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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

ROMANTIC PARTNERS' COMMUNICATION  
ABOUT THEIR CROSS-SEX FRIENDS:  
DIALECTICAL TENSIONS AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A Dissertation  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

By  
Kristin K. Froemling  
Norman, Oklahoma  
2000

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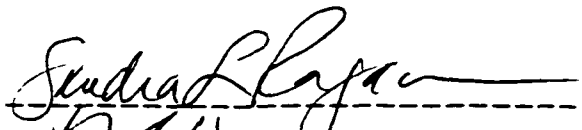
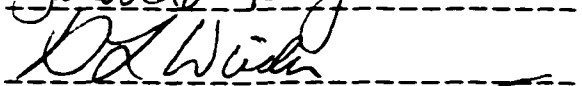
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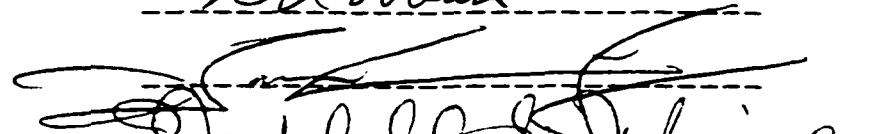
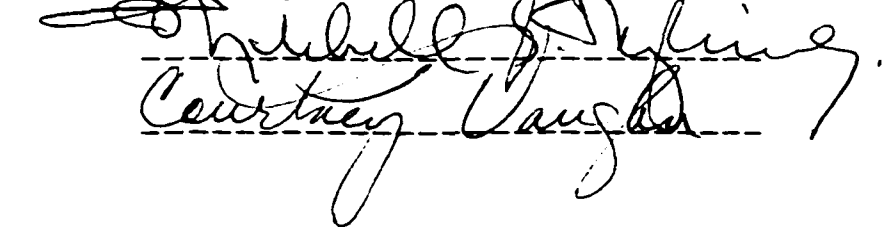
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ROMANTIC PARTNERS' COMMUNICATION  
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DIALECTICAL TENSIONS AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

With my journey through graduate school complete, I would like to thank those people who supported and helped me along the way. My family has been an endless source of encouragement and shelter. Thank you Mom, Dad, and Tim for putting up with my stressful moments and cheering my accomplishments. To Grandma and Grandpa, I appreciated our phone calls and visits when I came home. Thank you for your eternal love and support. I love you all for seeing me through the good times and the bad times and for accepting me for who I am.

Thank you to Jimmy, who was always willing to listen to my problems and to help celebrate when things went my way. I appreciate his support at conferences and for being a sounding board for my ideas. He continually reminds me that I can meet any goal I set for myself and for that I am grateful. He is the world's best cheerleader and I am glad that he is rooting for me.

To all of my friends, I offer my heartfelt thanks for helping me through the past three years. Especially I would like to thank Traci, Terry, and Ryan for their daily support and large shoulders on which I leaned many a day. They made me laugh when I did not think laughing was possible. Terry provided me with daily competition to be the best scholar I could be - and I know that we will continue to encourage each other to be the best. Traci's friendship and laughs are the most treasured things I take away from Norman - may we never tire of Pez, wacky museums, and stupid movies.

**My mentors, Sandy Ragan and Tara Emmers-Sommer, have taught me how to be a successful scholar. I thank them for their help over the past three years with research projects, my dissertation, and my job search. I am grateful to have had not one, but two, excellent mentors who have prepared me for much of what lies ahead in my career.**

**Thank you to my committee members, Mitchell McKinney, Courtney Vaughn, and Larry Wieder. I appreciated your feedback on my dissertation and your guidance through the process. My dissertation is better because of your suggestions.**

**I dedicate this dissertation to my Grandmother, Edith, who was unable to see the final product, but who never questioned the fact that I would receive my doctorate. She will always be with me in my heart and I will cherish the memory of her love and encouragement throughout my life's pursuits.**



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## **ABSTRACT**

**Cross-sex friendships dramatically decrease in number and in perceived intimacy with age and marriage (Rose, 1985; Rubin, 1985). In U.S. society, social taboos treat the formation of cross-sex friendships as a logical progression toward a romantic relationship. At some point, couples must contend with cross-sex friendship conflicts. If marital couples are less likely to engage in cross-sex friendships, how do they communicate about their friends in a way that makes the friendship acceptable in their marriage?**

**A mixed method approach (including diaries, questionnaires, and critical incident scenario discussions) was utilized for data collection. Of the ten married couples who participated in the study, only four couples successfully completed all three methods. A case study approach was implemented to highlight the communication of the four couples. In the discussion section, the diary entries from the remaining six couples were included to provide further evidence for the existence of dialectical tensions, management strategies used to negotiate tensions, and commitment and trust in the marriages.**

**Four dialectical tensions were identified in the communication of the participating couples. Self-other orientation dialectic is an intrapersonal dialectic, which involves privileging one's own needs over the needs of the other.**

**Spouse-friend temporality dialectic involves the amount of time spent with the spouse versus time spent with the cross-sex friend. Discuss-divert**

dialectic concerns whether to discuss with the spouse details of interactions with the cross-sex friend. The fourth dialectic is confront-avoid, which involves confronting a spouse regarding the nature of the cross-sex friendship.

Of the management strategies used to negotiate dialectical tensions, selection was reported, but the couples were actually more likely to utilize segmentation to manage dialectical tensions. One couple reported implementing moderation in their own relationship, while none of the couples reported the use of reframing or disqualification.

Regarding commitment and trust, couples indicated that honoring their commitment to their marriage was more important than maintaining cross-sex friendships. According to the participants, the key to dissipating jealousy and strengthening trust in the marriage was for the spouses to communicate their commitment to each other.

**ROMANTIC PARTNERS' COMMUNICATION ABOUT  
THEIR CROSS-SEX FRIENDS:  
DIALECTICAL TENSIONS AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

**Chapter I**

**Introduction**

**Background of the Problem**

**Luke: I would be willing to participate, and I know that my wife would do it, too. But, I have some opposite-sex friends that I have lunch with and spend time talking to. If my wife and I participate, I am afraid that she will start asking too many questions, and I will have to explain time that I spend with my friends.**

The quote above illustrates one of the problems facing married couples who have cross-sex friends. Many times, spouses feel jealousy regarding a spouse's cross-sex friend. Whether the concern is warranted or not is not the focus of this study. Rather, how the spouses communicate about their cross-sex friends is the focus of this study.

Romantic partners have to endure many obstacles to maintaining a stable, committed relationship. One problem in particular, the relationship maintenance of a cross-sex friend by one or both of the partners, may cause partners endless strife. Social taboos treat cross-sex friendships as a logical progression toward romantic involvement (Bell, 1981; Parlee, 1979). O'Meara (1989) stated that the phrase "just a friend" portrays a social stigma in that it often conveys a failed romantic relationship, or more importantly, it is used

to downplay the relationship as a less than "real" relationship. Swain (1992) concurs that social taboos are barriers to cross-sex friends; because most heterosexual love relationships begin as platonic friendships, society stereotypes all cross-sex friends as a natural stage in the coupling process rather than a legitimate friendship. With regard to married people who have cross-sex friends, society may think negatively of their friendships because they could be construed as affairs. Therefore, people who internalize social taboos against cross-sex friendships will be less likely to form them because they are considered "deviant" by society. Thus, if one of the romantic partners views the cross-sex friend of his/her partner as a deviant relationship, or even a threatening relationship, problems will arise.

Historically, men have had opportunities to form cross-sex friendships in the workplace. In the past several decades, women have entered the workforce in growing numbers. With the growth in female employees comes a much higher potential for the creation of cross-sex friendships between co-workers. These cross-sex friendships can be maintained either solely in the work place or they can be shifted to after-hours social outings. In either situation, cross-sex friends run the risk of being misperceived as romantic relationships. Such misperceptions can create havoc in the romantic relationships of the cross-sex friends.

As a result of the uniqueness of cross-sex friendships and societal perceptions of such friendships, it seems important for romantic partners to communicate openly about their cross-sex friends. There is a dearth of

research on the influence of cross-sex friendships on romantic relationships. Research that does exist tends to compare dating relationships to cross-sex friendships.

Relationship commitment literature provides some background for examining the influences of cross-sex friendships on romantic relationships, yet researchers have not examined directly the intersection of cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships. Interdependence theory, a social exchange theory, states that individuals remain involved in relationships that are more rewarding than costly. Rusbult and Buunk (1993) state that interdependence theory “focuses on the *interaction between partners* as the essence of all close relationships” (p. 177, emphasis in original). The interactions bring about rewards and costs for the individuals in the relationship. The theory is concerned with how romantic partners influence the other’s reward/cost outcome. Dependence is the key to interdependence theory in that there are four properties of interdependent relationships: degree of dependence, mutuality of dependence, correspondence of outcomes, and basis of dependence. From this brief description of interdependence theory evolves the investment model, which will be useful in examining the influence of cross-sex friendships on romantic relationships.

