmel (2011) cites a quote from another sociologist in his text:

The very basic assumption friends must make about one another is that each is going beyond a mere presentation of self in compliance with 'social dictates.' Inevitably this makes friendship a somewhat deviant relationship because the surest test of personal disclosure is a violation of the rules of public propriety. (P. 327)

By going outside the sphere of public norms, friendship indicates an inherently high level of individualism. Individuals must exercise their agency for it to exist; discrete individual entities choose separately and voluntarily to create the relationship and breach the bonds of public propriety. Individuals privately manage the responsibility of negotiating the sensitive terms of investment and commitment for each manifestation of friendship,⁶ which in kinship bonds are already indicated on a broad structural level by public decree.

Linda Sapadin (1988) pointed out that it is the unequal distribution of prestige given to one type of friendship over the other, which creates gender differences between male and female friendships.⁷ Historically, ideal friendship consisted of traditionally

⁶ For example in relation to the previous quote, investment in a relationship through self-disclosure of personal information distinguishes the giver and the receiver relationship beyond what public or civic norms require of strangers.

⁷ Also argued by Michael Kimmel in his text *The Gendered Society* (2011), "Gender difference is the product of gender inequality, and not the other way around...It is through the idea of difference that inequality is legitimated" (4).

masculine characteristics like bravery, loyalty, duty and heroism. Women were thought to be incapable of friendship because they stereotypically lacked these qualities (Sapadin 1988; Walker 1994). These beliefs were in accordance with the claim that female friendship was inferior to male friendship. Paul Wright (1982) observed that designating gendered friendship types in a hierarchy was arbitrary without evidence to support the claims. Evidence would not only have to show that friendship actually differed by gender but that in addition, the evidence would have to demonstrate that female friendship was less valuable than male friendship. He speculated that if the qualities assigned to female friendship that were different from male friendship were valued above those assigned to male friendships than female friendships would be considered superior. In a later study, Sapadin (1988) referred to this gendered construction of friendship as the “new ‘friendship myth’” (401). Today, that myth is not new, but rather the accepted and idealized representation of friendship.

This distinct portrayal of valuable friendship touts ascribed feminine characteristics believed to be naturally or socially⁸ female abilities and assigned to female friendship, like emotionally expressive exchange, intimate self-disclosure, personal sharing and caring, and relationship work. For the better part of recorded history, men were construed as capable, and women incapable, of valuable friendship. Now, popular attitudes suggest that men are disadvantaged in friendship compared to women, due to

⁸ Refers to the nature v. nurture discourse: “natural” ability for intimacy, relationship work, and emotional labor is based on physiology and biology findings and “social” ability based on psychosocial perspectives of socialization (Kimmel 2011). Kimmel points out that focusing on this disagreement undermines the more important issue of gender inequality imposed on gender differences regardless of the discipline from which their construction has been derived from.

their supposedly deficient intimacy and nurturing capacities in men (Kimmel 2011: 318-320). Because contemporary attitudes champion “female” characteristics as the valued currency in relationships, intimacy, as the delineation of closeness, generally refers to self-disclosure, support, shared interests, and expressed valuation of a relationship. It is also often related to romantically charged interaction, sexual relations and physical affection (Caldwell and Peplau 1982; Parks and Floyd 1996; Monsour 1992; Sapadin 1988).

In recent decades, friendship and intimacy has been predominantly studied as a comparison highlighting gender differences within a framework that is hyper aware of differentiating between same-sex and cross-sex friendships. The focus of these studies has been influenced by the prominence of sex-role theory in academic circles of the time (Hochschild 1973; Meeker and Weitzel-O'Neill 1977; Peplau 1983). Sex-role theory applied to friendship says that men are instrumental and task oriented. They are prohibited from displaying emotion and these constraints inhibit their formation of friendships with other men. In contrast to men, women are affective and socio-emotionally oriented. They perform expressive behaviors (Aukett, Ritchie and Mill 1988; William 1985; Wright 1982). To match the abundance of research based on sex-role theory,⁹ there is a comparable amount of critique of these findings.

There is substantial evidence conflicting with the suppositions of sex-role theory. Research demonstrated that female and male friendships differed on a number of variables but they did not construct an “expressive” versus “instrumental” configuration

⁹ See Appendix A. Same-sex and cross-sex findings on gendered friendship

by gender. Female “expressive” traits were positively associated with intimate friendship, but male “instrumental” traits had minimal effect on the degree of reported intimacy (Hacker 1981; Williams 1985). Both types of characteristics were equally prominent in strong friendships for men and women (Duck and Wright 1993). Another study (Sanderson et al. 2005) found that individuals with a strong focus on intimacy in friendships exchanged high levels of social support and self-disclosure with their close friends. These individuals chose constructive methods based on communication strategies to address conflict. These strategies were held in contrast to destructive methods like selfish responses, reciprocal blame, criticism, and neglect to solve conflict and dissatisfaction. Ultimately, those with a strong focus on intimacy goals experienced high levels of satisfaction at least in part because they used constructive strategies to resolve conflict and dissatisfaction. Researchers concluded from this study that intimacy is a basic social need and an important predictor of satisfaction in friendships for men and women. Gender effect on pursuit of intimacy goals in friendship interactions was minimal and the overall findings that were true for both sexes were overwhelmingly more substantial.

Additional studies have established that both sexes value similar characteristics in ideal friendship and express comparable beliefs about same-sex friendship formation and maintenance (Burlison 1996; Jones 1991; Monsour 1992; Perrin et al. 2010; Sapadin 1988). For example, females rate affectively oriented communication skills somewhat higher than males and males rate instrumentally oriented skills as somewhat more important than females, but both males and females overwhelmingly view affectively

oriented skills as more important than instrumental skills overall (Burlleson et al. 1996). Although there are differences that do reflect traditional sex roles and accompanying socialization patterns, these are not substantial differences and mostly indeterminate (Perrin et al. 2010; Wright 1982). There is more similarity than dissimilarity in friendship practices and attitudes of women and men (Burlleson et al. 1996; Perrin et al. 2010; Wright 1982). Furthermore, the similarities definitively outweigh the differences, and the differences tend to diminish as strength and duration of friendship increases (Wright 1982).

Another weakness of sex-role theory is that researchers might base their findings on inaccurate gender differences; women might conceptualize a different scale of comparative intimacy than men given the same description of a relationship (Caldwell and Peplau 1982). A hypothetical example might be a man who considers playing basketball with a friend or giving his name to a stranger actions of an equivalent level of intimacy as a woman telling her friend her most embarrassing moment. Sex-role theory would probably see the woman as being more intimate but that would only be because the scale of valuation for intimacy would be weighted to the woman's orientation of intimacy. Sex-role theory does not look at the significance of intimacy performed through its prescribed roles from a social and cultural context. It perceives gender differences instead of possible scale variation for differently weighted friendship characteristics within each gender (Duck and Wright 1993).

Researchers who implement sex-role theory to analyze results often do not adequately explore gender as a subject variable in their findings. For this reason, critics of

this analytic approach caution that selected variables and cases are preemptively biased to show two kinds of friendship characteristics distinguished by gender (Wright 1982). When using the sex-role theory framework to analyze results, there is a tendency to erroneously stress statistical significance between genders and overlook variability within gender (Kimmel 2011). Paul Wright (1988) advised researchers to be moderate and skeptical in their interpretation and reporting of gender differences because most pattern differences attributed to gender are actually modal, rather than categorical or dichotomous. Since there are greater similarities than differences for the qualities that enhance friendship satisfaction for both sexes, when researchers focus on gender differences, they fail to highlight the qualities that promote good relationships regardless of sex (Jones 1991).

Social constructionist and feminist theory offer a critique of sex-role theory applied to intimacy in relationships within the framework that gender is a highly pervasive social construction (Walker 1994), and intimacy in relationships is a social construction problematized by gender inequality. They claim that cultural ideologies about gender, intimacy, and relationships are reified and reproduced through discussions and interactions in friendships. Angie Burns (2002) found that when men and women engage in discourse about emotional gender differences in heterosexual relationships, they inhabit two broad and distinct gender narratives. Women tell a romanticized love story about male inability to express feelings. In contrast to female emotional expressivity, men construct a rationalized story about working toward relationships where they perform heterosexual intimacy and love appropriately. Burns (2002) says:

These discourses...reproduce, constraints on relationships... Accepting this evidence of 'real' and 'factual' gender difference reinforces the power of such organizing principles to inhabit our ways of talking about relationships, which in turn, through repetition, reproduce and reinforce this version of gender relations. (P. 169)

Men and women adjust their behavior in response to whether they adhere to, or deviate from these accepted cultural definitions of gender differences in relationships (Duncombe and Marsden 1993; Migliaccio 2009; Walker 1994).

Some researchers posit that in American culture it may be more acceptable for men to incorporate instrumental activities with self-disclosure towards achieving intimacy in friendships with other men but not with women. Then gendered patterns in intimacy may show behavioral preferences encouraged by societal expectations rather than actual conceptualizations of intimacy (Radmacher and Azmitia 2006). This explanation references Erving Goffman's theory of dramaturgy (Goffman 1959), where men and women "do gender" and "do friendship" as part of the comprehensive performances that creates their gender identities. Men may want to have expressive relationships, but they may choose not to perform effeminate intimacy through increased emotional expression because there are social consequences for inappropriate gender behavior. For example, if it is more acceptable in society for men to perform intimacy using an instrumental approach along with self-disclosure, then men will most likely adjust the way they practice their friendships to meet these expectations for masculine behavior so that they can manage their gender identities in a socially successful and acceptable manner (Migliaccio 2009).

Social constructionist and feminist theory are also highly critical of research that reifies gender differences in heterosexual relationships (Burns 2002). They are skeptical

of findings, which support theories that limit relationships to a single pathway (Macvarish 2008), like Anthony Giddens (1993) work on the “pure relationship” and the “transformation of intimacy.” Critics of his theory take issue with his restrictive construction of the ideal relationship. It does not permit a multidimensional understanding of intimacy (Jamieson 1999; Monsour 1992) and reinforces characteristics attributed to feminine intimacy, like expressive mutual disclosure as the best practice of intimacy. The text supports a therapeutic model for heterosexual relationships and justifies psychological and psychosocial clinical practices that promote couple emotional therapy, especially for men, to improve their ability to perform intimacy successfully and productively (Garfield 2010). Society’s incorporation of these intimacy strategies into the collective understanding of relationships imposes undue responsibility on the individual to conform to restrictive intimacy and can have problematic results for gender relations in relationships. Critics emphasized that Giddens frames marital issues as an individual problem, rather than the product of the forces and processes of greater social milieu (Jamieson 1999). Individuals are compelled to format interactions in their relationships to fit the type of socially valued emotional intimacy and relationship work deemed necessary for success in a heterosexual couple (Burlison et al. 1996; Duncombe and Marsden 1993).

Cultural prescriptions are limited in their ability to account for a substantial amount of aberrant behavior. The conflicting findings around sex-role theory when applied to intimacy and friendship testify to the fallibility of cultural prescriptions as inherent or natural behavior, and to their incomplete control over actual human behavior. The

discrepancy between people's general accounts of friendship and their specific experiences can be explained by recognizing that general representations of gender differences function to provide coherence and understanding of otherwise arbitrary norms through which people attempt to live as gendered humans (Walker 1994). Studying the norms for navigating intimacy in friendship is particularly important because unlike the collectively and extensively sanctioned and stringently regulated norms in kinship relations, individuals could choose virtually any type of categorization to privately regulate intimacy in friendship. While there is a preponderance of friendship studies that focus on gendered practices of intimacy, especially the occurrence of expressive intimacy as an indicator of intimacy in friendship, the pronounced ambiguity and difficulty of navigating friendship suggests that there may be significantly more complex and distinct concerns that determine the existence of intimacy in friendship.

Kin and non-kin interaction in the relationship community

The marital couple alone is severely limited in its ability to meet the numerous and diverse intimacy, stability, and companionship needs of the multifaceted individual over the life course. Some social researchers have already recognized that the idealization of marriage as the solitary source of intimacy in the life course is harmful to healthy stable relationships (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). Michael Kimmel (2011) describes the "traditional" family and marital couple in his text:

[The] 'traditional' ... family was supposed to be the sole source of comfort and pleasure in an increasingly cold, bureaucratic world; the marital union was the single most important and sustaining bond of intimacy and friendship that a person could have. Gone were the more 'traditional' supports of community networks, civic participation, and extended

kinship ties—now the family was suppose to provide for all psychological and emotional needs. (P.149)

The “diversity defenders” and their opponents, the promoters of traditional family and marriage, cannot agree on whether these institutions are declining, but there is no dissension over their concern for the isolation of the nuclear family. David Popenoe said, “Recent family decline is more serious than any decline in the past because what is breaking up is the nuclear family, the fundamental unit stripped of relatives” (1993a:537). He also said, “People today, most of all children, dearly want families... most young children... would probably prefer to live in the large, complex families of old” (1993a:540). The increasingly exclusive, isolated, honored, and idealized marital couple and their children are forced to face extreme pressures, expectations, and obligations with relatively little support. Kimmel references a quote from Margaret Mead before his chapter, “The Gendered Family” (2011) that says, “Nobody has ever before asked the nuclear family to live all by itself in a box the way we do. With no relatives, no support, we’ve put it in an impossible situation” (141). These bleak depictions of the isolated marital couple and nuclear family emphasize the increasing importance of friendship as a potential alternative, supplementary, and complementary relationship to marriage. Friendship can alleviate some of the extensive and intensive pressures burdening the marital couple by improving well-being through voluntary intimacy, social interaction, companionship, structure, socialization, and support for the individual (Birditt and Antonucci 2007; Caldwell and Peplau 1982; Sapadin 1988; Wellman and Wortley 1990).

Research shows that friends make up a large portion of support networks. Strong ties in these relationships provide emotional support, small services, and companionship

to the individual (Pahl and Pevalin 2005; Wellman and Wortley 1990). Friendship is also an integral and congruent support in the management of marital and familial relationships. It has crucial social impact on the way that individuals conceive of relationships and intimacy (Burns 2002; Walker 1994). Friendship is a source of feedback, information, comparison, and reflection in relationships. In the context of the highly idealized marital relationship, friendship is a mitigating tool for navigation of the disjuncture between romantic ideals and the realities of heterosexual relationship success (Hacker 1981; Titus 1980).

Studies have shown novel connections between friendship and marriage. Kira Birditt and Toni Antonucci (2007) found that people with best friends that had at least two high quality relationships, not necessarily with their spouse, were associated with greater well-being. People with high quality family and best friend relationships showed high levels of well-being regardless of a mediocre spousal relationship. People with a best friend did not need a high quality spousal relationship to have psychological well-being. For people without best friends, well-being was especially dependent on quality of spousal relations. Finally, best friends seemed to provide significant additional support as a relationship, but could not completely replace the influence of spousal or familial relations on well-being. From these results Birditt and Antonucci advised that policy or clinical interventions should consider the composition and quality of social networks when determining which relationships should be improved. They suggested that best friends might be important for daily well-being while spousal and family relations were important for overall well being. If policy makers and clinicians consider multiple

relationship improvement in quality across at least two different types of relationships, for example quality relations with family and a friend, then moderate quality relations with a spouse would still result in improved overall well-being (Birditt and Antonucci 2007).

Ray Pahl and Liz Spencer (2004) also noted the importance of analyzing an individual's multiplicity of relationships in context with each other, rather than studying relationship types separately. Sasha Roseneil and Shelley Budgeon (2004) corroborated their approach and argued for an extension of the heteronormative framework to study cultures of intimacy and care. They believed that in order to most accurately understand practices of intimacy and care in the 21st century, it would be necessary to move beyond the framework of families and kin. Jan Yager (1999) made the distinction that friends are not related by blood. She found that the value of friendship increases proportionate to the decline in closeness to the family. However, Pahl and Spencer (2004) disputed this claim, and state that there is no dichotomy of "given" (kinship) and "chosen" (friendship) relationships. Instead, they stated that there is a "suffusion" of friend-like and family-like relationships that produces a highly variable and individualized personal community. They concluded that using the lens of the traditional dyadic relationship to understand the cutting edge of social change in relationships severely undermines accuracy of results (Pahl and Spencer 2004).