The investment model stems from interdependence theory. The investment model asserts that “the state of dependence is subjectively represented and experienced as feelings of commitment” (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993, p. 180). Commitment is comprised of three components: satisfaction



with the relationship, quality of alternatives, and investments in the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Rusbult and Buunk suggest that one threat to relationships is the “presence of a tempting alternative” (p. 182). Because of the impact that a cross-sex friendship can have on a romantic relationship, this study will focus on the cross-sex friend as a “tempting alternative.” Such a focus does not imply that there is romantic attraction, but rather that there can be the *perception* that the cross-sex friend is a tempting alternative.

Block and Greenberg (1985) state that men and women have been conditioned by society to evaluate sexual attractiveness the first moment they meet someone. Thus, the act of evaluating attractiveness will play a role in a cross-sex friendship from the outset. Studies have shown that women do not seem motivated by sexual attraction to establish cross-sex friendships, whereas men were motivated by sexual attraction (Kaplan & Keys, 1997; Rose, 1985). Sexual attraction may not be the reason for cross-sex friendship formation at the outset, but for some individuals, cross-sex friends may become more attractive alternatives to their current romantic partner as the friendship develops.

When romantic partners maintain cross-sex friendships, trust is a salient issue (Froemling, 1999). For relational satisfaction, a partner must be able to trust that there is nothing more than a platonic friendship involved between their partner and their partner’s cross-sex friend. Many researchers have examined trust in romantic relationships (Boon, 1994; Boon & Holmes,

1991; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Lund, 1991). Boon and Holmes (1991) state that "trusting individuals feel no need to question their partner's motives and commitment" (p. 207). However, if one of the romantic partners views cross-sex friendship as a social taboo or a threat, will the partner continue to trust the platonic nature of his/her romantic partner's cross-sex friendship? Few researchers have examined trust related to cross-sex friendships in romantic relationships.

Holmes and Rempel (1989) explain trust as a process of uncertainty reduction. In the case of the cross-sex friendship, romantic partners may utilize many strategies for reducing uncertainty, such as directly questioning their partner or examining the partner's behavior. Understanding the types of management strategies for reducing uncertainty and enhancing trust in romantic relationships which maintain close cross-sex friendships is essential to the stability of relationships.

Closely related to trust are feelings of jealousy. Jealousy results when an individual's behavior threatens our romantic relationships (Salovey & Rodin, 1989; Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997). Time spent with a cross-sex friend instead of a romantic partner can lead to jealousy in the romantic relationship, especially if the romantic partner perceives cross-sex friendship as a pre-cursor to romantic involvement. In this way, jealousy can undermine a stable romantic relationship.

Most of the literature that examines romantic relationships utilizes a monologic perspective, which focuses on the experiences of only one of the

individuals in the relationship. Dialectical theory offers a perspective which focuses on both individuals in the relationship. Dialectical theory is predicated on the tenet of change. Relationships are not static, but rather they undergo continual change. Dialectical tensions represent the opposing forces that continually influence and change the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Romantic partners must constantly manage the tensions. For example, do the partners spend all of their time together or most of their time apart? This is the dialectic of connectedness-autonomy.

With the use of dialectical theory to examine romantic relationships, the focus is on dialectical tensions. Dialectical tensions are best understood as “unified oppositions” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Each tension exists because of its opposite. To understand one pole, we must understand its opposite. For example, with the dialectical tension of openness-closedness, we cannot understand what it means to be open (to self-disclose) without also understanding what it means to be closed (choosing to withhold information). Tensions exert influence on the communication and behaviors of the relationship partners. To continue with the example previously mentioned, individuals in a relationship must negotiate the openness-closedness tension by deciding whether to be completely open and honest with each other or whether to be open about some topics and closed regarding others.

Within the dialectical perspective, tensions can be both internal and external to the relationship. Internal tensions exist between the two members

of the dyadic relationship (for instance, two friends). External tensions exist between the dyad and their social networks (for instance, a married couple and their in-laws). This study will examine the potential internal dialectical tensions that arise in romantic relationships in which one or both partners maintain a close cross-sex friendship.

Researchers have examined a variety of relationships from a dialectical perspective, such as friendships, romantic relationships, and familial relationships. However, there has been little research conducted which focuses on the dialectical tensions created by the influence of cross-sex friendships on romantic relationships.

### **Statement of the Problem**

All of these elements (attention to alternatives, satisfaction, investments in the relationship, trust, jealousy) influence the stability of romantic relationships. The entrance of a cross-sex friendship into this dynamic can be destructive to the romance, depending upon how the romantic partners communicate about the situation, their beliefs about cross-sex friendship, and how much commitment and trust are present in the relationship. Therefore, it is important to study the influence of cross-sex friends on romantic relationships.

The goal of this exploratory study is to examine marital partners' communication about cross-sex friendships. Marital relationships are more stable than undergraduate dating relationships, and thus, would be more appropriate for an exploratory study. In particular, the study will illuminate

dialectical tensions created by the maintenance of cross-sex friendships, how marital partners manage those tensions, and the influence of cross-sex friendships on the commitment and trust levels of the romantic partners.

### Definition of Terms

Examining commitment literature provides insight into the dynamics of romantic relationships. Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) define commitment as “the intent to persist in a relationship” (p. 359). Lund (1991) explores the various ways researchers have defined “commitment” over the years. She quotes Robert Hinde (1979) who defines commitment as “situations in which one or both parties either accept their relationship as continuing indefinitely or direct their behavior towards ensuring its continuance or optimizing its properties” (Lund, 1991, p. 214). Hinde’s definition takes the Rusbult, et. al. definition a step further by implicating behavior as a means of continuing a relationship.

Commitment is comprised of several variables which are used by researchers in its definition, primarily in studies that employ the investment model (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Commitment includes satisfaction level (with the relationship), quality of alternatives (potential alternative relationship partners), and investment size (includes investments in the relationship, such as time, effort, or self-disclosure) (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). For the purposes of this study, both the Rusbult, et. al. and the Hinde definitions as well as the components of

commitment from Rusbult's investment model will be used in the analysis of relationship commitment.

Because trust is an important component to romantic relationships, especially when one or both partners are maintaining a cross-sex friendship, it is necessary to define its use in this study. Trust is defined as "confident expectations in the benevolent intentions of another" (Boon & Holmes, 1991, p. 190). In this study, "another" is the spouse. Jealousy, which is closely related to trust, is best defined by Salovey and Rodin (1989) as "an apprehension, anxiety, suspicion, and mistrust generated by the loss or potential loss of a highly valued possession or of affection and love" (p. 226). Despite the presence of trust in a relationship, jealousy about the amount of time that a romantic partner spends with a cross-sex friend can still exist, and therefore, jealousy becomes an important variable in this study.

Marital relationships will be defined in this study as heterosexual relationships in which partners have formally committed to each other to maintain a monogamous relationship. Married couples were selected because they tend to be more stable than non-married relationships. Additionally, marriages are more difficult to dissolve because of the formal commitment. Both undergraduate and graduate students were included because there is no qualitative difference between the two groups with regard to marital stability.

Many researchers report that the problem with friendship research is that researchers cannot agree on the definition of friendship. There is much

ambiguity about the meaning of “friendship.” This study will utilize two definitions of friendship. Several researchers have asserted that relatives do not belong in the category of friendship (e.g., Fischer, 1982). One important implication of a friend that separates friends from relatives is that friendship is a voluntary relationship. Even if we choose not to interact with a relative, that does not negate the relationship of “relative.” But, if we choose not to interact with a friend, then that negates the relationship.

Rawlins (1998) provides a useful communication-based definition. Using the dialectical perspective, he defines friendships as “dynamic, ongoing social achievements involving constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple individual, interpersonal, and social factors” (Rawlins, 1998, p. 64). Because friendships are voluntary relationships, they are conducted among a conglomerate of more institutionalized relationships, and therefore, friendships involve a great deal of communication for their success.

Reisman (1981) provides a more cognitive definition of “friend.” He states that a friend is “someone who likes and wishes to do well by someone else and who believes those feelings and good intentions are reciprocated” (p. 206). Additionally, this study focuses on the influence of cross-sex friendship. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, cross-sex friendship is defined as a dynamic, ongoing social achievement involving constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of non-relative persons of the opposite sex who like and wish to do well by someone else with reciprocated intentions.

### **Significance of the Study**

With the growing number of opportunities for men and women to cultivate cross-sex friendships, the high rate of divorce, and the impact of relational conflict, it is important to understand the influence of cross-sex friendship on romantic relationships. Few researchers have examined the influence of a close, cross-sex friendship on one's primary cross-sex friendship, a marital relationship. Because close cross-sex friends could become attractive alternatives to a marital partner during the course of the friendship, and because of partners' levels of trust and jealousy, as well as their social beliefs about cross-sex friendship, the impact of a cross-sex friendship on a marriage can be dramatic. How marital partners communicate about their opposite-sex friends can affect their commitment level, trust, and maintenance of their relationship.



## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

**The focus of this study is on the influence of cross-sex friendships on marital relationships. Few researchers have examined this unique arrangement from either a monadic or dialectical perspective. Therefore, the literature review will provide an overview of romantic relationships from a commitment perspective (including trust literature), a review of cross-sex friendship, and a discussion of dialectical theory literature.**

**To explicate the connections between the literature and marital partners with cross-sex friends, the following scenario will be referred to throughout this chapter. This scenario is contained in Appendix F, and was used in the critical incident data collection phase.**

#### **Hypothetical Scenario**

**Jane and John have been married for three years. They dated for 2 years prior to their marriage. John has a close, opposite-sex friend named Kate. John and Kate have been friends for one year. John and Kate work in the marketing department at the XYZ company. John loves the outdoors, as does Kate. However, Jane does not like outdoor activities. As such, John asks Kate to go hiking or kayaking on the weekends. The outings are always day trips (no overnight stays).**

**Jane is becoming unsettled by their friendship. She believes that John is trustworthy and committed to their marriage. Kate is not married, nor is she involved in a romantic relationship. Jane is concerned that Kate may be**

trying to persuade John to become more than friends. Jane is also jealous of the time that John spends with Kate.

### **Romantic Relationships**

In discussing romantic relationships, the literature review will focus on relationship commitment and trust. The commitment literature encompasses a variety of aspects of romantic relationships important to the understanding of the potential impact that cross-sex friendships can have on the continuance of the romantic relationship.

### **Relationship Commitment**

The basis of the commitment literature is interdependence theory constructed by Thibaut and Kelley (1959). Interdependence theory states that the “interaction between partners” is the “essence of all close relationships” (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993, p. 177). The theory is an example of a social exchange theory, which is predicated on the idea that individuals engage in and maintain relationships that are beneficial to them.

According to interdependence theory, individuals are motivated to maximize the rewards and minimize the costs of maintaining a particular relationship. But the theory goes beyond the rewards to costs ratio. The mutual influence of the partners is the key. There are four properties of interdependence relationships: degree of dependence, mutuality of dependence, correspondence of outcomes, and basis of dependence (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

Interdependence implies mutual influence, which leads to two important components of an ongoing relationship: satisfaction level and degree of dependence. Satisfaction level is “the degree to which an individual favorably evaluates a relationship and believes that a partner fulfills important needs” (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993, p. 179). Individuals determine their satisfaction level through a self-constructed comparison level. The comparison level is “the standard against which the member evaluates the ‘attractiveness’ of the relationship or how satisfactory it is” (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 21). The comparison level is constructed through an individual’s previous relationship experiences and the collective experiences of trusted others. From this collection of experiences, the individual compares his/her current relationship with their comparison level, which determines how satisfied the individual is with the current relationship.

The dependence level is determined by the comparison level for alternatives, which is the “standard the member uses in deciding whether to remain in or to leave the relationship” (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 21). The comparison level for alternatives can also be viewed as the lowest level of acceptable relational behaviors that the individual will tolerate when compared to alternatives to the relationship (e.g., other potential romantic partners or being alone).

Given the focus of the current study, the cross-sex friend of a romantic partner may be the person for whom the partner uses as a yardstick in the

comparison level for alternatives. In the hypothetical scenario, if John perceives that a romantic relationship with Kate would be more rewarding than his relationship with Jane (and John's marital relationship falls below his comparison level), then John may terminate the marriage to be with Kate.

The investment model is an outgrowth of interdependence theory. The model extends interdependence theory by claiming that the state of dependence is "subjectively represented and experienced by feelings of commitment" (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993, p. 180). Commitment level represents "the experience of dependence on a relationship" (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993, p. 180). Prior to the investment model, researchers examined commitment in terms of satisfaction.

Rusbult (1980) asserts that commitment is influenced by more than just satisfaction with the relationship. Commitment to a relationship also involves quality of alternatives to the current relationship. In other words, a romantic partner who has no high quality alternatives to the current romantic relationship may be more committed to the romance than if he/she had a high quality alternative to the romantic partner. When a "tempting alternative" to the current relationship exists, the individual experiences a change in his/her commitment level (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). This tempting alternative could be a cross-sex friend, who previously was not considered an alternative, but when the friendship deepened, the friend became a reasonable alternative.

Bui, Peplau, and Hill (1996) conducted a test of the investment model and discovered a relation between several variables of the investment model. The authors found that "the quality of alternatives to a current relationship experienced by one partner may be related to the other partner's level of commitment" (Bui, et. al., 1996, p. 1253). This finding reinforces the mutual influence or interdependence of romantic partners. For instance, if Jane perceives Kate as a quality alternative for John (and Jane believes that John sees Kate as a quality alternative), then Jane may adjust her commitment level to match what she perceives to be John's lowered commitment level because of the threat. In other words, if Jane perceives that John's commitment level to the marriage is lowered, she will adjust her commitment level to the marriage accordingly. Therefore, the quality of a partner's alternatives may influence the other partner's commitment level.

Yet, satisfaction and quality of alternatives are not the only components of commitment, according to Rusbult (1980). A third component of commitment is the investment size. Investment size refers to the amount of investments, both intrinsic and extrinsic, that the individual has accumulated in the relationship. Intrinsic investments can be self-disclosures and time involved in the relationship. Extrinsic investments, for example a shared home, are "previously extraneous interests linked to current behavior" (Rusbult, 1980, p. 174). Therefore, despite the fact that an individual may have quality alternatives and low satisfaction in the current

relationship, he/she may feel as though they have too much invested to terminate the relationship.

The three components of the investment model may provide reasons that cross-sex friendships influence romantic relationships. Perhaps a couple experiences high satisfaction and a large investment size in the relationship. The individuals may not perceive the cross-sex friend as a high quality alternative to the relationship, and thus, there is no problem in the marital relationship. However, if an individual experiences low satisfaction with the current romantic partner and is not heavily invested in the marriage, the cross-sex friend may be considered a tempting alternative. As such, the investment model is an important perspective from which to examine the influence of cross-sex friendship on marriages.

### Trust

From the discussion of interdependence theory and investment model stems the concept of trust. Trust evolves from the interdependent nature of relationships. Boon and Holmes (1991) consider interdependence and risk to be the fundamental cores of trust. They state that interdependence is crucial because "the degree of interdependence between individuals determines the relevance of trust for the interaction between them: the greater the interdependence, the more crucial the state of trust" (Boon & Holmes, 1991, p. 191). Risk is explained as the "subjective value or meaning of the outcome to the individual, and the probability or likelihood that the other will facilitate

the particular outcome" (Boon & Holmes, 1991, p. 191). Therefore, dependence on another individual involves a particular amount of risk.

Many researchers have examined trust through the use of relationship stages (Boon & Holmes, 1991; Holmes & Rempel, 1989). The first stage is the romantic love stage, which represents the early stages of a romantic relationship. It is characterized by positive feelings toward the romantic partner and an optimistic view of the future of the relationship. Trust and love are strongly associated at this stage because the partners project their strong feelings of love onto their partner, thus creating a perception that the person can do no wrong. As Holmes and Rempel (1989) state, trust at this stage is "often little more than a naive expression of hope" (p. 192) that the relationship has a stable future.

The second stage is the evaluative stage during which the partner's imperfections become more noticeable as a result of richer interaction and interdependence. The individuals no longer project their feelings onto their partner, but rather they begin to analyze behaviors more closely. According to Boon and Holmes (1991), this is the stage during which a real sense of trust can "take root." Partners begin to take notice of whether their partner is acting unselfishly toward the relationship. If the partners can perceive consistent acts of unselfish behavior, then the relationship can strengthen and the partners solidify trust. However, if the partner perceives that the other person continually acts in his/her own self-interests, then the relationship may be strained to the point of dissolution.