Researchers also looked at the various factors that influence the formation, maintenance, and constitution of friendships. Age, gender, and marital status affect the source, amount, and quality of friendships. In younger cohorts, closest friends are non-

kin. After reaching middle-age closest friends are increasingly kin. In the older cohorts the shift is exceptionally pronounced (Pahl and Pevalin 2005). Variability in class (Walker 1995), status, sociable resources (Tsai 2006) and physical distance (Johnson et al. 2009) between members also determine the nature of friendships and how they function. Elisa Bellotti (2008) studied the types of communities and relationships of singles and uses similar community theory as Pahl and Spencer (2004). They have found evidence of friendship substituting for marriage and/or compensating for lack of family relations. Since friendships are not rigidly constrained by outer institutions, the strength of their bonds can range from mere acquaintances, to strength of intense intimacy, which risks severe personal devastation if lost (Yager 1999).

James Ramey (1975; 1977) did two studies on Intimate Friendship (IF) that demonstrated an example of friendship as a negotiable, intimate relationship supplementary or as an alternative to the normative couple. IFs were defined as otherwise traditional friendships where sexual intimacy was also considered appropriate. Participants in IFs were single or people who agreed to a sexually open primary relationship. This agreement was normally reached in couples whose partners desired mutual personal growth, and self-actualization within an egalitarian relationship, sometimes referred to as a “peer bond” (Ramey 1977). IF participants did not appear to be sex addicts or extravagant pleasure seekers. They had less contact with secondary relationships than with the primary relationship—mostly nonsexual—pertaining to intellectual, social, emotional, family, and career, rather than sexual intimacy. Participants viewed IFs as, “a kind of supportive kinship network in which the partners are chosen

and...the possibility that intimacy might become sexual is accepted by both participants and their primary partners or mates” (Ramey 1977: 47). Participants believed that IF openly accepted the potential for sexual intimacy but did not necessarily encourage, require, or enforce sexual involvement.

In fact, the majority of participants found that IFs strengthened their primary relationship. Over 90 percent of the participants were satisfied with their primary relationship and expressed increased satisfaction as a result of sexually open relating. IF participants rated their sex lives as “very satisfactory” and engaged in sexual activity more frequently than the average person; most of their sexual activity was in their primary relationship. Over 70 percent felt that their primary relationship was never threatened or that it was strengthened more than it was threatened by IFs. The majority of the participants claimed that they never experienced jealousy or that it was greatly lessened since they became involved in IFs. The participants in Ramey’s studies believed that IFs were “more rewarding, more honest, and a distinct improvement over their previous lifestyles” (Ramey 1977: 515). In general, participants were comfortable with their life style and the majority did not wish to return to a traditional marriage.

Although most individuals did not take advantage of the sexual opportunities offered by IFs, by recognizing the possibility of sexual overtones and related issues, they disarmed the taboo and tension surrounding sexual intimacy in heterosexual friendships.¹⁰ It is possible, that by acknowledging another type of intimacy in the relationship—other than intimate self-disclosure for example—overall intimacy for relationships within the

¹⁰ See Appendix A. 2nd and 3rd paragraph especially focusing on intimacy limits for cross-sex friendship.

network strengthened and deepened. The positive support and growth in IFs probably alleviated some of the pressure on other relationships and helped individuals to be more effective with their intimacy needs. Instead of placing expectations for all aspects of association on one or a few significant people in their lives, a network of IFs would allow the individual access to diverse compatibilities and help them to get different social benefits from different—perhaps more effective—people. Even though IFs were a favorable change in participants' lives, the majority did not wish to reveal their life style choice to in-laws, parents, or associates, regardless of its positive rewards. An IF network may be more acceptable now, but it is likely that at the time of the study, participants feared the judgment and disapproval from people outside the IF network because they had chosen a highly irregular alternative to the normative sexual exclusivity of the couple relationship in the life course.

Some findings showed that friendship, especially cross-sex friendship, inhibits or conflicts with marital relations. These findings highlight a collective understanding and a structural environment that forces cross-sex friendship to be at odds with the marital couple, which could be detrimental to an individual's well-being, according to the previous studies showing positive benefits from friendship and couple interaction.

John Mayer (1957) studied how friends of an individual in the process of finding a spouse would self-restrain their friendships to facilitate achievement of the goal. He noted that restraining friendships provided a wider range of possible partners, allowed interested individuals to become more prominent, and protected the individual from criticism and possible interference in the development of the relationship once it had

begun. Other research showed that marriage has a major effect on married individual's interaction and intimacy in cross-sex friendships. Married individuals report less contact and affectionate interaction with cross-sex friends than non-married individuals (Booth 1974; Rose 1985). Notably, these findings did not focus on beneficial or negative effects on individual well-being, but rather opinions and practices for finding a spouse, or the negative effect on cross-sex friendship when married.

This thesis investigated the value of friendship in relation to other relationships in a participant's community. I argue that the negotiation of various forms of intimacy within the relationship—an aspect less essential to the existence of kinship relations, which are regulated by public bonds—provided unique social validation to participants. Friendship also enhanced benefits of support and well-being in the relationship community. The goal of the study was to provide more insight into the formation and maintenance of strong, stable, healthy relationships that provide stability and support over the life course and lead to greater well-being for participants. The findings bridge the literature proposing alternative frameworks for the study of relationships and can be used to inform and strengthen the argument for social policy that provides structure and support for changing family demographics and adjustment to the system of institutional practice in the workplace and labor force.

Methods

To explore intimacy in relationships, I applied for and received Tufts University Institutional Review Board approval¹¹ to conduct original qualitative research via in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews. Interviews were 1-2 hours long with 8 male and 8 female self-identified heterosexual participants, aged 24-38 years, residing in the Boston area. 2 women had been previously divorced once and both were in exclusive couples when the interviews took place. 2 women were engaged and 1 woman and 1 man had 2 children each. Overall, there were 5 participants that identified themselves as single and not in a couple relationship. There were 5 participants in an exclusive couple relationship, meaning that they were dating or having that romantic relationship with only one other person. There were also 2 participants in non-exclusive couple relationships.

I originally wanted white, middle-class, heterosexual, U.S. born citizens, aged 24-38 years for the study but I had trouble finding male participants that fit all of these criteria. 14 of the 16 participants were Caucasian. 1 male of those 14 was of British-Columbian nationality. The 2 other participants were U.S. born citizens. 1 male was

¹¹ See Appendix B. Tufts University IRB approval of study

African-American and he was of Nigerian ethnicity. 1 male was Latin-American and he was of Chilean ethnicity.¹²

I chose the 24-38-year-old age group because I wanted participants that were not currently attending the University as undergraduates. I wanted a participant age group in the life stage where marriage would be a concern for at least some of the participants. I thought that the selection of this age group would provide participants that were not concerned with marriage and some that were very concerned about it while still within a small enough range for there to be some overlap in similar life stage experiences in a young adult to middle adult aged cohort. All of the 8 male participants were in their twenties at the time of the interview. There were 4 female participants in their early thirties.

To draw my study sample, I used convenience, snowball, purposive non-random sampling. I did initial outreach sending e-mails¹³ and a flyer¹⁴ to organizations on campus and to personal contacts that had connections to participants falling within the demographics I had selected for the study. I contacted the Tufts Graduate Student Council (GSC), the Tufts REAL program, the Tufts Academic Resource Center (ARC) Graduate Writing Consultants, The Tufts Alumni Network, the TuftsLife website, the Tufts English Department, and a general outreach e-mail to some of my contacts on campus that said they might know potential participants.

¹² See Appendix F. Demographics sign in sheet

¹³ See Appendix C. Participant interview e-mail request

¹⁴ See Appendix D. Participant interview outreach flyer

From that outreach, the Tufts GSC, the Tufts REAL program, and the Tufts ARC supplied the majority of participants. There were 5 participants from the REAL program, 1 of those did not contact me through my e-mail but through a personal contact. Those people along with 3 others were participants that I found through personal contacts. There were at least two participants from the ARC, two graduate students that I am not sure of, and 1 participant that contacted me through snowball sampling—one of his classmates did an interview with me. 1 participant came from my individualized outreach to the Tufts Alumni Network. I filtered and searched the system so that I could individually e-mail every male that had identified as close as possible to my study criteria and had been an anthropology, psychology, or sociology major in their undergraduate time at Tufts. Ultimately, 7 participants were Tufts graduate students, 6 participants were Tufts undergraduate students, and 5 of those 6 participants were from the Resumed Education for Adult Learners (REAL) Program at Tufts. There were 3 participants that were not students and they had full-time jobs. All participation was voluntary and uncompensated. I communicated with participants through e-mail to set up an interview date, time, and location.

Individual interviews took place in private rooms reserved in advance of the interview at the Campus Center at Tufts University. The venue was convenient for participants because it was located centrally on campus, which made it easy to find. It was also equipped with bathrooms, food vendors, comfortable waiting areas with seating and television, and nearby street parking. The rooms were equipped with at least one table, numerous chairs, unnatural and natural light sources, and a clock. They were

appropriately furnished for the interviews because these rooms were normally used for campus organization meetings. I reserved these rooms through the Office of Campus Life in the Campus Center. Rooms were located on the third floor of the Campus Center and were locked if not already reserved and being used. I chose this locale because it assured privacy for the interview, which was important because the topic of intimacy and relationships could have lead to private subject matter that might have been uncomfortable for participants to disclose if in a public space.

I offered bottled water and a snack at the interviews because the participant age cohort meant that most of them were extremely busy with family, work, and school obligations and were not eating regular timely meals. Also, participants were sometimes hungry or thirsty by the end of a long interview so offering food and water established pre-interview rapport with the participants. The rooms did not have tissue in them, so I brought tissues in case a participant might need to use them. I timed the interview on a watch that I could easily check without noticeable disruption of my attention to the participant. I also took minimal notes about related questions I wanted to ask as they arose during the interview.

At each interview I introduced myself and gave the participant a consent form¹⁵ to read and sign before beginning the interview. I also gave them a sheet to fill out that listed columns for demographic information.¹⁶ After they had finished reading, signing, and filling out this information, I verbally affirmed that they understood what they had

¹⁵ See Appendix E. Participant interview consent form

¹⁶ See Appendix F. Demographics sign in sheet

read in the content of the consent form and if they had any questions about it. Then I gave them a short briefing about the study and to prepare them for the interview. I told them the study was about intimacy in relationships, and that intimacy and relationship did not have to necessarily refer to sexual and physical intimacy and romantic relationships. I explained that I would be focusing on friendship, romantic, marital, and family relationships, but that the term relationship could refer to any human interaction or acquaintance including, for example peers or co-workers. I said that I would try to be clear about the relationship type in the interview, but if I was unclear that the participant should ask me to clarify.

I also explained that intimacy generally referred to feeling close to another person, and it could be defined however the participant understood it in his or her life. I gave some examples of different types of intimacy like doing an activity with someone else, laughing with them, or hugging them. I told the participant that the dynamic of the interview meant that I would try to speak very little, and that giving specific examples or stories in response to my questions would be the most helpful and richest data for my study. I also gave them a brief overview of the general relationship types and themes I would be asking about, and said that I would try to cover friendship, intimacy, comparisons between relationships, and kinship relations. I asked questions about these categories using an interview guide,¹⁷ and I audio-recorded the interviews with participant permission.

¹⁷ See Appendix G. Interview guide

After the interviews were completed, I downloaded the free online program ExpressScribe to my laptop to use for transcription. While transcribing I kept a running list of terms and codes that might be useful to me in the process of coding. Before I started coding I also referred back to the qualitative research project on intimacy and relationships I had done for the Qualitative Methods course the previous semester. Referring back to this project helped me to think of concepts from the codes I had used for participant observation and in-depth interviews on the same topics as my thesis. Then I did open coding with original codes on Microsoft Office Word and used colored borders to signify the codes that I kept on a separate word document as a running list. I also kept a number of reflection documents in relation to the codes in order to formulate important themes and groupings while coding. The literature review, the content of the interviews, the running list of codes I had kept while transcribing, and the previous coding I had done on my qualitative research project were all extremely helpful when I was coding. Some of the more significant codes for my argument included: individual affirmation, age cohort, situational, casual intimacy, too intimate, disrupting movement, physical proximity, significant sharing, need of a friend, individual growth, biography, safe space, ability to hurt, too much stuff, hypersensitivity around sex, time spent, equal exchange, prioritizing, diverse compatibilities, cross over, durability, flexibility, obligation, perspective, stability, and mutual relationships.

Then I did focused coding by forming code clusters of the open codes. Examples of some of the initial code clusters I had included: public regulation and less intimate relationship codes, private most-intimate relationship codes, establishing intimacy codes,

dealing with conflict codes, family codes, community codes, technology codes, couple codes, and physically grounded codes. From the previous codes and code clusters, the concepts I initially wanted to bring out included the tension between collective and individual with private and public regulation of intimacy, the diminishing of social networks for this age cohort, the value of friendship within a personal community of relationship types, the hypersensitivity around sex, and the importance of the individual and physical proximity for relationships. I initially chose these concepts mostly because they were all interesting to me from other areas of my life. That strategy was not conducive to forming a coherent argument. I did content analysis of the code clusters and went through the process of multiple argument diagrams and several analytic memos trying to structure an argument from disparate code clusters. I eventually focused my argument on the regulation of intimacy, the value of friendship, and the importance of studying friendship in the context of an individual relationship community.

Findings

Chapter I

Beyond Words: Valuable and Variable Intimacy and Intensity

My findings show that participants recognized emotionally expressive disclosure as the establishment and negotiation of intimacy in friendship. This intimacy was collectively valued. In interviews participants referenced its significance in relation to collectively held beliefs about psychology. The socialization of its practice took place over life stages, particularly in childhood, high school, and college. By studying the way this intimacy manifested itself in relationships it was possible to see the variability of intimacy in actual practice and preference. Intimacy did not have to flow in a dyadic formation but could also exist in triads, larger groups, and communities of friends. Emotionally expressive disclosure was important as a marker of establishing intimacy but was not representative of all valuable intimacies in practice and preference. The reliance on this intimacy was problematic for participants because it marginalized and devalued other types and practices of intimacy.

Socialization of expressive intimacy

Participants talked about the changes to the way they approached relationships in previous life stages. They reviewed transformation in their friendship constituency from childhood to adulthood generally distinguishing high school and college as particularly formative transition periods. Participants believed that there was a fundamental shift from quantity to quality in their friendship makeup from youth to adulthood. Joel, a 25-year-old, white, single, male participant said:

When you're younger, elementary school, middle school the friendship means something different. It's more that you're in the same setting. You ride the bus together. You're in classes together. It's not as much of an emotional bond but more like a playmate. When I was younger it's, "oh I'll have a couple of boy friends over and we'll go play sports outside." It's more active. Once you get older the friendships become deeper in terms of

the type of relationships that you have, what you talk about and what you lean on each other for. In high school people were focused on getting into college and cliques. It was a very competitive environment and it was tough to relate to people that way. Once I came to University I found more people like me that I could relate to on a lot of different levels, not just emotionally, spiritually but interests too.

In his response, Joel described his earlier friendships as more superficial and less consequential compared to his friendships at the time of the interview. Participants differentiated between friendly acquaintances and intimate friends by the level of emotional and private disclosure that they felt they could share with them. Their descriptions of friendly acquaintances were day to day situational relationships whose friendship interactions outside of purposed environments was based on casual group outings, and focused around less intense, ephemeral entertainment, relaxation and mutual interests rather than serious and intense emotional inquiries into personal topics in a more private setting e.g. a two-person discussion separate from public space.

Emphasis on personal and emotional security in closest friendships for this participant age group unconsciously marginalized the value of less intense group activities. Notably, Joel characterized youth friendship similarly to the distinctions made between casual acquaintances and more intimate, highly invested, emotionally intense, close friendships. He implied that doing an activity together for recreational entertainment is a less valuable practice of intimacy than an emotionally involved interaction. The end of Joel's response reveals that in fact what he appreciated most about the friendships he made in college in comparison to those he had in high school was not depth in terms of emotive intensity but rather the enhanced strength of one relationship bond encompassing many types of intimate ties. Valuing friendship by assessing it in comparison to a specific idealized type of intimacy along a scale of lowest to highest

intensity is not an accurate depiction of the variability of intimacy and its value in friendship.

Additionally, participants talked about their shift in friendship from youth to adulthood by describing their younger selves as more prone to having a general lack of concern for proper public comportment and social consequences. Conflict was described as less significant, more ephemeral, and overall less consequential during childhood and young-adult years. Logan, a 26-year-old, married, male, undergraduate student, with two kids said:

It's a small campus and the part of it in which I'm involved is a small subset and I have a fairly limited number of people with whom I interact regularly. I not only consciously worry but implicit in the ways that I interact with people worry of saying the wrong thing or getting the wrong reputation and then having that snowball and cause problems in my life that are more than social... When I was younger I was much more open I was much more irresponsible. I was able to form close friendships relatively soon after meeting people. But also I had a lot of enemies. They're not necessarily enemies but people who really didn't like me because they found me offensive. I've managed to become less offensive to people. When I was younger, I didn't care what anybody thought. I didn't mind offending people and I didn't have concern for my future.

At the time of the interview, participants were at a life stage where they preferred to avoid conflict if possible. Participants gave examples of romantic relationships and living situations where dissatisfaction with the relationship occurred for an extended period of time on a regular basis, and conflict avoidance was still preferable to openly engaging in disagreement that would cause unnecessary trouble, and take more time and effort than a possible solution might be worth. Participants described their aversion to conflict with distinct differences between their age cohort at the time of the interview and youth.

However it was important to note that along with different meaning placed on conflict as children, intimacy and friendship were valued and constructed differently as well.

Referring to the beginning of this chapter, youth friendship was likened to less valuable, casual, less-intimate, ephemeral, situational friendship rather than close friendship. Both conflict and friendship were depicted as far more common in quantity and far less meaningful in youth. Conversely, in adulthood, negotiating conflict and friendship seemed much more significant because of participants' heightened awareness of potential consequences and their emphasis of managing investment of limited resources like time and effort.

Participants felt their ability to navigate intimacy and negotiate relationships had improved over time but by comparing it to their description of childhood relationships, it seemed that their comparison was actually an incomplete assessment of how they had matured. Instead, over time participants had familiarized themselves through socialization with collective norms valuing expressive emotional disclosure. The significance of this type of intimacy rests on privileging access to private, personal, emotional vulnerability. The consequences of valuing of this type of intimacy meant enhanced consciousness of private sharing over other types of interaction and intimacy. Socialization imposed pressure on participants to cultivate valuable negotiation and navigational skills specific to this type of intimacy and emphasized fear of emotional pain. Participant aversion to pain applied to anything from daily housekeeping complaints between roommates all the way through romantic relationship issues and marital disagreements and ironically resulted in the silencing of the individual.

Psychosocial reinforcement of expressive intimacy

Support groups, self-help culture, and therapy focalize their strategies around this type of intimacy, thereby idealizing it through their promotion as the most effective and most acknowledged type of intimacy for success with intimacy in personal relationships. It reinforces the social value of this specific type of intimacy over other types in relationships. In addition, it creates the necessity for respective set of specific communication social skills with which to navigate a plethora of collective public norms in order to be successful in personal relationships. Kendra was a 27-year-old, white female, undergraduate student, engaged-to-be married. She said:

I have been in therapy my whole life. I study psychology. I do substance abuse counseling. I have to remember that I articulate my feelings a lot better than some people can. When you're feeling so angry you wanna put your fist through a wall, can you stop and say, 'I'm feeling so angry and here's why.' People can't do that. I have had 12 years of training of how to do this...I've been taught that and I teach that a lot...Maybe it seems unemotional. I cry, I yell, I stomp my foot on the floor when I'm fighting with my boyfriend so it's not that I don't feel these things but I know in that state we're not gonna accomplish anything. Other therapists and counselors do this. If I approach you and say, 'I'm feeling like this. This is what I need from you' (lets air out exasperated) my boyfriend always says, 'I don't understand what you're saying. What are you saying?' I'll say, 'it's so clear to me...I'm telling you I'm feeling unsupported right now and this is a reflection of the dishes are still on the sink and you know how busy I am,' and he's like, 'I didn't feel like doing the dishes. It doesn't mean I'm not supporting you' but to me nothing can jus be; it means something...The most important thing is you need to be able to be comfortable with saying what you need from anybody and people can't do that... That is so vulnerable to say, 'I'm feeling sad I'm feeling needy'...That's what's really important to me is that I can be vulnerable enough to say what I need.

Kendra believed that she had been extensively trained in the best way to navigate intimacy and negotiate conflict in relationships. She felt that these skills had to be taught and they functioned through specific practices of sharing emotional vulnerabilities and needs. She also felt that this type of intimacy was legitimated because of its basis in therapy. In the social cultural context of a competitive capitalist society, she considered this type of intimacy as best practice because it was more effective and productive

towards “accomplishing something.” It suggests that there should be “productive” results; there has to be a greater purpose behind intimacy and conflict other than inherent value in the existence of basic human interaction.

This type of intimacy is considered more valuable because it seems logical that it is the most effective way to share the private individual self, which as mentioned before, is highly valued in American society because of its exclusivity and autonomous power. Nevertheless, going back to Dan’s description of the contrasting intimacy between his parents, the argument could also be made that the fact that Dan knows his father loves him without his father having to say it because he demonstrates it, means that this type of intimacy is actually more intimate, individual, and private than an intimacy based on public declarations that anyone could understand the meaning of.

In addition, Kendra acknowledges the contradiction of removing emotion from expressing emotion in order to be successful in the practice of this intimacy. This type of intimacy requires the isolation of emotion and pain. It limits their power and value to the constricting confines of verbal expression and the problematic language form. A receiver might experience a pronounced contrast of meaning between seeing someone burst into tears and listening to someone calmly and rationally explain that they are feeling sad. By constructing intimacy and its practice in this specific manner, other types of intimacy and interaction that do not follow the format of expression towards the goal of accomplishment are devalued.

Kendra and other participants stressed the importance of gaining the skills and practice of translating their emotions and needs into words for the purpose of sharing

them with others in order to be successful in personal relationships and intimacy. However, the collective valuing of this type of intimacy overlooked the important connection to the significance of face-to-face interaction and different channels of communication covered in the next chapter. Kendra seemed to assume that expressing a thought in words would ensure unadulterated perception upon its receipt. She could not fathom why her boyfriend did not understand what she was saying when it seemed clear to her. She seemed to assume that the only way another person would understand her meaning was if she expressed it verbally. If that were true, face-to-face interaction to establish intimate and closest relationships would not be necessary. Yet, participants valued other kinds of communication like body language and delivery that could not be captured by words by continually expressing the need to establish intimacy by extended face-to-face interaction. Similarly, Dan's quote about his father shows that there other ways than expressive means to communicate intimacy.

Kendra was particularly loquacious with her support for this type of intimacy and how it functioned, but other participants also referenced beliefs about psychological findings and conflict mediation techniques like "I statements." When participants mentioned being taught these techniques to navigate conflict, they framed their knowledge of them similar to Kendra. They felt that they had gained a valuable ability to express private individual emotions and vulnerability and understood these skills to be the most effective way to navigate intimacy and conflict. Furthermore, the assumption that language was capable of accurately conveying the message intended by the source was questionable. In a way, the raw instinctual emotion loses immeasurable facets of

significance along the pathway of transfer when it is translated into words by the individual, received by another person and finally interpreted for its meaning. Language and communication are inherently prone to misunderstanding between individuals coming from distinct worldviews and life courses.

The diversity of intimacy

Although significant emotional disclosure was an initial marker of establishing intimacy, once the boundary of public propriety had been breached and the precedent set, intimacy was established through a variety of mechanisms. Kylie was a 33-year-old, white, female, undergraduate student working part-time. She was previously divorced and in a couple relationship at the time of the interview. She said:

She [friend] divulged a lot of her history to me and we had a lot of stuff about our childhood and our first experiences at college in common. We both had relatively alienating experiences at college and it was the fact that she...felt like she could share those things with me. Once we had shared that information with each other, it created this bond... It was very sensitive information that you don't tell everybody. Then it would be reinforced by going out and doing something together, and we'd find out more about each other. It was appreciating the differences in our lives and then recognizing where we were the same. Then that moves on to sharing goals or what that person wants out of their life, so you know where your place is in the future. You show this trajectory of past present and future and that's what creates a certain amount of closeness.

Related to the findings in the next chapter about face-to-face time and other types of communication beyond expression, Kylie's description of establishing intimacy was far more complicated than the initial disclosure. The disclosure acted as a marker of possible intimacy but the actual establishment required interaction and communication on a variety of levels. Amanda described intimacy in her closest friendships:

With Ken and Kim part of it is just feeling totally comfortable. Also, it's this atmosphere that we've created of having a good time together that's a positive feedback cycle...

Every time I go there I'm like, 'woo, this is gonna be so fun.' I go in happy and they're happy and it feeds into itself. Ken, I always really liked and admired him. I met him in high school. He and Kim moved to Boston so they didn't know that many people here. Kim is more talkative than he is and was also a facilitator in the group. It wasn't suddenly my little party with Ken was ruined because Kim was there—just made better.

Amanda also believed that intimacy meant feeling comfortable enough to freely express herself, but she also noted the important aspect of casual and fun interaction. It was also interesting that she was initially a friend of Ken but after Ken and Kim were dating and she met Kim, Kim became part of their friendship.

Amanda's description of her closest friends showed a dynamic distinct from the dyadic construction of the word relationship and most relationships we think of. It showed that intimacy in friendship is flexible and can flow through multiple individuals and formations. Mary was a 26-year-old, white, female, graduate student, in an exclusive couple at the time of the interview. She described another example of negotiating a friendship triad

I have an interesting friend situation because there's three of us, which causes issues cause three is a weird number and one of em is a boy so it's even weirder. These are two friends from childhood. I was the friend of both of them before we all three became friends so I have different ties to them... That was really great when we all lived at home because then we all could be together... It took a long time to navigate the threesomeness.

Mary had sustained these friendships for over twenty years and negotiating the “threesomeness” gave her a lot of group dynamics to talk about that were not present in the majority of relationship descriptions. There was a common thread of jealousy when a dyad broke off from a triad and issues when the individuals were in a romantic couple. There was also the constant advice from others that she would not be able to sustain a close friendship with the boy. The triad format was probably much more difficult to navigate

because of its immersion in a society that conceives of relationships in dyads. Ned was a 25-year-old, white, male, in an exclusive couple at the time of the interview. Ned described how he made some of his closest friends:

Just the living situation—we were just constantly together—we all lived in the house. There's five of us. It was almost like an extended family. Not to say that had we not lived together that things would be different, but definitely living together. You come home from work and your buddy's sitting there. There's constant hanging out.

Ned's quote reflected participant accounts of becoming intimate friends with people not initially close to the participant until they lived together. These accounts reinforced the link to physical grounding being essential to the production of intimacy. Living with a group of friends exposed individuals to private aspects of each other's lives. For example a person might hear a private phone conversation of another housemate that they would not otherwise be privy to had they not been living together. Logan said:

It [physical proximity] can serve as a catalyst [for friendship]...A number of my most intimate friendships have been people whom I lived with and people whom I didn't know that well until I started living with them. I've met people where I had the feeling that I really could become a close friend with this person if we were in the same place—if we were spending half an hour every morning together—a really strong friendship might grow out of that. It takes a good amount of mutual exposure to develop friendships and then to develop intimate relationships. One of the reasons that it gets harder as you get older is cause you don't have roommates and housemates and people who are in a similar situation in life with whom you spend a lot of time. That's not to say that it can't happen but it doesn't happen on its own as easily.

The constant contact and exposure to each other also meant that one of the critical criteria for establishing intimacy in friendship was cover—significant amount of in-person time.

When participants described the intimacy produced by marriage, there was a lot of similarity in regards to the pathway of intimacy build up, which was basically extended time, sharing the same physical space. For younger participants still in their 20s, there were descriptions of friend groups. Notably, for the older participants, friends were talked

about as a few separate individuals that usually did not know each other, and then a number of friendly acquaintances that the participant knew through their occupation. Participants also talked about the friendship they had from communities through their occupation, activities, religion, and interests. Dan was a 27-year-old, white, male, graduate student. He was in an exclusive couple at the time of the interview. Dan said:

My best days are days when I'm interacting with a lot of people. Both friends and even classmates, who I'm friendly with them but they're not necessarily friends. I feel a very strong need to stay connected, to be interacting with people throughout the day. I definitely feel my best days are the days when I see a number of people on campus that I'm friendly with even if it's just for a quick 'howsit going? What are you up to? Grab a quick coffee?' or something. That kind of stuff's really important to me. I'm pretty prone to feeling lonely if I have a number of days in a row or a week where I'm not interacting with people. So that's definitely a big part of my daily life, social interaction.

In this quote, Dan talked about the benefits of a different intensity and type of intimacy at the University, which was a community and was also where his occupation is located. The daily exchanges he had there were not intense, intimate, emotional disclosure, but rather less intimate casual interaction.

The reinforcement of expressive emotional disclosure as the most valuable intimacy type marginalizes and devalues the practice and preference of alternative intimacies and intensities. Participants cited a number of different examples alternative to disclosure and emotional expression. Kylie said:

When we get together...we'll go out and grab a coffee, talk and bitch about what's goin on in our lives and our significant others, and then we give each other a hug and take off...We don't spend a lot of intense time together.

Kylie described the interactions within one of her intimate friendships. Although sharing was an aspect of the intimacy they shared, the majority of the content was not emotionally expressive or significant. Cindy was a 31-year-old, single, white, female,

graduate student at the time of the interview. She shared her doubts about the value of a friendship entirely given to emotional expressivity.

You would be exhausted [laughs a little]. Even I can't get enough of talking but sometimes you need a break and you can't always do that much self-analysis or gut wrenching talk about the world. You wanna talk about T.V. and you wanna talk about what music you like. Having a variety of friendships that allows you to engage in those different kinds of conversation are really important. The best friendships are the ones that that exists in one person... I'll meet up with a friend who will laugh about something that I made for dinner and we'll talk about something more serious and then shift back to talking about something else lighthearted. That variety is very important.

Cindy valued intimate relationships that had differing levels of intensity and significant content. Kylie added:

There is value in having casual relationships. There's a certain amount of funness that's lacking from a lot of my relationships because they are so serious or so intense. There is such a high level of knowledge that's necessary for me to be friends with somebody... I wish that I could have some frivolous relationships where you just chill with people... These gaggles of girls that will go out they don't necessarily know that much about each other; it's superficial... They don't even need to be friends and some of them can even hate each other... That casualness or that lack of intimacy is okay with them. They don't need the intimacy to have a good time... I miss that. Sometimes you wanna go out and have a good time ... You don't have to be intense or have a lot of physical or emotional investment in something. Cause it's a lot of work. Sometimes what you need out of a friendship is just to have a good time, be silly and do something stupid. In these intense intimate relationships, you can do those kinda things but you're always having to do the work of the relationship at the same time.

Kylie also wanted relationships of differing intensity. She felt that most of her relationships required a high level of intimacy and she missed having less-intimate relationships. She saw value in having the physical presence and company of other people in a group but not necessarily having to know them intimately in any intense, emotional, and privately invested way. Kylie also described another type of intimacy that showed the value of physical presence:

Being able to be with somebody but without having to talk to them or be constantly engaged with them is really important to me. I don't like to talk a lot. I could go to Katie's [friend] house, we could sit in the same room and study, and we don't have to talk the entire time. I could be with Matt in the apartment and just knowing that he's there—I

don't know what's so comfortable about that, but when he's gone for two weeks for business—that human contact without being physically in contact with each other is important.

Kylie described the intimacy of living together and inhabiting the same physical space without talking. Although she did not verbally engage the other individual in this description of intimacy, she still valued the intimacy with these specific individuals and would not have felt the same degree of noticeable lack or presence of intimacy if she had been sitting silently with someone else. Dan gave another example:

My thought did quickly turn to a physical intimacy not necessarily a sexual intimacy but there is something more intimate about having the same conversation that you might have had with a friend, with your romantic partner while laying in bed. There is something about the physical intimacy that is incredibly powerful, or holding hands... There's something very powerful and comforting supportive about it.

Dan's quote represents many participant responses that vouched for the importance of physical affection or physical intimacy. While some participants claimed to be more physically affectionate than others and sometimes differed between relationships and contexts, participants thought that the presence of physical affection or intimacy was a good sign of a healthy relationship. Most participants thought it was more necessary for romantic and marital relationships and not as important to friendship, but it was described as another beneficial kind of bond that could strengthen the overall relationship. Dan also described the intimacy that he had with his parents and that they had in their relationship:

With my mother, I call her at least once a week and catch up with her... My father couldn't last three minutes on a phone (laughs)... He's not a talker at all, even in person. It's more doing activities with him. He sent an email to me and my brother saying... he just bought us all Celtics tickets. That was his way of showing, 'I love you and lets get together'... That's the way he shows that he cares and it's not through talking and asking... My mother is a talker. They have a very interesting dynamic together because I remember once as a kid I was on a ride with my father and this was the most he's ever opened up to me. He says, 'oh Dan, your mother, I don't know. She loves to talk and I just can't give that to her.' He's just an incredibly quiet man.