Accommodation stage is the final stage in which conflicting needs and preferences are negotiated. During the evaluative stage, partners become aware of their incompatibilities and during the accommodation stage they determine how to manage those incompatibilities. Management strategies can serve to solidify further the trust between the partners. Understanding the partner's motives and dispositions is the key to the accommodation stage. Knowing how the partner will act (through a balance of unselfish and self-interested acts) during a conflict will enhance the bonds of trust.

The concept of trust is closely related to uncertainty reduction. Holmes and Rempel (1989) state that "feelings of uncertainty about a partner's motives have a pervasive influence on people's intimate lives" (p. 210). Therefore, if an individual perceives that his/her partner's maintenance of a cross-sex friendship is self-interested (e.g., pursuit of a tempting alternative) then uncertainty may increase and trust will decrease.

According to Holmes and Rempel, the goal of uncertainty reduction is to "reach confident conclusions about the strength and quality of the partner's attachment to the relationship" (p. 190). Individuals will seek out information to reduce their uncertainty about their partner (Berger and Calabrese, 1975). The partner's behavioral predictability is one type of information that is relevant to the development of trust. Therefore, the individual studies the partner's behavior for consistent behavior and unselfish acts in favor of the relationship.



Holmes and Rempel (1989) make a distinction between trusting and uncertain couples. They suggest that in trusting relationships, there is an absence of an “active appraisal process” throughout the daily activities engaged in by the couple because the couple perceives each other as trustworthy and primarily acting in the interest of the relationship.

Uncertain individuals (i.e., low trust) are more driven to test their partner’s commitment to the relationship (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). The lack of trust can be personal, often stemming from previous relationships in which trust was broken. When compared to trusting individuals, uncertain individuals are more likely to react adversely when presented with negative information about their partner (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). Such a reaction could become problematic in relationships in which one partner is maintaining a cross-sex friendship. Therefore, the extent to which the marital partners trust one another could greatly impact the negotiation of dialectical tensions resulting from the influence of a cross-sex friendship.

### Jealousy

Jealousy can occur when an individual perceives a threat to a relationship. The individual may feel as though he/she will lose a valued commodity (e.g., love or affection). Salovey and Rodin (1989) state that the power of jealousy lies in the “simultaneous threat to a valued relationship and threat to self-evaluation via negative social-comparison” (p. 227-228). In the case of John and Jane, jealousy can result when Jane feels a threat to her marriage because of Kate. Negative social comparison can occur if Jane

compares herself to Kate or if John compares Kate to Jane. Similarly, Sharpsteen (1995) states that romantic rivals pose a threat to both the individual's self-esteem and to the romantic relationship. With a threat to either the self-esteem or the relationship, jealousy is likely to result.

According to White (1981), the strongest predictor of jealousy was a desire for exclusivity. If Jane perceives that John is attracted to Kate, there may exist a threat to exclusivity. White also discovered that jealousy is produced by the availability of cross-sex friendships.

Salovey and Rodin (1989) posit that the appearance of jealousy provides evidence that the partner is interested in maintaining the current relationship. By exhibiting distress at the thought of losing a relationship to another, a romantic partner can signify that the relationship is a valued one. Some researchers suggest another benefit of jealousy is that it can provide motivation to cope with relational problems (e.g., Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997).

Guerrero and Afifi (1999) examine communicative responses to jealousy. They examine jealousy from a goal-oriented approach, which states that individuals "behave in a strategic manner to fulfill desired ends" (p. 217). Therefore, if the goal is to maintain a romantic relationship, then any impediment to the actualization of this goal will result in negative emotions. In the present study, for example, if Jane views Kate as a threat to the maintenance of the marriage, then jealousy (the negative emotion) will result. Guerrero and Afifi argue that communicative responses to jealousy

are influenced by the goals of the individuals in the relationship (as well as the “spontaneous reactions to emotional experience”) (p. 219).

Afifi and Burgoon (1998) discovered that individuals with high uncertainty about their partner’s commitment to the relationship were more likely to avoid a direct confrontation to reduce uncertainty. However, Guerrero and Afifi (1999) found contradictory evidence that individuals with high uncertainty are motivated to directly express their jealousy to their partner to reduce the uncertainty. Therefore, researchers are divided with regard to the communicative strategies used in the reduction of uncertainty in jealousy-producing relationships.

### **Summary**

Interdependence theory and the investment model provide important insights into the dynamics of romantic relationships. The components of commitment, as explained through the investment model, may enlighten this study of the dialectical tensions involved in marital relationships in which one or both partners maintain a close cross-sex friendship. How couples manage tensions may be dependent upon whether the cross-sex friend is perceived as a quality alternative in addition to the partner’s satisfaction with the romantic relationship and the amount that the partner has invested in the romance.

Trust is a key component when a spouse engages in a cross-sex friendship. Because cross-sex friendship can be perceived as a threat, marital partners must trust their spouse to be honest about the platonic nature of the

cross-sex friendship. If the friend is perceived as a romantic rival, jealousy may result. This study will examine the influence of commitment and trust on the maintenance of a cross-sex friendship in marital relationships.

### Cross-sex Friendship

Cross-sex friendships are a unique relationship. Many people view them as potential romantic relationships. Others maintain cross-sex friendships for the benefits of interacting with a member of the opposite sex in a platonic relationship. Despite the reason for maintaining a cross-sex friendship, romantic relationships can be influenced both positively and negatively by these friendships. Thus, it is important to examine the dynamics of cross-sex friendships to understand why romantic partners would endure potential threats to their relationship for the purpose of continuing their cross-sex friendship. Because this study will examine heterosexual marital relationships and their heterosexual cross-sex friends, any research that examined the influence of gay cross-sex friendships will not be included in this literature review.

When discussing friendship, many authors divide friendships along the life-cycle, which will be the organizational pattern employed in this review (e.g., Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Dickens & Perlman, 1981; Rawlins, 1992). Childhood, adolescence, young adult, adult, and older adult friendships are the life stages used most often. In terms of relevancy to this study, the review of literature will focus on adolescence, young adult, and adult. According to Werking (1997), it appears that the configuration of a

person's life plays a role in facilitating or restricting the development of enduring close cross-sex friendships.

The primary reason for mentioning adolescent cross-sex friendship is to establish a pattern for opposite-sex friendship formation. According to Gottman (1986), cross-sex friendship in childhood is rare. Research demonstrates clearly that sex is a prime organizer of childhood friendships, with most children choosing same-sex friends (Gottman, 1986). Negative evaluation of the opposite sex softens during adolescence as indicated by the increase in cross-sex friendship occurrence (as reported by Dickens & Perlman, 1981). Yet, despite the rise in the number of cross-sex friends among adolescents, same-sex friends still predominate.

Young adult friendships, according to Rawlins (1992), are seen as "unconsciously or deceptively rehearsing, enacting, or obstructing romantic involvement and the normative adult path to selecting a spouse" (p. 110). As a result, romantic partners must "rhetorically manage internal and external perceptions" of their cross-sex friendships (p. 110). The main problem with cross-sex friendships is that they violate the "homosocial norm," which is the tendency in the United States culture to prefer the company of the same sex (Rose, 1985).

For males, cross-sex friendships offer more disclosure, intimacy, and emotional involvement. Males self-disclose more to female than male friends (Hacker, 1981; Komarovsky, 1974). Males describe obtaining greater acceptance and intimacy in cross-sex than same-sex friends (Komarovsky,

1974; Rose, 1985; Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987; Parker & DeVries, 1993). For females, only companionship is rated higher in cross-sex than same-sex friends (Rose, 1985). It has been postulated that men feel more comfortable disclosing to women because women are more accepting of self-disclosure (Fehr, 1996). As stated previously, men are socialized to disclose less, and thus may be more inclined to disclose in a "safe" context (i.e., with a woman).

With marriage, each spouse's contact with peripheral friends disappears and gradually diminishes with close friends (Booth & Hess, 1974; Rose, 1985). Following marriage, both males and females confide less in all of their friends (Booth & Hess, 1974). Cross-sex friends dramatically decrease in number and in perceived intimacy with age and marriage (Rose, 1985; Rubin, 1985). The decrease in number of and contact with cross-sex friendships could be the result of the social taboo of engaging in social activities with someone of the opposite sex who is not your romantic partner. As stated previously, too often, cross-sex friends are perceived as romantic partners, which could cause trouble for married couples who have cross-sex friends.

Some researchers have examined the role of work and marital status on the formation and continuation of cross-sex friendships (Fine, 1986; Rubin, 1985). Buhrke & Fuqua (1987) examined friendships of individuals over the age of 45 years. They discovered that employed women, whether married or not, have more cross-sex friends than non-working women. Men's cross-sex friends are virtually unaffected by their work status. Employed single women report a slightly higher number of cross-sex friends

than unemployed single women. But, holding employment constant, married women are more likely to report more male friends than non-married women. Cross-sex friendships are usually friends that the woman meets through her husband, therefore the relationship is considered appropriate by both the husband and wife. Although married persons have a larger repertoire of cross-sex friends, they have less frequent interactions with cross-sex friends than unmarried friends.

Gender differences in the maintenance and interest in cross-sex friends have been the focus of much of the cross-sex friendship literature. In terms of social support, men are much more likely to produce the name of women as providers of social support. Women list significantly more same-sex than cross-sex supporters (Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987). Men regard cross-sex friends as closer than same-sex friends, but women regard same-sex friends as closer (Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987). Several authors have posited that jealousy over cross-sex friends can be a threatening issue in dating and marital relationships (Cupach & Metts, 1991; Guerrero & Afifi, 1999).

Sexual attraction between cross-sex friends has been the focus of many studies (e.g., Bleske & Buss, 1999; Cupach & Metts, 1991). Friends must choose to act on this attraction or to manage the attraction so that it does not interfere with the friendship (Werking, 1997). Communication between cross-sex friends must consist of how the friends will manage their private relationship (if one or both is sexually attracted to the other) and how they will manage their public relationship (jealousy exhibited by romantic partners

outside the cross-sex friendship and/or suspicion by others that there is more than friendship involved in the relationship).

This study will focus on how the cross-sex friends communicate about their friendship to their romantic partners. Cupach and Metts (1991) state that friends need to reassure their partners that the friendship is not a threat to them. If there is sexual attraction present in the cross-sex friendship, discussing the friendship with a romantic partner may become more difficult (Cupach & Metts, 1991).

### Summary

Cross-sex friendships would appear to benefit men more than women because men obtain greater acceptance and intimacy from cross-sex friendships through increased self-disclosure. However, both sexes benefit from having a member of the opposite sex as a friend, such as receiving advice about romantic relationships. Despite the benefits that cross-sex friendships offer, romantic partners may perceive cross-sex friends as a threat to the romantic relationship, thereby escalating trust and jealousy issues.

### Dialectical Theory

Dialectical theory is not a “theory” in the conventional sense. It does not purport to predict communicative behavior, but rather it explains communicative behavior through the description of dialectical tensions present in an interpersonal relationship. Tensions, each with its own opposite “pole,” exert influence on the communicative nature of a relationship.



**The most efficient method for explaining dialectics is to begin with a discussion of the four tenets of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality on which dialectics is grounded (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The first tenet of dialectics is contradiction, which is defined as “a dynamic interplay of unified oppositions” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 8). Several tensions exist within relationships, which will be listed and explained below. For the purpose of simplicity, the dialectic of openness-closedness will be used to exemplify the four tenets. This dialectic involves the amount of self-disclosure between interactants. In this example, openness and closedness are contradictions, or opposites. Each is not acting alone, but rather exists as a result of the existence of its opposite. This is what Baxter and Montgomery (1996) refer to as the “unity of identity.” One cannot comprehend openness without an understanding of closedness and vice versa.**

**A second assumption of contradiction is that the oppositions act as an interdependent whole, which Baxter and Montgomery (1996) call “interactive unity.” Both openness and closedness operate simultaneously within the relationship. Researchers have discovered that self-disclosure (openness) is important to the development and maintenance of personal relationships. Openness and closedness cannot be thought of in isolation to each other. To understand what being open is, one must understand its opposite, which is being closed. Therefore, openness and closedness are interactive elements in personal relationships.**

**The third assumption is that these contradictions are always in flux. Because these contradictions are opposites, tensions will ensue. The dialectics will manifest themselves in tension and will need to be negotiated. In other words, openness and closedness are continually surfacing in interactions in the sense of whether we avoid “taboo topics” (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985) or whether we maintain complete openness.**

**The discussion of contradiction leads to the second tenet of dialectics which is change. Within the assumption of change is a dialectic of stability and change. Traditional relational communication theories are predicated on the notion of creating stability in relationships. Dialectical theoreticians see stability as “momentary transitions in a stream of continuous change” (Montgomery, 1993, p. 208). Change is a constant within dialectics. As such, change is a stable element of dialectical theory. However, tensions are always in flux, which is the underlying element of change. To continue with the example of openness and closedness, the need for continuous management of that dialectic presupposes the omnipresent existence of change. Each relationship will be faced with different situations throughout its life. These situations will call for a re-negotiation of dialectical tensions operating within the relationship. The continual re-negotiation represents the tenet of change in the dyad.**

**Praxis is the third tenet of dialectical theory. Praxis can be explained as the assumption that “people are at once actors and objects of their own actions” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 13). In other words, people make**

choices as to their communicative behaviors in the social world. At the same time, people are reactive in that the behaviors of the past become norms for social interaction. As a result of the communicative choices of interactants, many patterns for managing dialectics result. So if a couple decides to forgo closedness for total openness, their future interactions will be controlled by that decision. That does not mean that the couple cannot re-negotiate the dialectic, but rather that their future interactions will be influenced by their decision for total openness. Thus, the communicative choices we make in the present are based on previous communicative choices and will affect future communicative choices.

The final tenet of dialectical theory is totality. One issue with regard to totality is that the unit of analysis is the relationship as a whole, not each individual within the relationship. This does not presuppose, however, that each interactant experiences the dialectic in the same way. A second issue of totality is that there are many tensions that exist within a relationship. It is important to acknowledge when studying dialectics in relationships that these tensions are interdependent. The final issue of totality is context. Communication varies within contexts as do dialectical tensions. Werner, Altman, Brown, and Ginat (1993) examined dialectical tensions that existed in particular contexts, more specifically the dialectics that existed between the dyads and their social networks. This study is just one example of the tenet of totality within dialectical theory.

The discussion of totality leads to the explication of the internal and external dialectics which exert influence on relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Internal dialectics exist between the interactants in the relationship. External dialectics exist between the interactants and their social networks. These internal and external dialectics that have been identified by dialectical scholars encompass "conventional" dialectics as opposed to indigenous dialectics. Conventional dialectics will be outlined, followed by a discussion of "indigenous" dialectics.

Werner and Baxter (1994) argue that most dialectical tensions can be categorized into six "universal" dialectical tensions. Conville (1998) refers to universal dialectical tensions as "conventional" dialectics. Baxter (1993) outlines three categories of conventional dialectics in which one internal and one external dialectic reside in each category (resulting in six conventional dialectical tensions). The first category deals with integration-separation, or the amount of time spent together versus time spent apart. The internal dialectic is connection-autonomy, which concerns the amount of time that the interactants spend together or apart. The external dialectic is inclusion-seclusion, or the amount of time that the couple spends with others in their social network.

The second category that Baxter (1993) outlines is the dialectic of stability-change. This tension acknowledges the amount of change within the relationship. The internal dialectic of predictability-novelty reflects the amount of change versus routine in the couple's relationship. The external

dialectic exhibits how the social networks of the couple perceive the conventionality-uniqueness of their relationship. In other words, are they a traditional couple who pursue conventionality, or are they unique in their approach to their relationship?

The third category emphasizes the dialectic of expression-privacy, which is the self-disclosure dialectic. The internal dialectic of openness-closedness concerns the amount of self-disclosure between the interactants. Revelation-concealment is the external dialectic, which entails the amount of information that the couple discloses to their social networks.

Some dialectical scholars believe that it is premature to suggest that conventional dialectics are generalizable to all relationships (Conville, 1998; Werner & Baxter, 1994). Additionally, conventional dialectics do not represent the totality of dialectical tensions present in every relationship. As such, Conville (1998) posits the identification of indigenous dialectics, which are unique to a particular relationship, specifically unique to a dyad. Werner and Baxter (1994) refer to these dialectics as “unique” dialectics. Indigenous dialectics can be gleaned from the examination of the communication of a particular dyad. When such dialectical tensions are identified, they fall outside the realm of the conventional dialectical tensions previously discovered. In other words, conventional dialectics fail to explain the dialectical tensions that exist in some relationships. Therefore, indigenous dialectics offer the scholar the ability to identify particular tensions that are unique to a given dyad.

With the identification of several tensions that exist within relationships, it is important to acknowledge the maintenance strategies that relational partners utilize to negotiate the dialectical tensions (Baxter, 1988a). The first strategy is selection, in which partners choose one dialectical pole and make it the dominant pole. For instance, the partners decide to adopt the behavior of openness and forsake closedness.