Dan believed his parents loved him equally and showed it differently. This quote and the others before it suggest that intimacy is much more variable, complex, flexible, and fluid in relationships than it is given credit for. In participant responses, intimacy was described as being able to flow through multiple relationship forms and through different practices.

However, the ambiguity and variability of intimacy also made it difficult to navigate. Participant testimonies showed that navigating intimate boundaries and negotiating relationships was an exceedingly complicated and individualized process. Participants felt they had improved skills and strategies to manage intimacy in relationships over time. However, it would be more precise to say that they had gained greater familiarity with cues of emotional disclosure. By gaining skill and experience over time with sharing and communicating they felt like they able to avoid a greater amount of intimacy issues by navigating emotional involvement through expressive disclosure. Participants mentioned other kinds of intimacy in addition to those above: loyalty, reliability, sharing silence in the same physical space, silent physical intimacy and affection, one-sided listening, and casual activity-based recreation to name a few, but participants disproportionately valued and related being able to express emotional vulnerabilities as a way to establish intimacy and address conflict in relationships compared to these other forms of intimacy.

I found that participants were socialized over the life course to value emotionally expressive disclosure as the most effective practice to manage intimacy and conflict in relationships. It was considered the most effective practice to communicate the

exclusively valued personal thoughts and feelings of the private individual. This definition and practice of intimacy marginalized the value of other intimacies that were also valuable to individuals in their responses. Emotionally expressive disclosure was often a social marker to begin establishing intimacy but the actual creation of the safe space for intimate friendship required a more comprehensive and complex test of compatibilities. Participants offered descriptions of multiple relationship sources, various forms of intimacy, and different intensities that were all individually valued but were also described as if their intimate value was a personal insight and discovery. In contrast, the explanation of private disclosure was assumed to be understood as intimately valued. I found that accounts of practice and preference for intimacy were more complex and variable than was first described in definition by participants.

Chapter II

Friends with Social Validation Benefits: Privileged Access to the Private Individual

Respondents described friendship as an ambiguous relationship that provided a flexible structure for the creation of an individualized, private, and intimate space. However, the variability and individuality of intimacy seen in the previous chapter meant that creating, navigating, negotiating, and regulating an intimate space in friendship and establishing intimacy within the relationship required intensive time and effort. The choice to establish intimacy and to increase and maintain it in intimate friendship required investment and commitment of the individual to navigate individualized preferences and practices of intimacy. Employing the free will to invest effort into the creation and management of a non-kin relationship beyond the civilities required by public norms for strangers was a powerful act of social validation for the individuals

involved. The unique social validation of friendship was inherently tied to the value of the individual; it voluntarily bestowed privileged access to the private self on another person. In addition, it was a relationship described as capable of enduring over time and distance, and able to provide valuable long-term support over the life course.

Individual choice produces unique social validation

In this study, I found that participants believed that intimacy was initially established by emotionally expressive disclosure. They knew that it had been established when they felt that the relationship was a “safe space,” characterized by trust, open sharing and acceptance. It was necessary for participants to have a certain amount of face-to-face interaction in a shared physical space to establish intimacy in friendship. Although face-to-face time was necessary to establish intimacy, physical proximity was not as important to maintain it. Choosing a friend was an individualized process of constructing the relationship for each manifestation of friendship. The criteria used to choose a friend was complex and ambiguous. It was a unique process— individualized per participant and individualized per participant relationship. There were some broad premises that increased the likelihood of friendship, which included similar life stage, shared status or role in a situational environment, similar life situation in terms of relationship status, especially marital and family status, and compatibility of intimacy and friendship needs. Compatibility of needs was especially important in terms of conflict, dissatisfaction and misunderstanding within friendship related to topics of sexual and physical intimacy, emotional investment, and unequal exchange of commitment.

Before intimate friendship could be established, participants had to choose their friends. They used a diverse set of criteria. Some participants thought that intimacy was established by lasting over an extended period of time in the quantity of decades. They believed that time was important in order to establish the background knowledge of another individual in terms of events that had shaped them and things that they cared about. Other participants thought that friendship could happen quicker dependent on compatibility and life situation, so that intimacy was not a function of time. Some people thought having common interests were important, and others thought it was more important to be able to engage in deep reflection. The diversity of criteria reflected the importance of the individual definition and specific needs the participants had for friendship. In general, the reasoning behind one set of criteria or another suggested that there would be a critical mass of content that would provide structure to the relationship through which friends could engage one another.

First, choosing a specific individual as a friend and then, investing in the process of establishing intimacy in the friendship was essential to the production of social validation benefits for the individuals involved. Cindy said:

Friendship is important because beyond the immediate social relationships that you have with people, like your family, you need to be accepted and cared for by the social world —by strangers—there's no reason for them to be invested in you. Affirmation outside of your family lets you know that you're doin' all right... Friends [are] an affirmation that you make people comfortable. The way that you operate does not repel people; they want to be in your company. That affirmation is...giving their stamp of approval on the person that you project into the world.

This social validation was a potent aspect of intimate friendship and especially pronounced when compared to social validation from kinship bonds. Even if the desire to commit and invest in kinship disappeared, the relationship still existed for participants.

The solitary individual could not create or terminate kinship bonds without engaging in a formal and informal public process.¹⁸ In contrast, respondents privately regulated the existence of friendship by first choosing to create the relationship, and then choosing to sustain the maintenance of its existence. Friendship did not exist outside of the individual choice to commit and invest in it. The social validation from kinship relations was somewhat weakened or less prominent than in friendship because benefits from investment and commitment to the relationship, like intimacy, existed to a greater degree due to involuntary, obligatory compulsion from public sanctions. Cindy continued:

You never get to choose your family; they just have to love you [laughing]. But when somebody chooses you and they're continuing to choose you every day that's inherently affirming—you feel like you can demonstrate all sides of yourself—that every part of yourself is welcome...with romantic relationships and friendships there's something really great about picking somebody out of a crowd.

Cindy's description of the distinct connection between choice, affirmation and non-kin relations highlights the dependence of the value of friendship on the value of individualism in American society. Friendship relies entirely on individual agency and private regulation for its existence. The implementation of the individual's power in friendship is increasingly more significant in the context of American values and social forces placing greater value on the individual as a discrete, powerful, private entity in modern society.¹⁹

Expression of emotional vulnerability as a social marker for intimacy

¹⁸ See Appendix H. Respondent quotes demonstrating public regulation of intimacy and valuable relationships

¹⁹ See Appendix I. Historical origins of the private individual and its relevance to friendship

Participants believed that intimacy in friendship was initially established by an expressive exchange of emotionally significant, private, exclusive, personal material. The heightened sensitivity and awareness of the significance surrounding an exchange of emotional disclosure was linked to intimacy through the underlying fear of emotional pain and aversion to emotional vulnerability and risk in American culture.²⁰ Cindy said:

Intimacy starts because I've made myself vulnerable and put some things out there and the person responds to it and makes themselves vulnerable, or they go first and then I respond. Somebody initiates hedging of putting themselves out there in a greater caliber than the music they like or the movies they watch. Intimacy starts because there's a recognition that somebody is letting all their guard down and being themselves with you.

This type of intimacy was an interaction signal to participants that they were being given exclusive and privileged access to the private and personal psyche via emotionally destabilizing information. The heightened emotional significance and expressivity of the disclosure marked the sharing as an opportunity signpost to achieve a higher level of intimacy in the relationship if the participant were to reciprocate with acceptance and equal exchange of their own emotional vulnerability. The value of individualism and the private self as a powerful autonomous entity with agency in American society enhanced the meaning of disclosing private and personal information exclusive from public access.

Intimate friendship: a safe space insured by trust

²⁰ The dominance of this interaction as a collectively understood signal of establishing intimacy is reflective of the dominance of Freud's psychoanalysis and the related success self-help culture in the U.S. Associate professor of critical theory at the University of Toronto Mari Ruti, makes an interesting reevaluation of the role love and pain play in intimate relationships in Chapter 9: "Breaking the Patterns of Pain" in her text *The Case for Falling in Love: Why We Can't Master the Madness of Love—and Why That's the Best Part*.

Participants knew that intimacy had been established when the environment of the relationship had become a “safe space” for equal exchange of emotionally significant and expressive disclosure of sensitive, private, personal matters. Most intimate friendship provided a secure private space of understanding, flexibility and trust. The privileged intimate knowledge that friends shared with each other about their private selves in an intimate friendship enhanced their agency within the relationship. The value of friendship relied on the value of the individual in society, but also important, was the ability of friendship to increase individual agency confined within the relationship. Individuals felt that there was a greater level of honesty in intimate friendship that allowed them open expression to the point of disagreement and criticism. For most intimate friendship, disagreement was often characterized as helpful for its ability to provide a different perspective and help the individual to grow. Dan said:

I would define it [friendship] as complete trust in the other person—feeling free to say what you wanna say without fear of repercussion. A level of commitment, knowing that person wants to be around you, cares for you deeply...who knows me well enough where they feel comfortable speaking their mind to me...cause there’s an underlying trust. We know we’re good friends, we’re supporting each other, so we both feel comfortable saying, ‘What are you thinking? You shouldn’t take that job. That person’s not right for you.’...That’s the biggest difference between my really good friends, who I feel like I could tell anything to and who would tell me anything and people who are friends but I don’t know them quite as well. When you don’t know someone on that level there’s this politeness. Everyone does it cause you don’t know how feedback will be received unless you know a person well.

Through comfortable unregulated exchange individuals felt like the “safe space” they had created in intimate friendship enabled them to express themselves with a greater degree of freedom from judgment, social sanction, rejection, stigma, and expectations. Dan said:

With my good friends topics range from the completely mundane—talking about what’s going on in politics or news—to more insignificant things...Our conversations might start, ‘What have you been up to? How’s Karla? [friend’s girlfriend]’ Superficial stuff might launch us into, ‘I thought she said she was moving, looking for a job, are you guys

gonna stay together? It ebbs and flows between being very superficial and all of a sudden it's very deep and then something completely stupid. It's a completely free flowing conversation.

Dan's quote showed that the opportunity for significant and sensitive sharing existed in intimate friendship, but that intimate friendship also encompassed a dynamic variety of intensity and intimacy levels. Closest friends shared, among other things: vulnerabilities, space, humor, experiences, affection, caring, activities, conflict, thoughts, life stages, problems, food, personal biographies, networks and resources. Participants felt that they had attained an open exchange in most intimate friendship because there was usually an established precedent of emotionally significant disclosure, and trust had become an understood aspect of the intimacy in the relationship. An increased variability and flexibility of the intimacy in friendship structured the exchange to be able to adapt to changes in intimacy and intensity levels throughout the interaction.

Face-to-face time is necessary for establishing intimacy

A substantial face-to-face shared time investment was necessary for establishing intimacy in friendship. Especially for intimate friendship, which existed primarily for the sake of the relationship,²¹ interactions created the friendship and structured the intimacy in it. Since intimacy and value in relationships are believed to be heavily dependent on disclosure and expressivity, participants needed to learn how to communicate and be intimate with each other on an individually appropriate basis in order to successfully

²¹ Comparatively, other less intimate relationships might be regulated by specific purposes or kinship relations are regulated and defined by other bonds.

negotiate the intimate friendship. Emma was a 33-year-old, married, white, female, graduate student with two kids. She said:

It's really important when you're establishing a friendship to have lots of face-to-face time. I've been able to maintain friendships without a lot of face-to-face time. The people that I'm closest to—not necessarily that I talk to the most—are the people that I have spent a lot of face-to-face time with. Often you end up spending a whole day together one time. Over the course of the day, shopping, going to a movie, lunch, you string a bunch of activities together and you realize that you spent six hours together and you've been talking the whole time. That's really important to somebody becoming a close friend. Once you've passed that hurdle those close friendships you can maintain. That's the definition of a close friendship to me. You can maintain a good relationship even when you don't see each other all the time. Little bursts by phone or e-mail or whatever will keep things going when you're not able to actually see each other.

In the example of Emma's quote, spending an entire day together doing different activities in various settings probably established the relationship by putting Emma and her friend in distinct contexts and situations that gave them opportunities to navigate relationship compatibility and negotiate intimacy throughout the day, thereby creating the friendship bonds themselves. Clara was a 29-year-old, white, female, graduate student.

She was engaged at the time of the interview. She said:

[Physical face-to-face interaction is] really important in establishing a friendship not so important in maintaining it... Well-established relationships, where they come back and we pick up where we left off, feels like we're in the middle of a conversation. But I don't think I would be able to start to develop a really intimate friendship with a sense of confidence about that intimacy without physical presence.

Communication was a highly individualized process and face-to-face time negotiating the exchange created the individualized manifestation of friendship and intimacy within it.

Participants had to manage contextual information that was pertinent to the relationship and the interaction beyond time and space, and they had to delivery it appropriately within the current context of the exchange.

Participants thought that face-to-face time established a more reliable and comprehensive interaction that could not be achieved through alternative virtual modes of communication. Ned explained his misgivings about information communications technology (ICT) use as a replacement for in-person interaction:

There's certain emotions that you can't get through alternative ways, whether it be emails or texting. There's certain things that don't come across and don't translate correctly. I'd much rather be one-on-one with somebody. Plus, you can talk to somebody via email and then if you get face-to-face with them it's different. They could be completely awkward.

According to Ned, communication was less rich and less transparent in alternative modes of interaction, like ICT, and could depict inaccurate compatibility in the relationship.

Participants preferred sharing the same physical space and interacting face-to-face because there was an important dynamic of delivery, reactions, and response that was lost in other media. Cindy said:

Growing up there's so much friendship making that happens in virtual worlds, online and things like that. It's so foreign to me. I really shine and I'm really at my best when I can be interacting with somebody actually in front of them. Even phone conversations, I'm not really a big fan of. It's absolutely essential for me to be in the company of somebody to establish a real meaningful friendship. I'm so expressive. I gesture a lot, the way I relate to people—so much of my communication is not just what I'm saying—it's coming straight out of my heart. That all gets completely lost if it's not in front of them.

Cindy explained that in face-to-face situations people share information about themselves in many ways. They exchange hard facts about their backgrounds but they also learn to navigate communication norms and test intimate boundaries by reading and responding to body language. Face-to-face interaction was believed to be critical to the process of building trust, rapport, and familiarity for the foundation of an intimate friendship.

Intimate friendship resilience over time and space

Since intimate friendship indicated a principle investment in the individual, after an unknown quantity of initial face-to-face time in the same physical space, friendship intimacy was flexible and resilient in regards to regular maintenance, physical proximity, and frequent face-to-face interaction. Dan gave an example:

Two of my closest friends from high school, when we've been in the same area we've seen each other quite a bit and there've been times where we've gone six months without seeing each other. It's a weird sense of loyalty...One of my good friends, when I do see him he'll say, 'you know I'd do anything for you it doesn't really matter that I haven't seen you in a long time.' When I think of my best friends growing up...it's very much unspoken but I definitely feel that in any situation I could pick up where we left off.

Most intimate friendship allowed for individual growth, change, and transition without negative effects on the relationship because the friendship was not hinged on any one particular aspect of the identity; caring did not flow through a single channel of connection. The flexibility of intimate friendship made it resilient and helped it to endure over time and distance despite life course volatility in shifting occupations, financial situations, relationships, interests, activities, and residence. Kendra illustrated this point with an example:

I have a friend—we have been friends for twenty-one years this year—she's my best friend in the world. We've ebbed and flowed through life. We've had fallings out. We've had fights. We had fistfights when we were thirteen...She knows I need my space sometimes. She's really busy so I know if she doesn't call me back she's busy. I'm not gonna say, 'I can't believe you didn't call me back. I can't believe you're out taking the dog for a walk, cooking, going out with your husband, eating with your in-laws and you can't stop for an hour and talk to me.' I would never expect that and she wouldn't expect that.