A second strategy for negotiation is segmentation in which the tensions are separated by topic. For instance, the partners decide which topics to remain open about and which topics are taboo such that closedness is dominant. Cyclic alteration is similar to segmentation, but the poles of the dialectics are separated by time periods. So, for some periods of time the partners are apart (autonomy) and other times they are together (connectedness). This particular example is probably most familiar to partners in a long distance relationship.

Neutralization is the third strategy in which neither pole is made dominant and a happy medium is sought. Reframing occurs when the dyad redefines the dialectic so that it is no longer seen as an opposition.

Baxter's work with dialectical theory has provided an increased awareness of the dynamics of relationships. Aside from romantic relationships, dialectical theory has been applied to other types of relationships, such as families (e.g., Werner, et. al., 1993), friendships, (e.g., Rawlins, 1983), and co-workers (e.g., Bridge & Baxter, 1992). Yet, researchers

have not yet explored the dialectical tensions that exist within marital relationships in which one or both partners maintains a cross-sex friendship.

The management of dialectics in friendship is especially important to the present study. Unlike other kinds of relationships, there are few external structures to promote the continuance of friendships. As stated earlier, friendships are voluntary relationships that do not have the expectations of dating or marital relationships, nor do they have the irreversible nature of kin relationships.

Rawlins is one of the premier dialectical researchers of friendship communication. He states that friendships involve inherent dialectics. He provides a dialectical definition of friendships as “dynamic, ongoing social achievements involving constant interconnection and reciprocal influence of multiple individual, interpersonal, and social factors” (Rawlins, 1998, p. 64). Because friendships are voluntary relationships, they are conducted among a conglomerate of more institutionalized relationships, and therefore, friendships involve a great deal of communication for their success.

Within his discussion of the dialectics of friendship, Rawlins (1998) has organized many dialectics into two categories. Contextual dialectics are derived from the place of friendship in the social order of American culture. Public-private dialectic states that friendship is part of the observable public world, which confers on friendship no normative or institutional status, while friendship has a unique private bond. A second example of a

contextual dialectic is the ideal/ real dialectic, which is the interplay between the expectations of friendship and the realities of friendship.

Interactional dialectics encompass the dialectics of friendship interaction. Rawlins has identified four examples of interactional dialectics. Freedom to be independent-freedom to be dependent dialectic involves the ability to pursue one's interests without interference from a friend, while retaining the ability to rely on a friend in times of need. A second example is affection-instrumentality in which we use a friend to benefit self versus caring for a friend as an end-in-itself. With judgment-acceptance, we must negotiate the ability to judge a friend but also accept them for who they are. Expressiveness-protectiveness is the fourth type of interactional dialectic, which involves the desire to self-disclose to a friend while continuing to protect the self. In other words, if I self-disclose something to my friend, will he/she want to terminate the friendship as a result of my self-disclosure? Within the context of cross-sex friendships, this can be especially critical if the self-disclosure is about a romantic partner with whom the cross-sex friend also maintains a friendship.

Other researchers have utilized dialectics in the study or examination of friendship. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) identified several dialectical tensions in relationships. The dialectic of integration-separation, which concerns the amount of time individuals spend together, has been identified by several researchers as important to the maintenance of friendships. Such a



dialectic can be a source of problems between romantic partners who must negotiate how much time they spend with their cross-sex friends.

Openness-closedness is the amount of self-disclosure in a relationship. As noted above, Rawlins has examined this in friendships through the dialectic of expressiveness/protectiveness. Additionally, he identified the dialectic of candor/restraint, which deals with being honest with a person, but not too honest to the point of hurting their feelings.

Stability-change is the tension between wanting the relationship to stay the same versus wanting some uniqueness at times. Baxter (1994) identified one example as predictability versus novelty in a relationship. Within the friendship literature, Brenton (1974) discussed the dialectic of constancy versus change. This dialectic involves the desire to not want a friendship to change, but facing the inevitability of change in the friendship.

There are several theoretical underpinnings to the use of dialectical theory to examine friendship. Rawlins (1992) provides us with several findings that illustrate the importance of dialectical theory to friendship literature. Within the dialectic of interdependence-dependence, Rawlins discovered that men and women report qualitative differences in interactions and activities with friends. The findings revealed that there was a greater interconnection of the lives and mutual dependence in women's friendships than men's friendships.

With regard to affection-instrumentality, women's friendships appear charged by ongoing tensions of both, while men's friendships typically have

**an instrumental emphasis. In other words, men tend to value friends for the instrumental benefits they provide.**

**The dialectic of judgment-acceptance reveals that males do not criticize their friends much, but neither do they communicate robust acceptance. With regard to expressiveness-protectiveness, female friends manifest considerable expressiveness, while male friends exhibit much more protectiveness.**

### **Summary**

**Because dialectical theory includes the perspectives of both individuals in the relationship, we can gain deeper insight into the dynamics of relationships than other relational theories allow. As discussed earlier, friendships are voluntary relationships that contain no normative or institutionalized status in our culture. As such, friendships are easily expendable. We do not have to go to court to dissolve a friendship. We simply terminate the friendship. This expendable nature of friendship could create a simple solution to arguments that romantic partners may have about a cross-sex friend: simply terminate the friendship. However, if the partner is not willing to give up a close cross-sex friendship, problems may ensue. Thus, understanding how romantic partners communicate about cross-sex friendships (through an examination of the dialectical tensions and the strategies used for managing those tensions) will be important to the understanding of the stability of romantic relationships.**

### **Rationale For The Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore the dialectical tensions present in marital relationships in which one or both spouses maintains a cross-sex friendship. Marital relationships were chosen because they represent a segment of the population least likely to engage in cross-sex friendship (Booth & Hess, 1974; Rose, 1985). Additionally, marriages tend to be more stable with larger investment sizes than dating relationships. As such, the important question becomes, how do these couples sustain their relationship in such a potentially threatening situation? In other words, with the presence of a potentially tempting alternative to the marital relationship, how do the marital partners communicate about their extra-dyadic cross-sex friend in order to maintain stability and satisfaction in their marriage?

While some previous research reports that married individuals maintain fewer cross-sex friends than single individuals (Booth & Hess, 1974; Rose, 1985), Buhrke and Fuqua (1987) discovered that, holding employment constant, married individuals have more cross-sex friends than single individuals. The reason for these conflicting findings could be represented in the fact that many married couples meet their cross-sex friend through their spouse. As a result, the cross-sex friendship is considered appropriate in most cases because it is a "couple" friend.

With the increasing number of women in the workplace and those attending college, the opportunities for the cultivation of cross-sex friendships increases. Such friendships would be extra-dyadic, and would,

most likely, not represent the more typical “couple” friend. Because of the uniqueness of the cross-sex friendship, it is important to examine its influence on romantic relationships.

Previously, researchers have studied the internal dialectical tensions present in romantic relationships and external tensions regarding romantic relationships and their interaction with familial relationships (e.g., Werner, et. al., 1993). Other researchers have examined the internal dialectical tensions present in friendship relationships (Rawlins, 1992; Brenton, 1974). However, researchers have overlooked the intersection of cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships. Therefore, this study will examine the influence of cross-sex friendships on romantic relationships by focusing on the dialectical tensions present when romantic partners maintain a cross-sex friendship. Thus, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: What dialectical tensions are present in marital relationships in which one or both partners maintain a cross-sex friendship?

While it is important to understand the dialectical tensions present in any relationship, it is of equal importance to examine the management strategies that couples utilize to manage the tensions. Baxter (1988a) has examined several management strategies used by participants to manage the tensions she identified in romantic relationships. However, cross-sex friendships pose a potential threat to romantic partners if they are perceived as tempting alternatives. Therefore, it is important to examine the management strategies to determine if Baxter’s list is exhaustive or whether

the unique nature of cross-sex friendships has provided romantic partners with still other management strategies. As such, this study seeks to answer the following question:

**RQ2: What management strategies do marital partners utilize to manage dialectical tensions that arise from the maintenance of cross-sex friendships by one or both partners?**

Commitment is comprised of three components, according to the investment model (Rusbult, 1980). Satisfaction with the relationship, quality of alternative relationships, and investment in the relationship are important to the examination of commitment. Quality of alternative relationships in particular is most important to this study. According to Atwater (1979), extramarital sex can develop within the context of friendship. Therefore, cross-sex friendships can develop into a high quality alternative to the romantic relationship. However, simply because the cross-sex friend is viewed as an attractive alternative does not mean that the romantic partner will end the romantic relationship (or even act on the romantic impulses toward the friend). The satisfaction with and the amount invested in the romantic relationship can squelch any thoughts of leaving a romantic partner for a tempting alternative found in the cross-sex friendship. The commitment of the romantic partners can influence how the partners communicate about cross-sex friends and thus influence how they negotiate dialectical tensions. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

**RQ3: How is commitment related to the maintenance of cross-sex friendship by marital couples?**

Romantic partners must trust each other to be open and honest about the platonic nature of the cross-sex friendship. Trust is considered an important component in romantic relationships in which one or both partners maintain a cross-sex friendship (Froemling, 1999). Trust can influence the ways in which romantic partners communicate about their cross-sex friends. As such, the amount of trust that exists between marital partners may influence how the couple negotiates dialectical tensions.

Therefore, the following research question is posed:

**RQ4: How is trust related to the maintenance of cross-sex friendships by marital couples?**

## **Chapter III**

### **Methods and Procedures**

**In order to investigate the dialectical tensions involved in marital relationships in which one or both spouses maintain a cross-sex friendship, a mixed method approach will be utilized (in the form of a case study approach), consisting of the diary, questionnaire, and critical incident methods. This chapter will outline the epistemological assumptions that guide the use of the diary method, the questionnaire, and the critical incident method, the recruitment of participants, and the procedures utilized for analyzing the data.**

#### **Epistemological Overview**

**Mixed methodology is the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods for the purpose of investigating phenomena. The underlying premise of mixed methodology is that “each paradigm offers a meaningful and legitimate way of knowing and understanding” a phenomenon (Greene & Caracelli, 1997, p. 7). Each of the monomethods (quantitative and qualitative methods) offers many strengths to gathering data from a sample population. By espousing the virtues of mixed methodology, scholars are not negating the benefits of monomethods.**

**The fundamental strategy of mixed methods is to approach research problems with a variety of methods that contain complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). By combining monomethods, researchers can compensate for weaknesses while reaping the**

benefits of the combined strengths. Thus, one advantage of mixed methodology is that it can compensate for the weaknesses of the monomethods (Chen, 1997).

The underlying rationale of mixed methods is “to understand more fully, to generate deeper and broader insights, and to develop important knowledge claims that respect a wider range of interests and perspectives” (Greene & Caracelli, 1997, p. 7). As discussed in Greene and Caracelli (1997), Smith (1994) states that qualitative methods provide “journalistic accounts,” which “beg the question of rigor and rationality” (p. 15). Quantitative methods provide objective accounts, which are “at best false advertising and self-interested” (p. 15). Both methods lead to “distortion and oversimplification” of findings (p. 15). Therefore, the only logical move is toward mixed methodology. Brewer and Hunter (1989) state that mixed methodology increases the feasibility of verifying or validating theories. Because each monomethod has limitations, combining monomethods provides an easier, possibly more efficient way of validating theories. A second advantage of mixed methodology, then, is that it can provide more well-developed theories as well as a fresh approach to the study of a particular phenomenon.

### Case Study Approach

One approach to data gathering that utilizes the mixed methodology epistemology is the case study approach. According to Creswell (1998), a case study is “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases)



over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (p. 61). The bounded system is constrained by time and location. The case can be an event, an activity, or individuals. For the purposes of this study, the "case" is the marital couple, which is bounded by the time period in which the data was collected. According to Stake (1995), this study would be classified as a "collective case study" because it involves more than one case.

The case study approach is predicated on the idea that an in-depth examination of one or a few cases can provide great insights into human communication. Creswell (1998) suggests that the examination of any more than four cases muddles the study, and only aids in generalization of findings. He argues that generalization is antithetical to true qualitative research. Therefore, the case study approach should be applied in a study with no more than four cases. As such, this study will focus on the communication of four married couples who are maintaining close cross-sex friendships. In the discussion chapter, the experiences of the diary-only participants will be mentioned as further evidence of the dialectical tensions, management strategies, commitment and trust experienced by the four couples (full-study participants).

Creswell (1998) states that data collection in the case study approach is "extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information" (p. 62). In this study, the case study approach consisted of the utilization of the diary

method, questionnaire, and critical incident method. Next, each will be discussed separately.

### The Diary Method

The diary method requires participants to record information about their communicative interactions over a specified period of time. According to Duck (1991), in order to be a productive method for data collection, diaries must be “structured, regularized, and made to bear on the issues in which the investigator has an interest” (p. 142). The structured diary used in this study contained qualitative, open-ended questions designed to elicit information about how the partners communicate about their cross-sex friends. In addition, the diary contained a “history of the cross-sex friendship” section to provide more information to contextualize the cross-sex friendship within the marriage.

Qualitative questions (i.e., open-ended questions) enable the participant to elaborate on communicative interactions with romantic partners and friends. By utilizing structured questions as opposed to free writing, the researcher can direct the participant’s recollections to discover pertinent information about the influence of cross-sex friendship on communication in romantic relationships. For instance, the researcher can direct the participant’s recall of incidents through questions placed throughout the diary, such as “In what ways does the maintenance of an opposite-sex friend negatively influence your romantic relationship?” (see Appendix B for the full list of diary questions).

According to Baxter and Wilmot (1986), much of the extant literature on relationships takes a "relationship as state" conceptualization, which implies that relationships are stable and that change is not the norm. The present study examined relationships as a "process" because relationships are constantly in flux, which is an underlying tenet of dialectical theory (i.e., the notion of change in a relationship instead of a static relationship). Therefore, a method(s) for data collection must emphasize this perspective of "relationship as process." The diary method is an efficient and effective method to examine the processes of romantic relationships as they change as a result of the maintenance of cross-sex friendships.

By espousing a "relationship as process" stance, a research method that examines relationships over time was necessary (as opposed to a one-time measurement of a relationship, such as a questionnaire). The diary method provides the tool to gather data about a relationship over a specified time period. Baxter and Wilmot (1986) suggest that the diary method has two distinct advantages over other forms of data collection: immediacy and concreteness of stimuli.

With the diary method, participants record information about their interactions on a daily basis. Therefore, they have more immediate recall of an interaction than other methods which ask for recall of events that could have occurred weeks or even months ago. Another advantage is concreteness of stimuli. Because the participants write about events that they have recently experienced, the diary method has an advantage over other

methods that pose hypothetical scenarios to which participants are asked to respond.

According to Duck (1991), diaries have several other advantages. First, participants can complete the diaries within their own time schedule when it is convenient for them. Thus time limits are not imposed upon them and they are able to respond to questions when they do not have other important issues on their mind. Second, the participant can respond to questions while the communicative interactions are still fresh in their minds. This reduces the change in perception that might occur with a more time-elapsd recall method such as a survey. According to Winstead and Derlega (1986), the diary method is an improvement over standard self-report and behavioral measures because of these advantages.

The best form of data collection for any study about communication phenomena would entail following a couple and recording their every interaction. However, that is not feasible. The diary method negates the need to follow the participants around every day by asking participants to provide data about their interactions (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1982).

Several communication scholars have utilized the diary format to examine communication phenomena. Baxter and Wilmot (1986) examined interaction characteristics of relationships by asking participants to complete diaries over a two-week period. Monsour, Harris, Kurzeil, and Beard (1994) tested O'Meara's (1989) four challenges to cross-sex friendships by asking participants to respond to questions in a diary format for a three-week period.

For each day of the diary period, the participants were asked to respond to a series of questions about their interactions with their romantic partner and their cross-sex friend. Questions included, "Did you speak with your opposite-sex friend today?" and "What did you tell your romantic partner about your interaction with your opposite-sex friend?" Additional questions were provided for the days in which the participant did not interact with the cross-sex friend.

Several questions in the diary asked participants to discuss an interaction with their cross-sex friend or an interaction with a romantic partner about a cross-sex friend. Participants were provided with an explanation of what counts as an "interaction." Duck (1991) defines an interaction as "an encounter (of any length) with another person in which the participants attend to one another, converse (whether face-to-face or by telephone), and adjust their behavior to one another" (p. 157-158). He continues by providing examples of what is not an "interaction," such as sitting next to someone on a bus or in class. Also included is "mere exchanges of greeting" unless a conversation follows and the participant feels as though the interaction was significant. The diary provided examples of what does and does not count as an interaction to avoid ambiguity.

### **Questionnaire**

Upon completion of the diary, participants completed a quantitative questionnaire (see Appendix D) designed to measure their commitment to the relationship as well as their trust levels. Quantitative instruments can

provide more stringent responses to pertinent issues. Information from the instruments was not analyzed statistically, but rather qualitatively to provide further explanation for the qualitative responses and additional descriptive information about the couple. The questionnaire contained several quantitative scales, including a measure of certainty, the Dyadic Trust Scale, the Information-Seeking Scale, and the Investment Model Scale.