As Kendra notes, intimacy in friendship demonstrated flexibility after intimacy was established. Intimate friendships could span time and distance even with low levels of maintenance and infrequent and irregular in-person meetings. Yet, even if infrequent, closest friendships that did last over time and distance did require a minimum amount of

updating on current concerns in the person's life in order to provide support in the relationship. Emma explained:

You have to know what's going on in people's lives currently in order to support them. A friend to me is somebody who you can call up when something's going wrong to talk about it and if they don't know about your current situation it's hard to be like, 'hi we haven't talked in a long time. Oh, you didn't know that I was in graduate school but I am and there's this professor who's really terrible.' If you have to supply a bunch of backstory before you can talk about the current situation it's really difficult. It doesn't feel like somebody that you can call on for support.

Most participants claimed that if they had the opportunity to be in the same physical space with a previously close friend that they would still be close, it also seemed important to participants to have intermittent face-to-face interaction as a necessary thread interspersing distance friendships. During interludes of physical face-to-face interaction, closest friends used various modes of ICT like calling, text-messaging, social-networking sites, instant messaging, and e-mail to stay in touch until they could meet in person. In general, participants talked about seeing distant closest friends a few times a year regardless of regular or sporadic maintenance through alternative forms of communication.

Some participants were more vocal about the necessity for a future in-person encounter in order to continue an intimate friendship. These accounts reinforced the importance of face-to-face interaction as a veritable testimony to compatibility. It would seem that intimacy is inherently linked to physical grounding. The assumption seems problematic because distant intimate friends that did not maintain regular long-distance contact were not actually participating in the relationship in terms of interactions. Distant intimate friends may undergo significant transitions during periods without contact and without verification of their compatibility with each other. Participants believed that

usually an extended amount of face-to-face time was necessary to establish intimacy and create friendship initially because it provided transparency through multiple opportunities to truly know the private intimate individual in more aspects than a singular instance or context. It seems for distant intimate friends, the reassuring knowledge of the untapped resource produces benefits of well-being and social validation, and raises the question of how accurate and necessary face-to-face interaction actually is in producing the benefits of friendship.

Individualized need of a friend: moving and marital status

The most important determinant for the possibility of establishing friendship was dependent on need. The need of a friend depended on life situation mostly affected by relationship status and recent residential movement. Mary said:

What I look for in a friend is someone who's equally in need of a friend... You can sense in other people when they wanna make a friend and not just an acquaintance or like a friend in class but an actual outside of class friend. There has to be equal amount of need and space. Emotional space in terms of how much they wanna know about you and how much they are willing to open up about themselves and if they wanna see you outside of class is an indication. There's this girl that's really nice that I ride on the bus with every time. We don't ever go past talking about school and I get off at my stop and she gets off at hers. It's great and it's a really pleasant trip and I like that she's there but it's been clear that I don't think we're gonna have each other over for dinner. Whereas there's another girl in my program that I ask her a question about school and I end up hearing about her mom. I'm like, 'oh maybe we should go have coffee' cause clearly she has things to share. Based on what they give you, you see what kinda space they have to make room for you in their lives.

Mary had recently moved to the area and talked extensively about her need to establish a friend network. She joined a yoga studio and was trying to be more honest about her need for a friend in her classes. In the previous quote she talks about the importance of both people needing a friend equally in order to establish an intimate friendship. Her quote

shows again how the use of significant disclosure about personal and private content is a signal of an opportunity to establish intimacy. Even though she could be talking about space in terms of time and resources, she specifically notes emotional space because it serves as a primary marker of potential intimacy.

Married participants had family constraints on their time and also expressed a desire for more time to spend with friends or to spend making friends. They seemed to have the highest specificity regulating and inhibiting their need of a friend. Emma said:

After class...sometimes people will say, 'hey let's go get a drink'...It's difficult to do those things ad hoc because it's a lot of coordination...I could meet people and go have a drink at 8:30 or 9 o'clock but I have to go to bed because we have to start all this over in the morning... It means that it would have to be scheduled...Then it becomes a planned activity. The people in my program tend to be more spontaneous. My husband and I have made family a priority for ourselves and I don't make friend time as much of a priority... The people where I do prioritize their friendship are people that understand that about my life. I do make time to see them and often they will want to see my kids. The graduate program went out for karaoke on Thursday night and I would have loved to go but I couldn't go because of family stuff. So I don't get to do a whole of that kind of stuff right now.

Participants were particularly aware of entering highly coupled friendship networks and making tough decisions to prioritize family and marital commitments above any others.

Participants were strung out between jobs, school, and relationships. One of the younger male participants Logan said:

One reason that I don't have many close friends in my day-to-day life is that I've never met anybody who's in the remotely similar situation to me. Things that really define my life right now are my family, kids, academics and my intellectual pursuits. I've never met anybody who's close to me in all three of family intellectual abilities and interests and age. There are people who are as smart as I am, who have as many kids as I do (laughs) but there aren't any who I've found that are under thirty and similarly for all the other combinations that you could come up with.

These participants needed the understanding from a friend that their family was the top priority and that a friend would have to be invested in their family as well. These

participants wanted potential friends to meet and get along with their families, or at the very least they had to be willing to talk about them. For the married participants, their family and particularly their spouse were critical components of their public and private identity. These participants often said that their spouse was their most intimate relationship if only because they were so deeply involved in their lives in terms of day-to-day logistics but also because of formal bonds like children and shared financial commitments.

Recent residential mobility was also pertinent to establishing the need for a friend. Participants that had moved several times between several states and were new to the area found it especially difficult to engage in friend networks. Mary said:

It's a conscious effort. It feels like work. It feels like listening for cues of people who might wanna be friends...I've moved enough to realize that eventually it [making friends] probably will happen but I'm only here for two years so I don't wanna have to wait for a long time...Now it becomes much more of a proactive, 'I know I'm tired but I should meet this girl and have social time cause I know that's something I need as a person.' It's also a preemptive, 'oh write that down in the calendar to call her' whereas before I was all wrapped up in fun and excitement and now it's more work.

In the previous quote, Mary explained that she had to strategize and work to gain friends after she moved away from her established social support communities to Boston. She realized that she had to find places where community was supported and encouraged. For participants that had recently moved to the area, need of a friend seemed more urgent and less specific than the need of married participants or long-time residents of the area. For participants that had established networks, need of a friend was sometimes non-existent to the point of not wanting to spend so much time with friends to increase alone time.

For this age cohort many people had already established networks from transitional life stages like high school and college. For participants that had experienced

the interruption of social network stability through disruption of the life course, missing a life stage, or moving away from established networks, making friends was often a challenge that they had to work at. Kylie said:

Sometimes you just wanna go out and have a good time. If you don't have a lot of friends, it's harder to create those opportunities... When you get into your 30s people tend to be coupled. They go out in their groups of 4 or 6 to have a nice dinner, or they go to somebody's house. It's a closed off group of people. College is this open network, where you grab a bunch of people and go have fun (laughing). As you get older, you do things as a couple with other couple friends... Before I moved to Boston, I didn't have any friends in Michigan... I lived there for two years after I got divorced because I had moved from San Diego to Michigan. I didn't have any friends in San Diego cause of the ex. I went through this 10 year drought of friendships... Being on campus, especially with the girls, they're not necessarily even close, but they go out and they do a lot together. I'm envious of that to a certain extent, I just don't know how to get it. I've passed that phase in my life where you can just grab a bunch of people and go out. Once you get to be in your thirties, people have their groups of friends and they're not taking applications anymore (laughing). It's really bizarre.

By missing a life stage with her cohort and then going through a divorce and an extended period of isolation, Kylie was particularly aware of an absent social support network that her peers seemed to have established. Furthermore, she and Mary both struggled to find ways to cultivate friendships with the current culture and support for community for this age group that they seemed to find lacking. Even within the age cohort of the study, recently graduated participants had decidedly larger friend groups than older participants. Younger participants that were still in their 20s and had not left the area where they went to college still maintained dwindling networks of friends from school. These groups seemed to shrink comparatively with age within the study group. Many participants particularly mentioned how college provided a unique social structure and cultural environment conducive to establishing long lasting friendships and social networks. They regularly compared their current friendship situations to high school and college. High school characterized friendship as a survival mechanism, and college seemed to be about

establishing the networks for the future. The significance of these findings reinforced the importance of physically grounded networks and the importance of social structuring to promote community and social interaction.

The majority of participants had moved at least once and maintained fewer closer friendships over time and distance. Day to day interaction happened in situational contexts with friendly acquaintances and casual friends. Participants noted that marked difference from the college lifestyle of many, easy, casual connections. They felt that post-college their social networks revolved primarily around their career environments and any other side activities or interests if they were lucky enough to have the time for them. Post-college participants felt that it required more time, effort, and planning to spend time with friends and it was also more difficult to meet new friends that were in similar life situations. Participants that moved a lot, did not attend college, had divorced, or in other ways had instability in their life course to significantly disrupt social support networks desired friends and were under the impression that the odds of making friends were against them. The centralizing of networks around the immediate family and a few close friends seemed dangerous for well-being in an environment of high job volatility, frequent residential mobility, and multiple relationship transitions. Especially in the context of social isolation following retirement in U.S. work culture, it would be important to explore the ways that institutions can promote community building and support for community involvement over the life course.

Establishing intimacy: reciprocity and trust

Since participants lacked time to invest in friendship, the ability to navigate intimacy and negotiate relationships with minimal trouble, time, and effort was a desirable skill to have. Navigating intimacy seemed linked to equal reciprocity or level of exchange in the relationship. There was an abundance of participant responses focused on the analysis and negotiation of equal exchange of time, investment and resources in relationships. Equal exchange of investment in the relationship seemed like an essential requirement to establish intimacy. Cindy said:

Friendship is an exchange because you not want to give support to [your friend], you also want to receive support from them. You want them to care about you. If that relationship is uneven and it's too one-sided...someone is bound to feel like they're being taken advantage of. When those feelings of resentment become a fixture of the relationship it sabotages trust. Reciprocity is key for making the friendship exist in a safe place. Most of us want to have that affirmation that comes with friendship and if you don't have trust, if you don't have a safe place where the friendship can exist, then the friendship can bottom out... It's important for a healthy friendship to have that sense of equality.

Participants worried about equal exchange because it signified how close the relationship was and the nature of power dynamics within it. They were highly aware of being taken advantage of and contributing more than the other person to the relationship, or feeling in debt or guilty of not matching investment of the other person. An unequal exchange represented unequal power dynamics and opened the relationship up to fear of vulnerability. Whether the person was giving too much or giving too little there was a fear of emotional vulnerability in the relationship. People who were giving too much felt that they were being exploited in the friendship. More importantly, that this exploitation was with disregard to their emotional feelings about it. People who were giving too little felt that they were guilty of an unfulfilled obligation and felt emotions of debt that made them emotionally compromised and vulnerable in the relationship. Cindy said:

I used to think that the mark of friendship was being needed and that the best way that you could be a friend was to be available to people helping them, being at their disposal, not really knowing how to assert myself in friendships enough to be able to say, 'here's what I need. Here's what I would like from you.' I want more than just the satisfaction of knowing that I'm needed. That's definitely something that's changed in the past few years. When you're younger you don't understand or appreciate how much your friendships need to be really equal. Now there's an intimacy that I have with people that comes from sharing, being open, and not being quick to step back and say, 'okay well what do you need? Okay what's goin' on with you?' to be just as present in meeting them halfway.

Cindy stressed the importance of equal reciprocity within friendships. She drew the connection between an equal exchange of affirmation and the resulting production of trust and a safe space in the relationship. Safe space and trust were commonly described necessities for intimate friendship. These aspects of a relationship ensured the privacy of the intimate sharing that most likely happened to initiate the intimate relationship. They were the reassurance and protection for individuals that disclosed emotionally significant content.

Participants described being highly aware of the level of exchange with less intimate friends and friendly acquaintances. Less intimate friendship was more heavily characterized by: shared situational context, physical proximity, shorter relationship lifespan, casual daily interaction strictly governed by conversational norms, awareness of equal exchange and intimate boundaries like personal sharing and physical affection, less intense or non-investment in relationship, and ephemeral interaction focused around shared entertainment and recreation. Intimate friendship valued the connection and interaction with the other individual beyond a specific goal outside of the friendship, thereby affirming the individual as being valuable beyond specifically purposed or situated reasons and exchange e.g. working together. Logan said:

[Equal exchange] weighs less heavily the longer I've known someone and the more intimately I'm friends with them. You could think about it representing individual transactions in terms of favors, help or support—weighing those against the whole history of our friendship. If there's somebody who I met at the beginning of the semester and I helped him out with a couple of things, I feel okay asking him for something but calculatedly so—weighing it against those couple of things I helped him out with. Whereas somebody who I've been friends with for ten years anything I might ask of him, weigh it against the whole history of our relationship it's gonna be inconsequential... Those long friendships yield a lot without any individual quantifiable or identifiable benefits. I have friends where there's a definite benefit to being friends with this person because they help me understand philosophy or my wife really likes them, so it's nice for our family when we get together. But I mean with people who I've known longer, often the benefits are less tangible particularly with people, who now I don't see as often.

Logan's quote also shows the difficulty of evaluating reciprocal reciprocity. Participants needed to consider ability, capability, and willingness mediated by the level of intimacy when needing something from the relationship. The skill to navigate these concerns successfully would avoid damage to a potentially beneficial relationship and resource and possible intimacy in the future. Joel added:

I have some friends that don't care as much about, 'oh okay I helped you with this and then you have to help me with that' or 'I call you more or that you call me more.' But that is something that I think about and I think about it in terms of: they've invited me to these things and they call me more often than I do them. I feel guilty about that so I am aware of it. Honestly, I hate to say, I'm aware of it more if it's somebody who I'm not as keen [on] being close friends. Cause if you're close with somebody, then it just happens. You wanna call them and you wanna hear from them. But if it's somebody where you're acquaintances it's like, 'oh well, they were nice to think of me for this so I should probably return the favor.' I'm doing it out of obligation or necessity.

Joel brought up feelings of guilt and obligation that complicate exchange. He drew a distinction between valuable levels of friendship where flexible expectations for equal exchange existed. Flexibility was more apparent in closest friendships where exchange did not seem like conscious effort. He mentioned that worries for equal exchange were more pertinent to less-intimate casual friends than closest friends. Perhaps higher levels of intimacy lessen feelings of obligation in relationships, or obligation becomes a positive

aspect of relationships by making it a specific duty that only one individual is believe to be capable of filling. For example, instead of feeling obligated to care for someone, an intimate friend might reframe that obligation by believing that they are the only person allowed by the individual to provide that care and in that way privileged to do it.

Most intimate friends seemed less concerned with the level of exchange in their relationships, which seemed a product of having established an acceptable and trusted dynamic over time. The danger with this assumption was revealed in one of Cindy's accounts, where a close friend took advantage of the private intimate space that they had shared in the friendship. Cindy said:

In the year before I left for Turkey, I started to hit this threshold with a friendship. I was struggling to not feel taken advantage of ... When I was in Turkey she sent me this e-mail, 'I realize I have been so wrapped up in my own shit that I have not reached out to you in a long time. I have not taken the time to say how are you doing?' I responded by email, 'Thank you so much. I really needed to hear that. This is something that has actually been bothering me for a little while. I'm really glad that you brought it up.' Then she responded with this email that was so hurtful I couldn't believe it... She seemed surprised that I had accepted the apology, almost as if she was expecting me to say, 'no no, there's nothing for you to apologize about. Everything's fine.' She went on to cruelly attack my personality. She was an old friend so she knew terrible things about me. She didn't hold back. She smeared it all over the place: accusations about my character, ways that I was, ways that I wasn't, how I was terrible this way, how I was terrible that way, how she never thought this, she always thought that. I mean, 'whoa.' Nobody has done that to me... I felt utterly attacked, absolutely victimized and no recourse to deal with it other than email... I felt absolute utter resentment that somebody thought they could reach out and do that to me. The friendship is ultimately gone away.

Cindy's story shows her regard for the power that this type of intimacy possesses.

Privileging another individual with access to her private-self put Cindy at extreme emotional risk. Other participants echoed Cindy's concern for the link between intimacy, equal exchange, trust, and a safe space in the relationship for sharing of private information. Other participant testimonies that touched on breaches of trust and the break up of relationships framed their responses with a narrative of wanting to avoid receiving

emotional pain and being the source of that pain if at all possible in the future. Level of intimacy and relationship type was heavily dependent on extent and emotional significance of personal and private sharing of vulnerabilities. Increased emotional vulnerability was related to level of access given to the private self. Motivated by their aversion to emotional risk and injury, participants tried to manage access to the private-self very carefully before assuming the intimate space was safe enough to lessen attention to level of exchange. Participants were sensitive to managing boundaries and protecting themselves and others from emotional risk and pain before they established intimacy in friendship.

Hypersensitivity around the private individual

Similarly, when participants wanted to move from intimacy in friendship to intimacy in a romantic relationship they remained in the ambiguous sphere of non-kin relations but they had to navigate the hypersensitive boundary between platonic friend and romantic partner. Ned said:

When I started dating Mary, it was a big conflict for a little while because we were really good friends. We lived together and did everything together. Once I started thinking about her in, 'more than friendship' kinda way it's tough. You gotta figure out, you better be sure, you gotta brace yourself that it's not gonna be the answer that you wanna hear and could potentially ruin a friendship. You say something like that to a close friend and then it becomes awkward all the time. I was lucky enough with her that at the time it was a mutual thing but yeah that's tricky.

It was common for participants to consider making friends into romantic partners but unlikely that they would actually follow through with the possibility. Most of the time when participants considered this option, like Ned emphasizes in the quote above, the

risks seemed too great and the stakes too high for participants. They feared the potential emotional pain that might come from exposing themselves to rejection and the emotional injury of losing an intimate friend. This fear of being emotionally vulnerable by sharing private information with another person again demonstrated the power and sensitivity in expressive intimacy, making it the method to cross boundaries between levels of intimacy and relationship types.

The sensitivity around the private individual also elucidated the hypersensitivity related to the baring of the personal body in sexual intercourse. Participants described sex as the most physically vulnerable that a person could be and related this vulnerability to emotional vulnerability. The hypersensitivity surrounding sex or the lack of it reinforced the influence of emotional vulnerability as the current understanding of intimacy and its regulation of relationships. Cindy said:

There is a fear of being that vulnerable with somebody. When you have gone as far as being physically sexually intimate the desire is to want to hold onto that person because they know something about you. They've find out the ultimate thing. When somebody knows you like that that's terrifying. To think that there's no contract behind sexual intimacy really rattles a lot of us. We want to make something about that sexual contract permanent to help smooth over those feelings of fear. 'Oh my God, I can't believe I just did this with somebody.' But it's a false answer to that feeling. There is no answer to that feeling. That's what makes sex so amazing is that you're at your ultimate most vulnerable, exposed with somebody in the literal and figurative sense. You can have very healthy sexual relationships that are not bound by marriage or bound by any sort of commitment, especially if the person you're engaged with is genuine and they're not doing it to hurt you.

Participants expressed that sexually intimate and physically affectionate bonds were important because they represented privileged access to physical vulnerability and private individual space. While there were a few participants who believed that emotional investment in sex was gendered, almost all participants believed that there was a full range of emotional investment that individuals could attribute to the act of sex. It was the

level of emotional investment that the individual chose to attribute to the sexual act that determined the meaning of sex, thereby reinforcing the importance of emotional investment and vulnerability as the defining and regulating type of intimacy in relationships. They became more important as emotional bonds became involved and as other types of intimacy strengthened the relationship.

Most participants also believed that as long as sex happened between consenting adults that felt the same level of commitment to the relationship and were not engaging in the act with the purpose of hurting the other person, sex did not have to occur in a romantic or marital relationship. This further complicated the existence of a boundary between a romantic relationship and a platonic friendship. The acceptance and practice for sex, affection, intimacy and care to exist in any non-kin relationship without a label on it meant that participants had a more difficult time describing their definitions and making distinctions between them. Without clear definitions, navigation of the boundary was especially problematic for people who were naturally more open. It was also a testament to the movement of intimacy outside of relationship type and centered on the private individual. The majority of participants were accepting of sex outside of committed relationships, especially marital, but most of that majority did not feel comfortable in participating in sex devoid of emotional attachment, like in hook-up culture, although they deemed it socially acceptable.

There were also polarized feelings about sexual infidelity and affairs while in a romantic relationship. Cindy continued:

It's weird because I've had incredibly intimate relationships with people where there was no there was no sexual or physical intimacy whatsoever. Really this has happened with a couple of guys who have been boyfriends of somebody often find that they really like

talking to me. We talk about stuff and they wanna ask about things in life and what develops is this very awkward intimacy that's very real and a very real threat to their relationships but there is nothing sexual going on.

Some felt that cheating through emotional intimacy would be equally as bad as sexual infidelity, while others felt that sexual infidelity would be grounds to end the relationship. One participant said that they would rather their partner not be able to have sex at all than to cheat on them with someone else. While participants claimed it was not the most important bond and did not by itself signify intimacy, participants still used sexual relations and romantic discourse as the major distinctions between the relationship types. Participants expressed regard for its existence or its lack demonstrated by the hypersensitivity surrounding it. Sex seemed to be the major topic that participants did not talk about with their families, especially their parents. It was also the topic that when pertaining to a romantic relationship was talked about to other peers but avoided within the relationship.

My findings show that potential intimate friends were chosen based on specific need of a friend. Trust was established by reciprocity of emotional vulnerability between individuals. It was necessary to spend a significant amount of time in face-to-face interaction to substantiate disclosure with credibility of compatible interactions. After intimacy in friendship was established, the friendship could span time and distance providing optimal social benefit of resilience and support and requiring minimal and flexible maintenance. Participants recognized emotionally expressive disclosure as the opportunity to establish intimacy. This practice of intimacy signaled the sharing of personally significant content and presented the opportunity to structure the privileged access to the private individual by creating the space for intimate exchange within a

friendship. The ambiguity of friendship enhanced the difficulty of navigating diverse intimacies and intensities within the relationship. Thus, the choice to invest time and effort in the creation of the individualized relationship of friendship, and establish intimacy within the relationship was a powerful act of social validation for the individual.

Chapter III

Lean on Us: the Power of Sum—Friendship in the Relationship Community

The flexibility of friendship allowed it to crossover relationship types.

Participants often described kinship relationships that were also chosen friends. These relationships were often the most intimate and most valuable to the individual because the sum of their relationship strengths enhanced the benefits and deepened the intimacy within the relationship. Similarly, friendship in an individual's relationship community provided important support to other relationship types by the mere fact that more trusted people in a relationship community meant augmented resources for the individual.

Intimate friendship in a participant's relationship community strengthened relationships

where it existed in addition to other relationships and supported other relationships by alleviating the stress on any one relationship.

Hybrid relationship: two-for-one relationship crossover benefits

I found that when intimate friendship existed with other relationship types, it produced advantageous hybrid relationships that strengthened the overall intimacy and benefits of the relationship. Friendship also supported other relationships in an individual's community by acting as an alternative resource. It increased support and opportunities for individual growth from a plurality of diverse compatibilities. I found that despite the idealization of marriage as the most intimate and most valuable relationship type, friendship, family, romantic and marital relationships were all distinct relationship types with strengths and weaknesses. Participants hoped that relationships from different parts of their life interacted positively by showing support for or approving of each other. I also found that the participants that felt their dependence on different relationship types was evenly balanced expressed a sense of well-being in terms of having a complete and effective support system for the unknowns of the life course.

The undefined and adaptable nature of friendship made it possible for it to be applied to all relationships. For example, participants described this occurrence in friendly acquaintances and hybrid relationships where family members were also friends. Crossover in relationship types showed the potential of friendship to strengthen all types of relationships and demonstrated the fluidity of relationship boundaries when applied to actual practice and preference in relationship communities. Duncan was a 24-year-old,

Latin American, white, male graduate student, in a non-exclusive couple. He was asked to describe the ideal intimate relationship, Duncan replied:

You're not stuck up on your appearances, the outward projection of yourself, or if what I say right now in this moment matters in the next ten minutes. My sister and I are family but she's also a really good friend that's almost more important to me than we have the same mom. We'll be teeth and nail fighting each other about the most ridiculous thing and she'll be like, 'oh my God you're so self-centered you always do this kina crap' and I'll be like, 'yeah well blah blah blah' in her face. In the same car ride by the next red light we'll have forgotten it and it wouldn't have mattered. We'll know that we said those things—it's kina this release but we know from experience that it doesn't change a thing. We're forever close maybe by virtue of being family—who knows—we're stuck there but she's cool people.

When Duncan described the rest of his family, he said that his most intimate family relationship was with his sister. He had siblings, two parents, and an extended family that he stayed in contact with on a regular basis. However, the fact that he considered his sister to be a friend even more than a sister strengthened this relationship and enhanced its supportive benefits for him in contrast to other comparable kinship relations. Similar to the way that knowing a person over an extended period of time in different contexts and through variable intimacies could strengthen a relationship, combining relationship types could produce a higher quality sum of individually specific benefits by giving the individual the flexible opportunity to choose, manage, and mediate strengths and weaknesses of different relationship types within the hybrid relationship. Gina was a 32-year-old, previously divorced, white, female, undergraduate student, in an exclusive couple at the time of the interview. Gina said:

My brother and I have periods of time where we don't talk for months or sometimes longer. But things happen and we'll drop everything to deal with that. Like my brother, his son was born premature and he and his girlfriend needed some help. He called, I flew down the next day and helped them out. There wasn't much that I could do other than be there but he needed me so I went. When I separated from my ex-husband, it was crazy drama—he was psycho. I called my brother and said, 'I need to leave here now' (starts crying). He drove up that night in his truck, drove 12 hours and packed up my apartment

with me (sobs while laughing). My brother is an ideal intimate relationship... He came up here a couple months ago and we went to a patio bar. We spent seven hours just sitting out on the patio chatting, laughing, enjoying the sun and each other. That's my ideal relationship—no drama.

In her interview, Gina stressed her dislike for “drama” in relationships, which seemed to have been a problem not only in her previous marriage but also in numerous potential friendships that became too dramatic for her to continue investing in. It seemed that the characteristics of a kinship relation with her brother and the benefits of friendship with him produced a relationship that was enduring, low-maintenance, supportive, and beneficial to her well-being. Aside from where kinship and friendship crossed over, other discrete relationship types did not fulfill the majority of her criteria for the ideal intimate relationship. The crossover of characteristics showed how the application of friendship to other relationship types that would otherwise be distinct in collective definition were modified and altered to better fit individual practice and preference. Each distinct relationship hybrid was negotiated to match individual needs and desires. Gina continued:

My romantic relationships are the most intimate, my friends would be the second, and my family would be the least, with the exception of my brother. My brother would fall with my friends. You have family members that aren't your friends. I actually have two brothers (laughs) one of 'em I'm very close with and the other, we jus don't get each other. It's not that we fight. We are just unable to communicate with each other on any level. My family ranks third because there are topics that I can't talk to my parents about because of their religious status that doesn't agree with mine and because you can't pick your family and you pick your friends.

Gina ranks the intimacy level of her the relationships in her community of support and although she ranks her family last out of the relationship types, her brother is the exception because she “picks” him as a friend, which enhances the benefits of the friendship and the intimacy in their relationship. Like Duncan's preference for his sister out of all his family members because of their intimate friendship, Gina, and other

participants felt most intimate with family members that they had also deemed friends or where the relationship had assumed friendship characteristics if not the label. Specifically within the family category, there were intimate relationships between siblings that were highly distinct from other siblings and relationships with parents because of the presence of friendship with a sibling and the lack of friendship from other kinship relations.

Can parents be friends?

Participants brought up an issue between the role of a parent and the possibility of friendship with them. Evan was a 28-year-old, white, male, undergraduate student in a non-exclusive couple at the time of the interview. Evan said:

I don't have a relationship with my parents or my family. Dad—sometimes we talk, but it's like friends. We grew up getting high together. I grew up as a kid usin' drugs with him. So it wasn't like a fa- so I never had like a family... Even when I got in trouble when I was a kid, my dad would be like, 'alright we gotta hide you from the cops.' My dad took care of me with a lotta legal stuff as far as—not getting me a lawyer but, 'shut your fuckin mouth don't say nu'in we'll take – you know, this will get handled... I don't despise em. [Breath in] yeah we're friends but that doesn't mean that I would ask him for help. I don't ask him for help. I wouldn't call him to bail me outta jail. It wouldn't happen.

Evan viewed his relationship as his father on the level of equal peers—someone to hang out with—and probably not the preferred choice. Even though he uses the term friend, compared to his description of friendship and his interactions with his other friends, Evan did not actually consider his father a friend. He also did not think he was a father to him.

Kendra also viewed her relationship with her mother as one of peers. She often felt that she mothered her mother and mothered her brother. She said:

I definitely take the caretaker motherly role in my own family. That's what my relationship with my mother is. I'm the mother and she's the sort of mother. I don't resent it... I also talk about relationship stuff with my mom but I use that as a teaching tool

cause my mother needs guidance...I am his [younger brother] mother...I am big time mothering him...My mother I'm really protective of...She's a good person and her intentions are good but she's not good at using what she has to get what she wants. ...I would talk about sex to anybody that's just something I'm comfortable with... Even to the point where I talk about sex with my mother and a lot of people don't.

Kendra and Evan felt that their respective parents were not fulfilling their parental roles.

The difference between Kendra and Evan was that Kendra applied more characteristics of friendship—true of her other friendships—to her relationship with her mother. There were other participants who also had intimate relationships with their parents that shared characteristics of friendship and stood out against the description of parent-child relationships from the majority of the study. Unlike Kendra, majority of participants did not feel comfortable talking about partying, drinking, sex, or romantic relationships with their parents. There were a few exceptions, but even then, none of those parents were labeled as friends. The kinship influence in the parental role of the American family meant that first and foremost parents were parents. Applied friendship was beneficial to the relationship but it was also secondary to the parental role for the participant's understanding of the relationship.

Participants also brought up the importance of shifting relationships with parents and siblings over time and specifically mentioned parental growth and change as being problematic. For this age group, the passage of time often improved sibling relationships distanced in age. A sibling relationship became closer as the age gap was mediated by exposure to increasingly similar life situations and experiences. These circumstances also promoted the likelihood of friendship because it structured the relationship to provide commonality in different experiences outside of family bonds. However, for participants that brought up the issue of parental growth or development, they took issue that their

parents had become complacent in this area, or because they were in fact going through some sort of individual transition and participants found it difficult to adjust to and accept. While parents were parents first and foremost, participants were conscious of intimacy with their parents and changing dynamics of this intimacy over time. Cindy observed:

There's an interesting conversation there about choice because with your family there is definitely a point where when you grow up as an adult—you don't choose your family but at some point you do choose to accept them. So there is this weird exchange that does happen with choice with them too.

In Chapter II, I commented on the obligation of kinship bonds—family “has to love you”—detracting from the significance of caring or intimacy in the relationship.

Applying friendship to the conceptualization of family relationships—referring to the aspect of choosing to care about an individual—motivated by the individual free will rather than collective compulsion—destabilizes the obligation of the relationship and replaces the individualized private commitment to the relationship as the primary determinant and regulator of intimacy within it. Notably, the majority of the participants already believed that the ideal form of marriage subsumed friendship and kinship relations as well.

The pressurized marital couple

Participants noted the significant pressure from numerous bonds composing the marital couple. The marital couple was understood as the most intimate and most valuable of personal relationships. Since the ideal marital relationship included family

and friendship relations within it, the marital couple was responsible for the greatest quantity of bonds and the greatest intensity of socially significant bonds. Clara said:

The reality of living together with somebody who's also your best friend who you're also sleeping with—there's more elements than to my friendship cause there's, 'who's gonna do the dishes? how much money do we have? are we gonna have kids someday?' We're both part of each other's families, which is by the way terrifying (laughs) as I'm about to get married. I'm gaining in-laws as well and there's not the same kind of separation you have with friends' families... Then we're sexually involved. Everybody has they're own baggage with that and we're friends with all the stuff that comes with that. There's that many pieces sometimes that feels like it creates a lot of pressure on this one unit. Plus expectations about young couples in love as we get married and everybody's like you must be so blissfully happy all the time.

Participants described the enormous amount of pressure on the marital couple to handle multiple types of public and private bonds including the assumption of family and friends.

Throughout the interviews participants reinforced their valuation of the marital couple by repeatedly using phrases like, “just friends” and “only friends” to signify friendship and “more than friends” “beyond friendship” to signify a romantic relationship. The romantic and marital couple appropriated alternative relationships in the category of friendship by the imposition of a romantic discourse. When participants attempted to engage the intricacies of friendship they were often surprised that they had not thought about the importance of friendship before and furthermore that they did not have an appropriate language with which to discuss it. A number of interesting terms arose from this dearth in the language of relationships: friend crush, friend fling, fringe friends, friend friend, emotional vampire, friend hierarchy, friendship ladder, situational friends, early stage friends, real friends, pseudo friends, microgroup. When questioned about what the terms meant, participants would react in surprise and often find it

humorous that they had never used the word before and had made it up on the spot for, “lack of a better word.” When participants described how closest friends became closest friends, the process was always compared to dating and again found humorous that the process was so alike but had not been noticed by the participant before. The opposite never happened; participants were asked how they established intimacy with romantic partners and the comparison was never made that it was like establishing friendship. It was noticed that romantic and marital relationships would preferably encompass friendship, and marital in particular would encompass kinship family ties along with the multitude of other bonds in the marital couple.

Different and necessary relationship types: distinct strengths and weaknesses

However, as shown in Chapter II, friendship had many distinct and redeeming qualities, one of them being resilience and flexibility in intimate friendship. While family was always considered the most durable of relationships because most participants did not think you could end a family relationship, intimate friends were often considered as durable as kinship relations.²² When participants were asked to rank relationship types in their community on a hierarchy of significance, intimacy, or importance the marital or romantic couple—signified the marital couple for people who chose romantic couple—

²² Kimmel (2011): When we say someone is ‘just a friend,’ we’re usually lowering that person on the cosmic hierarchy of importance. But it’s equally true that we believe friendships to be purer and more lasting than sexual relationships. In our world, lovers may come and go, but friends are supposed to be there forever. That’s why we also often find ourselves saying that we don’t want to ‘ruin’ the friendship by making it sexual. (P.327).

always came out on top. Yet, participant accounts described relationship types as being unique with distinct strengths and weaknesses. It seemed that different relationship types were actually all necessary and valuable to each other for providing support to the individual over the life course. Gina said:

Everybody brings something different... People need various people for different reasons. I need my best friend Kathy because she and I are so much alike and we make each other laugh really hard. I need my other best friend Amanda because she brings something different to the table. Kathy brings stability and reliability and Amanda brings the party. Brian my fiancée he's always nurturing everybody... A couple years ago I got pregnant and it was two months before I was supposed to come back to campus. I was like, 'I don't know what to do' and that was not something that I could talk to my parents about... So for that I talked to my friend Kathy. I actually didn't even talk to my brother about it. I talked to Kathy cause I think Mike [brother], he would have been more supportive but you need a girl sometimes to talk to about those things.

The different types influenced and interacted with each other and having a balanced and cohesive support system seemed important for well-being. When participants felt that they were missing one, they focused on the weak link of their relationship community as problematic and something that they wanted to address if they could.

When friendship supplemented other relationships, like the highly pressurized marital couple, it could alleviate some of the intense and numerous bonds. Friends provided multiple perspectives, opportunities for individual growth, access to resources, social capital, diverse compatibilities, and more friends that provided support to individuals and benefitted other relationships. Support was also provided by mutual relationships working together to support the individual or separately by alleviating the pressure on other relationship bonds. Clara said:

I have a lot of trouble when Nelson [fiancee] is really upset. He's stressed about work, feels like he's a failure, he's having trouble with his family, my anxiety level raises along with his but I can't possibly ask him to be calming me down (laughs). That's jus crazy. Because I have these wonderful friends I try to remember to go to them instead... Then I have somebody who's really just worried about me and appropriately so. We can talk

about me. If he's there in the conversation as well, it needs to be mostly about him if that's where the crisis is originating. My support system supports our relationship because it allows me these outlets to deal with things that aren't appropriate to deal with in the relationship or would be really complicated to deal with in the relationship... Friendships are very important for having a good romantic relationship. As much as your romantic partner might be somebody who is also a friend, it's good to have other friends too. It creates a better balance; it means that you're not so invested in this one person to be everything for you all the time.

Having a larger group of friends meant that not only could the burden of support be spread out, but that it could also be more effectively parsed to match the capabilities and willingness of the best person for the job. The lack of extensive kinship networks in modern society and the idealized representation of the marital couple as the highest social status for relationships signifying the complete self probably does not help the funneling of social networks as individuals age, especially beyond retirement.

Diminishing social networks for the marital couple and the nuclear family

In Chapter II, I mentioned the diminishing of social networks even within the young adult to middle adult age group of the study. Kylie's quote about the coupling of her peers in their thirties and the small closed off groups showed that as peers started families of procreation, participants had increasingly fewer and more intimate friends that often did not know each other and a separate group of situational acquaintances.

Participants also expressed concern for the observed diminishing of social networks in their parents' lives as their parents turned inward to their marriage for primary companionship and social interaction especially after retirement. Clara said:

I would never want my life to be such that my support system or my emotional supports and my day to day activities were all built around one person because you never know what's gonna happen both in terms of relationships failing and in terms of people dying. There's always that possibility. I just wouldn't ever want to feel like my whole emotional life was built around one person cause they're people they're not forever...God forbid something horrible could happen and like short of death too people have brain damage and all kinds of stuff too. I wanna have a fluid relationship with who's providing me with both logistical real world tangible and emotional supports. That's the all eggs in one basket thing, never do it, bad bad (laughs).

Consequences of diminishing social networks around a few most intimate relationships meant that loss of any relationship, for example marital divorce or death of a friend had severe repercussions for an individual's social support system. Friendship is potentially infinite in quantity. Less intimate ties, like friendly acquaintances, could also play an important part in alleviating some of the intense pressure burdened on other intimate relationships like the marital couple and enhance the stability of an individual's community of support during social or emotional turmoil or the loss of a relationship.

Participants believed that emotionally expressive disclosure regulated intimacy in friendship because they had learned to recognize it as a social cue that intimacy was being negotiated or established in a relationship. Their collective acknowledgment of this type of intimacy as the most effective practice for negotiating and navigating intimacy in relationships marginalized a more comprehensive and variable understanding of intimacy that they described in accounts of practice and preference in their relationships. Intimacy in friendship was understood as a privileging of access to the private individual within a space protected by mutual trust and equal exchange of vulnerability. Although intimacy was not recognized or characterized by participants as being individualized to the extent of friendship, both intimacy and friendship exhibited individually variable, flexible, and fluid characteristics that enhanced their socially validating benefits by being adaptable to

the needs of participants. The adaptability of friendship made it capable of existing with other relationships, which produced a more advantageous hybrid relationship for participants. Friendship also supported other relationships by providing enhanced social resources and support for the individual and spread the burden of relationship work across a greater number of sources. Friendship in an individual's relationship community enhanced support benefits for participants through volatile transitions and provided long-term resilience and support over the life course.

Conclusions

Previous research on intimacy in relationships established friendship as an alternative and undervalued relationship (Caldwell and Paplau 1982; O'Meara 1989; Sapadin 1988) compared to the formally legitimized and informally privileged kinship relations of marriage and family (Budgeon 2008; Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). The non-kin relationship of friendship possessed distinctly ambiguous and individualistic characteristics that were minimally present or less pronounced in kinship relations. These aspects of friendship also made negotiation of investment and commitment more difficult to navigate because the relationship lacked public bonds, collective definition, and formal reinforcement outside of private individual regulation. The ambiguity and undefined characteristic of friendship made it an adaptable and individualized space. The reciprocated investment and commitment to negotiate, create, navigate, and establish intimacy in friendship privileged access to the private self and produced social validation benefits unique to friendship.

This thesis investigates the value of friendship in the context of other relationships. The study corroborates findings that friendship is a highly individualized (O'Meara 1999; Walker 1995) and flexible (Yager 1999) relationship category that has many benefits for individual well-being (Birditt and Antonucci 2007; Caldwell and Peplau 1982; Wellman and Wortley 1990). This research shows that participants valued friendship for the social validation it provided them through the exchange of privately regulated investment and commitment to the relationship less regulated by collective definitions and public bonds than in kinship relations. The creation of friendship was an individualized process for each manifestation of the relationship because it was based on

compatible individual need of a friend. Participants believed that establishing intimacy in friendship required self-disclosure of emotionally sensitive content and a critical amount of face-to-face interaction.

Participants reflected on the comparison of friendship between previous developmental stages of the life course, and their perception of the relationship current to their lives at the time of the interview. In agreement with social scientists that found verbal communication, expression, and disclosure as essential to intimate friendship and to valuable relationships as a whole (Burlison et al. 1996; Caldwell and Peplau 1982; Giddens 1993; Hacker 1981; Monsour 1992; Parks and Floyd 1996; Sanderson et al. 2005; Sapadin 1988, William 1985), it seemed that participants had been socialized to believe that verbal communication was a valuable and most effective form of human interaction to navigate intimacy and negotiate relationships. Even though participants described the importance of expressive emotional disclosure as a social marker of intimacy, their accounts of the actual process for establishing intimacy were more complex than the description of a singular event or even multiple acts of emotionally expressive disclosure. Participants needed a significant amount of face-to-face time to verify compatibility within a relationship before considering it an intimate relationship.

Participants regularly referred to emotionally expressive disclosure as an indication that an individual was offering the opportunity to establish intimacy or to negotiate the degree of intimacy in a relationship. Because most participants identified this practice as a communication norm signifying the negotiation of intimacy, and furthermore, expressed the belief that this practice was a signifier of an established

intimate relationship, it seemed to suggest that there was a collective understanding that the exchange of emotionally expressive disclosure was a defining aspect of intimacy and was necessary in order to establish intimacy in relationships. The significance of this exchange was founded on the reciprocal vulnerability of the individuals in the relationship. Disclosure of emotionally sensitive and often personal content put the individual at emotional risk by privileging the other person in the relationship with access to the private individual self. Participants gave numerous accounts of withdrawing, avoiding, or ending relationships that they felt did not have reciprocal exchange, which seemed necessary for trust—often synonymous with intimacy for participants—to be established. Participants also said that they were more aware of the degree of reciprocity in less intimate relationships because they were not confident in the level of trust, and therefore felt more vulnerable to the risk of emotional pain.

My findings also show that friendship strengthened relationship communities by creating hybrid relationships that enhanced the benefits of a singular bond. Friendship also supported other relationships by alleviating pressure on them through additional quantity of alternative support resources. I argue that the negotiation of various forms of intimacy within friendship provided unique social validation to individuals, less central to kinship relations, which are regulated by public bonds. In addition, friendship in an individual's community produced enhanced benefits of support and well-being over the life course.

This thesis bridges literature supporting alternative frameworks for a more effective and accurate study of relationships. Findings from this study suggest that

relationships should be studied within personal communities (Pahl and Pevalin 2005; Pahl and Spencer 2004) because of their distinct but necessary attributes in providing support for each other and the individual. This support can flow through flexible intimacies destabilizing the heteronormative framework in cultures of intimacy and care (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004) and fluid relationship boundaries (Mckie and Cunningham-Burley 2005:185) where friendship can exist in other relationship types and supplement and complement other relationships in an individual's community.

These research findings on intimacy in relationships are relevant to research on American social welfare policy and the support for social citizenship rights in the U.S. These findings show that intimacy and relationships cannot be understood in a vacuum, and policy that provides structure or support for specific relationships should acknowledge the interdependent influence of benefits to one relationship or another. The flexibility and variability of intimacy and related actions of caregiving and support can be sourced through multiple relationship forms and policy makers should consider underprivileged at-risk populations and the prevalence of their changing household demographics.

Another concern for these research findings includes support for institutional efforts to restructure U.S. work culture towards alleviating its socially isolating affects for retirees and its harmful effects on family life. These findings showed a narrowing of the community of support for this age group, their concern for socially isolated parents, and their need for structure to promote community and mitigate the pressures on the marital couple and the nuclear family. Findings also showed the socially traumatic effects of

moving residences, which seemed to be common and somewhat frequent for this age group. An overhaul of the work place that encouraged a culture of community, an effective use of time and resources, and productivity as a function of increased overall well-being could alleviate some of the pressures that worry the aging couple as they retire and become entirely dependent on kin relations for social support or run the risk of complete social isolation. Since the U.S. is a society driven by capitalist values, the institutional support of company policy for productivity mediated by valuing of community and well-being of its workers would probably have a wide ripple effect toward changing isolating competition driven ideals that promote over-working and damage productivity.

This study of intimacy in friendship was limited by its methodology, the sampling of its participants, and the failure of language to capture the richness of the research topic. The findings of this qualitative study were entirely based on sixteen in-depth semi-structured open-ended interviews. Qualitative research seemed most appropriate for this topic so that I could analyze the complexity and depth of friendship in the context of individual relationship communities and life courses. However, triangulation of this methodology with historical analysis and quantitative opinion survey data would have improved credibility and reliability of these results and provided increased content for comparison between demographic relationship statuses. The participant sampling for interviews is another weakness of the study. While all female participants were Caucasian middle-class women, the male participants were more mixed in race and ethnicity and there was at least one outlier in socio-economic class. Race, ethnicity, socio-economic

class, family structure, nationality, and sexuality would all be significant demographic concerns for participant responses in interviews about intimacy and relationships that were not accounted for in scope of this study.

The limitations of language also affected the findings of my research. It was necessary to explain before the interview how the terms “intimacy” and “relationship” would be used in the interview questions in order to go beyond a collective assumption about intimacy being related to sexual intimacy and romantic relationships. I felt that I needed to preface the interviews by explaining that both interviewer and participant should be conscious of clarifying intimacy and relationship types during the interview because we would be engaging with a lot of intangible and theoretical content. Also, while I tried to avoid it, it is possible that the way questions were phrased also suggested assumptions or expectations for answers and supplied a certain type of language with which to discuss and conceive of intimacy and personal relationships. I noticed that if I phrased a question a certain way, respondents would sometimes assume that phrasing or language in the response even if they had not been using those terms in other sections of the interview.

In a similar way the use of qualitative interviews specifically influenced the way that findings were accumulated and what was said. In connection to my findings here, the interaction of relaying information about the self to another person in a face-to-face interaction is distinct from writing an answer on a survey where the researcher and participant never interact; it is more intimate and made more significant by the private and personal focus of this study’s themes. For example, I noticed specific moments of

information management throughout the interviews as participants made conscious decisions about how to present themselves to another person rather than a piece of paper. Respondents would begin to reveal something about themselves, pause for consideration, often with voiced pauses like “uhm, well, err, ehh, uh” and then decide to either continue with the reflection or withhold it. The interviewer’s gender, race, ethnicity, and class in terms of negotiating responses and their delivery and content also probably affected participants. Gender and race were particularly important for this study because of the homogeneity in race different from the interview, and as my literature review showed, the topic of gender is believed to be highly pervasive and influential in the practice of intimacy and that may have resulted in mediated responses especially around sensitively gendered topics of sex.

Future research from these findings should engage the discrepancy between idealization and practice in relation to the disjuncture between marital and romantic relationships. It may be that the romantic relationship plays a more significant role in perpetuating the marital relationship as most intimate especially with current trends of delayed marriage, increased singleness, and increased cohabitation. This research would benefit from a concurrent application of queer and feminist theory and gender and women studies that have engaged discourses of the non-normative and non-conventional alternatives for variable intimacies and manifestations of personal relationships. It would be pertinent to research the hypersensitivity around sex, age, family and the socialization of children to more fully understand the reinforcement of restrictive intimacy and the relationship hierarchy and its social and political ramifications for the life course.

Information communications technology (ICT) arose many times during the interviews. At least two interviews were interrupted by mobile phone calls and inadvertently demonstrated one of many ways that ICT permeates daily in-person interactions. ICT was often mentioned in regards to maintaining relationships over time and distance, which was especially important for closest friendships for this age cohort, as closest friends did not often live near each other and networks of support decreased in breadth and increased in depth or intensity. My findings showed that participants needed face-to-face interaction in order to feel comfortable establishing trust in an intimate relationship. They believed that exchange was less rich and less transparent in ICT. Interaction through ICT could portray inaccurate compatibility in a relationship because in-person interactions communicated information about a person in more ways than verbal disclosure.

The rapid advances in ICT create new social spaces, media, and tools through which human interaction can take place removed from the conventional face-to-face shared physical sphere and can create virtual networks of breadth rather than depth. Technological implications for physical distance, age cohorts, physical intimacy, long-distance relationships, virtual relationships and communities, and social networks are further complicated by inequality in access for differences in race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic class. ICT has infiltrated much of modern civilization, permeates daily life and is omnipresent in geographies of power. Research into the way intimacy and relationships are altered by ICT could provide important insight into the bolstering of communities, the promotion of an engaged and active citizenry, and the mobilization of

vast quantities of weak ties to accomplish objectives and productivity impossible without these networking tools.

Lastly, these findings were based on relationship types, definitions, and language. Cultural comparisons and historical research into other cultural and social constructions of kin and non-kin relationships would enrich this research by providing comparison and complexity beyond the structures of an American culture purview. For example cultures that still primarily maintain social organization around extended kinship networks, or historical research into understandings of friendship as tied to religion or a primarily male trait would be illuminating of the intricacies in non-kin and kin interactions in the social and cultural context of this study.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Same-sex and cross-sex findings on gendered friendship

In same-sex friendship studies, women showed a greater capacity for intimacy and self-disclosure than men (Caldwell and Peplau 1982; Hacker 1981; William 1985). They formed close one-to-one relationships characterized by affection, love, acceptance, and trust. They emphasized interaction through talking on the supportive level of emotional sharing. Comparatively, men focused on doing activities together and sharing common interests (Aukett, Ritchie and Mill 1988; Caldwell and Peplau 1982; Duck and Wright 1993; Monsour 1992; Radmacher and Azmitia 2006; Sapadin 1988; Walker 1994). In a study that compared male and female responses to strangers, friends, and kin, women were more likely respond to friends similar to the way they would respond to kin, while men responded to friends more like strangers and very differently from kin (Ackerman, Kenrick and Schaller 2007). Women also tended to have larger and more heterogeneous friendship networks than men (Bellotti 2008). Overall, women put more effort into maintaining relationships and seemed to receive more interpersonal benefits from them (Duck and Wright 1993; Jones 1991; Sapadin 1988). These findings could be interpreted to suggest that women place a higher value on friendship than men because they invest more time and resources into maintaining them.

Researchers also found that for both men and women, there was more self-disclosure within same-sex friendship than in cross-sex friendship (Hacker 1981). A later study found slightly different results, which showed that males disclosed less info to male friends than to female friends (Jones 1991). The content revealed in cross-sex friendship

also differed by gender. There was a tendency for men to reveal strengths while women revealed weaknesses. There was also a lower percentage of men and women who revealed both strengths and weaknesses. These findings may suggest that for cross-sex friendship, both sexes feel more pressured to fulfill sex role expectations. The need to maintain these fronts may indicate a lower level of intimacy in cross-sex friendship compared to same-sex friendship (Hacker 1981). Furthermore, both sexes reported that cross-sex friendship provided less support and loyalty than same-sex friendship (Rose 1985). In cross-sex friendship, men confided more in women than women confided in men (Hacker 1981; Jones 1991). Men also experienced greater emotional support and therapeutic benefits from cross-sex friendship than same-sex friendship (Aukett, Ritchie and Mill 1988; Bellotti 2008; Rachmacher and Azmitia 2006). For men, cross-sex friendship resembled same-sex friendship. Conversely, women differentiated between the two. They reported that cross-sex friendship provided more companionship, but less acceptance and intimacy than same-sex friendship (Rose 1985; Sapadin 1988). These findings suggested that male friends do not fulfill female expectations for friendship to the same degree as female friends do. Thus, women may experience social deprivation in cross-sex friendship. (Rose 1985).

Gender differences also arise in the ambiguous space between a romantic relationship and a platonic friendship. Research showed that unlike men, women reported that they were not motivated by sexual attraction to establish cross-sex friendship. Women also stated that they were aware of the likelihood that men had sexual motives, and their suspicions made them mistrust male attempts at establishing friendship. In

contrast to same-sex friendship, cross-sex friendship was described in regards to time, sexual attraction, and difficulty to form and maintain (Messman, Canary and Hause 2000; Rose 1985). One study (Afifi and Burgoon 1998) found that participants generally experienced low to moderate degrees of romantic interest for friends of the opposite sex. The results also showed that most cross-sex friendship operated at a moderate level of intimacy and satisfaction because participants felt a relatively moderate level of uncertainty about the state of the relationship in regards to romantic overtures. Higher levels of uncertainty were associated with relationship dissatisfaction, discomfort, feelings of vulnerability, and concern over embarrassment, related to avoidance or desire to discuss the relationship status and a potential romantic future. The researchers found that the few cross-sex relationships that became very close were characterized by exceptionally low uncertainty and topic avoidance (Afifi and Burgoon 1998).

Appendix B. Tufts University IRB Approval of Study

Appendix C. Participant interview e-mail request

Hi my name is Kara Takasaki and I'm a senior undergraduate at Tufts University. I'm contacting you because I was hoping that you could suggest the best way for me to get in contact with or pass my message on to _____ (e.g. students at the medical school).

I'm doing a senior honors thesis this year in sociology and I'm looking to do one-hour interviews with heterosexual adults, born and raised in the U.S., aged 24-38 years. My research investigates intimacy (self-disclosure, companionship, closeness, social/emotional support), in friendship and other relationships.

My study is IRB approved and I will keep names confidential. I also hope to audio-record these interviews since I will be transcribing them for analysis.

I have a flexible schedule and am willing to meet people when and where it is easiest for them. If anyone is interested and would not mind doing an interview with me, or if anyone has any questions about the study, please pass on my contact information below.

Contact information:

E-mail: Kara.Takasaki@gmail.com

Cell: 808-220-5781

Thank you for your time and help with my research. I hope you have a good day.

Appendix D. Participant interview outreach flyer

Appendix E. Participant interview consent form

The Value of Friendship: Social Validation and Support for the Individual
Researcher: Tufts University Undergraduate Student Kara Takasaki
Informed Consent Form for the Participation in a Qualitative Study on Relationships

Purpose: This consent form asks for your informed participation in a qualitative sociological study. This research investigates the practices of intimacy (self-disclosure, companionship, closeness, social/emotional support, not necessarily physical intimacy) in relationships. It aims to further understand how attitudes toward intimacy are formed, and the way that different types of personal relationships interact in a person's life.

Procedure: The interview will take place in a private space for 1-1.5 hours. The principal investigator will ask you questions but most of the time will be given to your response.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded so that the investigator can focus on the interview content instead of taking notes. The only people who will have access to the audio content will be the principal investigator and the research chair.

Confidentiality and Risk: There is risk to your privacy if your interview content were to be attributed to you in the public arena. However, for this study your name and any names mentioned will be replaced with pseudonyms to protect your privacy.

Withdrawal of Participation: There is also the risk that you may become uncomfortable discussing certain topics. Whatever the reason, if you do not want to answer a specific question, or you wish to end the interview at any time, do not hesitate to inform the interviewer. You face no prejudice for your decision.

Costs and Benefits: You will lose the amount of time that you are in the interview, but besides that there are no direct costs to you. There are also no direct benefits. However your participation will be greatly appreciated for its contribution to research on the fundamentals of personal relationships and the functionality of intimacy in society.

Request for more Information: If you have any questions, concerns, or would like more information about the study please contact the principal investigator at:

Kara.Takasaki@gmail.com or at: 808.220.5781. You may also contact Yvonne Wakeford at the Office of the Institutional Review Board at (617) 627-3417

Signature: I confirm that I understand the purpose of this research and its study procedures. I also understand the possible risks, costs, and benefits of my participation. I am also aware that I can ask questions at any time and withdraw from the study without sanction. I have read this consent form and my signature below indicates my voluntary participation in this study.

I agree to be audio-taped (circle) YES NO and Initial _____

Participant Name Printed

Participant Signature

Date

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix F. Demographics sign in sheet

Demographics Sign in Sheet

Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Relationship/ Marital Status	Kids	Race/Ethnicity	Family of origin notes
Amanda	26	F	Graduate student	Single	0	Caucasian	Married heterosexual parents and sister (2?)
Mary	26	F	Graduate student, tutor	Exclusive couple	0	C	Married heterosexual parents and older sister
Kendra	27	F	Undergraduate student	Engaged	0	C	Has a single mother and younger brother
Clara	29	F	Graduate student	Engaged	0	C	Married heterosexual parents and sister
Cindy	31	F	Graduate student	Single	0	C	Married heterosexual parents and brother
Gina	32	F	Undergraduate student	Divorced once, exclusive couple	0	C	Married heterosexual parents two brothers
Kylie	33	F	Undergraduate student, project manager	Divorced once, currently in an exclusive couple	0	C	Married heterosexual parents and younger brother and sister
Emma	33	F	Graduate student	Married	2	C	Married heterosexual parents and sister and brother
Lucas	24	M	Undergraduate student	Single	0	C (British-Columbian nationality)	Married heterosexual parents with a younger brother and sister
Adam	24	M	Client services	Single	0	African-American/Nigerian	Has a single mother and an older and younger brother
Duncan	24	M	Graduate student	Non-exclusive couple	0	Latin-American/Chilean	Married heterosexual parents with older

							brother and young sister and brothe with down syndro
Joel	25	M	Programmin g associate	Single	0	C	Married heterosex parents and young brother and siste
Ned	25	M		Exclusive couple	0	C	Divorced parents mother remarried father remarried a has a younger ste sister and step brot
Logan	26	M	Undergradu ate student	Married	2	C	Recently divorce heterosexual paren younger brother a sister
Dan	27	M	Graduate student	Exclusive couple	0	C	Married heterosex parents and a brotl
Evan	28	M	Undergradu ate student	Non-exclusive couple	0	C	Married heterosex parents with two younger brother

Appendix G. Interview guide

Friendship

1) What is your definition of friendship?

-What does it mean to you? Why is it important?

-What do you expect from a friendship? What do you look for in a friend?

- 2) How does friendship play into your daily life?
 - What do you do when you spend time with your friends? What do you talk about?
- 3) How did your best friends become your closest friends?
 - How was that level of intimacy established?
- 4) Can you give an example of a time when a friend disappointed or hurt you?
 - How did you address it?
 - What were the consequences for the relationship?
- 5) Can you describe a time when you resolved a conflict, dissatisfaction, or a misunderstanding in a friendship?
- 6) Was there ever a time when you ended a friendship or became less invested in it?
 - What pushed you to make that decision and what did you do to withdraw from it?
- 7) How has the way you approach friendship changed over time?
 - Is there anything that you like or dislike about what has changed?

Relationship Comparisons:

- 1) Could you describe to me what you look for in a friendship compared to a romantic relationship or marriage?
 - How do your expectations for each relationship compare to each other?
 - What do you like most and least about these types of relationships?
- 2) What is the the ideal intimate personal relationship?
 - What in your life has influenced what you want in an ideal intimate personal relationship? E.g. past relationships, family, talking to friends, religion
 - How have these things influenced you?
- 3) Can you rank your relationships from most to least important to you?
 - Why and how did you rank them that way?
- 4) Which relationship is most flexible? In terms of negotiating members' needs, resources, and time invested.
- 5) What relationship lasts the longest/is most durable, why?
- 6) Are there things in your life that you only talk about to certain people?
 - What kind of relationships do you have with these people and what are the topics that you talk about?

- Is there anything that you would share with your friends but not with your partner (couple/romantic/married) and vice versa? Why is that the case?
- 7) Who do you talk to about relationships? (e.g. problems/developments)
-Why do you choose to talk to them?
- 8) Are friendships important to marital relationships or romantic relationships?
-How do they influence each other?
-Is it important that they support or approve of each other?
- Have you ever had to depend on one because of the other?
- 9) Can you tell me about a time when you weren't sure where the line was between a platonic friendship and a romantic interest?
-What was confusing?
-How was it resolved?
- 10) How do you resolve conflicts in your relationships?
-What do you think are the most effective and least effective approaches to solving relationship issues?
- 11) Can you tell me about how relationships you have had have ended?
-What are some worthy grounds for ending a romantic relationship?
-What about a marital relationship?
-What are your reasons for ending a friendship?
-How would you end a family relationship?

Intimacy:

- 1) What makes a friendship intimate?
-What establishes intimacy?
-Can you describe an intimate personal relationship and the characteristics that make it intimate for you?
-Could you describe how intimacy begins? How does it end?
- 2) Can you list your relationships from most to least intimate?
-Why did you rank them this way?
- 3) How important are sexual and physical intimacy in determining overall intimacy and significance of a personal relationship?
-Are they different from each other?
- 4) Some people believe that physical intimacy should only pertain to romantic relationships or marital partners, what do you think about this opinion? Is it true in your life?

5) Do you have intimate personal relationships that you don't interact with on a face-to-face basis?

- Without the physical grounding, how do you maintain intimacy in this relationships?
- How do you know that these relationships are still intimate?

6) Was there ever a time when you considered opening up a relationship to becoming more intimate, but then changed your mind?

- Can you describe what happened?

7) Have you ever had a relationship that felt too intimate? How did you renegotiate the boundaries of the relationship? Was it effective?

Marriage, Family, Romantic Relationships:

1) What makes a good family relationship?

- Can you describe the relationship that you have with siblings versus the relationship you have with your parents?
- How does intimacy compare between your relationships with your siblings vs parents?

2) What makes a good marriage?

- How does your description compare to what makes a good personal relationship in general? (e.g. friendship, co-worker, family)
- Does a good marriage differ from a successful marriage? How?

3) How do you know if you're ready to be married? Who should get married? When? Why?

4) Do you have expectations for how marriage should work?

- Can you talk about a time when your expectations of marriage or a romantic relationship weren't met?
- What did you do to resolve the situation?
- How do you mediate discrepancies between reality and expectations?

5) Can you describe a time when you have had to sacrifice resources or time in other interests to attend to marriage or family?

- How do romantic and marital relationships affect the time and resources invested in other relationships with family and friends?
- Similarly, can you tell me about a time when you chose to spend time with your friends instead of with your partner or your family?

Appendix H. Respondent quotes demonstrating public regulation of intimacy

and valuable relationships

Gina described the obligation she felt from the collective to stay in a marital relationship that she had lost individual commitment and investment in:

With marriage, you're under an obligation to work a little bit harder to make it work...I felt some weird obligation to stick it out longer than I should have because I didn't want to admit to people that I made the wrong decision, rather than anything in terms of being committed to the relationship... Our relationship would have lasted two months if we hadn't been married.

Clara explained how the complicated presence of intimacy and obligation in kinship bonds can detract from the value of the relationship:

I have a sense of family as non-voluntary, compulsory, which makes it the most long lasting but not in a satisfying way. My sister will be my sister forever. She can never not be my sister. We could stop talking. She would still be my sister and we'd still have an intimate relationship in some weird kind of freaky way.

Similarly, Dan hypothesized that he would feel compelled to invest in kinship relations: If I had a huge fight with my brother [I don't know] whether I would see that as a relationship that I would be able to let go of more like a friend or if there would be this requirement for commitment even if the relationship was bad. Probably I would feel a much more intense desire and need to repair that relationship than someone who wasn't family.

Kendra struggled with public regulation of kinship relations and her private definition of their meaning in her life:

They're gonna be my family forever so I'm gonna wanna invest more... My mother is always gonna be my mother and I want a strong relationship...that's the only mother I'm ever gonna have. But I'm contradicting myself right now. My father wasn't in my life at all growing up. Out of nowhere he wanted to talk to me. This is 27 years. I don't want anything to do with him. So that's a contradiction. I would include my spouse as my family. When I say, 'I have a family at home' I mean him and the dog...My father—biologically he's my father, but what does that mean? It doesn't mean anything. A father, a mother or a family is more than biological.

Appendix I. Historical origins of the private individual and its relevance to friendship

Preceding the 17th century the social definition of “individual” primarily meant indivisible. “Private” was defined in respect to “public,” in the sense of a sphere preparing for the public, or the lack of the public. The individual did not have a distinct private self-identity with autonomy and agency separate from the collective public self-identity that it has today. The private-self was always understood in relation to the public-self because the public self-identity was the whole and complete individual of which private characteristics had a lesser part (Longfellow 2006). The rise of the liberal tradition and its rhetoric in the modern period altered the modern conception of these terms, their relationship to one another, and their comparative value. As a consequence of the burgeoning polemic tension between individual and collective, the individual self-identity was increasingly subject to an interminable struggle mediating, manipulating, and managing multiple selves within infinite contexts into congruency.

Simultaneous to the pronounced dissociation of public and private spheres, the individualizing forces of the modern condition placed growing value on what was private, individual, personal, exclusive, and separate from the public and the collective. Modern society endowed the individual with autonomy, agency, and political empowerment for the sole fact of existing as a singular private entity, discrete from the public (Warner 2002: 21-45). The increased value of the individual augmented the value of friendship because friendship then signified an inherently meaningful act of free will: a mutual and independent choice between potent individual entities to engage in a

relationship. Thus choosing to give the status of “friend” to another person became a powerful act of individual affirmation for the receiver.