#### Certainty.

One measure of certainty was included in the questionnaire as an additional indicator of trust in the relational partner. The participant responded to one question that read, "How much certainty do you experience about your relationship?" Certainty was defined for the participants as, "the ability to explain and predict your romantic partner's actions" (adapted from Kellerman & Reynolds, 1990). The participant responded using a five-point Likert scale.

#### Trust

The Dyadic Trust Scale developed by Larzalere and Huston (1980) was used to measure the amount of trust that the participant had for his or her partner. There are several scales to measure trust, but the Dyadic Trust Scale was chosen because the evidence for the validity of this scale is more persuasive than others, according to Baxter (1988). Additionally, the internal reliability and construct validity receive support from additional studies which use the scale (Baxter, 1988). The Dyadic Trust Scale contains eight

questions with Likert-type responses. In previous studies, the scale yielded a coefficient alpha of .93.

#### **Information-seeking.**

An individual's level of information seeking in a relationship was measured by the Kellermann and Reynolds (1990) model. This model examines motivation to reduce uncertainty in relationships. The instrument was included in the questionnaire because it can provide quantitative information about communication with a romantic partner about a cross-sex friend that can be compared to the qualitative data provided by participants in the open-ended questions. The scale consists of six Likert-type questions that were modified to pertain to question-asking about the partner's friend. The information-seeking scale yields a coefficient alpha of .78 to .85 (Kellermann & Reynolds, 1990).

#### **Commitment.**

The Investment Model Scale was refined by Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998). This scale was included in the questionnaire to measure the various aspects of commitment to the romantic relationship. Because the definition of commitment used in this study was taken from Rusbult's commitment research, Rusbult's Investment Model Scale was chosen for use in the diary. The scale is comprised of four sections that contain Likert-type responses that measure satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, investment size, and commitment level. Rusbult, et. al. (1998) reported good reliability ratings for the Investment Model Scale. Alphas for Commitment Level

ranged from .91 to .95. Alphas for Satisfaction Level ranged from .92 to .95. For Quality of Alternatives, alphas ranged from .82 to .88, and for Investment Size alphas ranged from .82 to .84.

### **Critical Incident Method**

The critical incident method was designed by Flanagan (1954) as a means of “collecting direct observations of human behavior” for the goal of “solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles” (p. 327). The method has been modified over the years and incorporated into many academic disciplines, such as business and education.

As it was originally designed, the critical incident method solicited information from participants by asking them to recall incidents that best illustrated the phenomena under study. The questions were posed to participants during an interview to allow the interviewer to probe for more details if necessary. For example, Neyer, Banse, and Asendorpf (1999) examined communication between twins in which they asked participants to “discuss a situation that had led to conflict” between the twins (p. 426).

Over the years, scholars have modified this method. For instance, in an examination of friendships between ex-spouses, Masheter (1997) used a similar method called “episode analysis” in which she asked respondents to recall conversations between themselves and their ex-spouse that were examples of good and bad times.

In the present study, marital couples were asked to respond to a hypothetical scenario about marriage and cross-sex friendships (see Appendix



F for the scenario and questions) in a laboratory setting. Holmes and Rempel (1989) conducted a similar study in which couples were placed in a laboratory setting and asked to discuss a difficult issue in their relationship. In the present study, couples were asked to respond to questions regarding the scenario. Questions were designed to promote discussion between the spouses about how they would communicate if the same situation would occur between them.

The scenario for this study was written by the researcher. Dynamics of the scenario couple were chosen to represent a realistic situation that could be encountered by a majority of married couples. First, in the scenario, John's cross-sex friend is someone whom he met at work, which is a likely setting for the development of cross-sex friendships. Second, the element of a sexual relationship between John and Kate (the CSF) was deliberately eliminated from the scenario to create a platonic friendship situation that the participating couple could freely discuss. The focus of the scenario should be the communication between John and Jane, not a sexual relationship between John and Kate. Third, the cross-sex friends were deliberately placed in a situation in which they may likely interact around other people. In other words, they are not alone in Kate's apartment, but rather they are engaged in an activity-oriented situation where other people might see them together (an activity in which Jane is not inclined to participate).

The scenario that was created provided a means for the couples to discuss freely communication about cross-sex friends. Adding information

about Kate's physical attractiveness or the hint of sexual involvement between Kate and John may have shifted the focus of the scenario discussion from the communication between John and Jane to the sexual elements of Kate and John's relationship. A focus on the sexual relationship might have made the couples too uncomfortable to continue the discussion. Additionally, couples may not have treated the scenario with as much seriousness if they had to dwell on a sexual relationship between Kate and John.

There are many ways in which a scenario could have been constructed for this study. Different scenarios would yield different discussions among the participants. However, as stated above, there were strategic reasons for constructing the scenario as it was utilized in this study. The primary interest was utilizing a scenario that would allow participants to feel comfortable discussing communication in marital relationships in which one or both spouses maintain a cross-sex friendship.

The critical incident method is the best method to capture actual talk between partners in a romantic relationship. Asking participants to carry around a tape recorder and record all of their conversations with their partners is intrusive and time-consuming. Therefore, the next best alternative is to place the couple in a "private" setting (alone in a lab room) where they can talk about relationship issues. The couples responded to pre-written questions about the scenario and were free to discuss issues between themselves without interruption or manipulation by the investigator. The

couple's conversation was tape-recorded and analyzed inductively to discover dialectical tensions and management strategies present when one or both partners maintains a cross-sex friendship.

As it was designed for this study, the critical incident method was developed from a qualitative perspective. The participants were free to discuss the issues without manipulation. Upon completion of the session, the audiotapes were transcribed and analyzed inductively, which will be described in detail later in the chapter.

### Recruitment of Participants

Participants were recruited from a large south central university. A posting was e-mailed to graduate students on the campus to recruit participants who met the requirements for participation. The goal of the study was to acquire twenty couples to participate in the diary phase and five couples to participate in the critical incident phase. However, because of the intricate nature of the issues involved in this study, fewer individuals were willing to participate. Permission from the Institutional Review Board was obtained prior to the start of the data collection.

Requirements for participation in the study included current involvement in a heterosexual marital relationship in which one or both partners was maintaining currently a close, heterosexual, cross-sex friendship. A "close" relationship was defined as someone with whom the participant interacted at least once a week, and with whom the participant felt a significant emotional connection (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989). Both

partners in the romantic relationship had to participate because of the employment of dialectical theory.

### Procedures

#### Data Collection

Ten married couples participated in the study. Seven of the ten couples (all of whom participated in the diary and questionnaire phases) agreed to participate in the critical incident phase. Initially, two hypothetical scenarios were created. Each of the seven couples randomly received one of the two scenarios. Two couples dropped out during the critical incident taping because the scenario "hit too close to home." Four couples successfully completed scenario one and one couple successfully completed scenario two. Because scenario two contains different elements from scenario one, the discussion was not included in this study. Therefore, the data for the study consists primarily of the data of the four couples who completed all phases of data collection. The data from the remaining six couples is utilized to further illustrate the primary findings of the study.

To characterize the participants, demographics for the four highlighted couples will be provided followed by a discussion of the demographics of the remaining six couples. As stated previously, only four couples completed all three data collection phases (diary, questionnaire, and critical incident scenario discussion). Three of the couples consisted of at least one graduate student. One couple consisted of at least one undergraduate student. Ages of these couples ranged from 20 to 33 years. The length of their relationship

(including time in a dating relationship) varied from 14 months to seven years and two months. The cross-sex friendships of these participants ranged from five months to ten years.

The remaining six couples completed diaries and the questionnaires. One of the six couples completed only the diary and not the questionnaire. Five of the couples were comprised of graduate students while one couple was comprised of undergraduate students. Ages of the participants in these six couples ranged from 22 to 49 years. The length of the marriages (including time in a dating relationship) varied from six and a half years to twenty-seven and a half years. The cross-sex friendships varied in length from five months to ten years and two months.

Participants were asked to write in a diary for a seven-day period during which diary entries were made daily. The seven-day period was chosen for two reasons. First, a seven day period fits the concept of "saturation," which means that the researcher gathers information that continues to add to the analysis until no more information can be found (Creswell, 1998). In other words, at a certain point, the researcher has gathered enough information to analyze to the point that anything more will be excess information. Second, more than seven days may prove to be too long for participants, who might grow tired of the daily entries in the diary and cease to provide useful information.

Each partner received his/her own diary. Two different diaries were created. One diary was written for the spouse who had the opposite-sex

friend. Another diary was written for the spouse who did not have an opposite-sex friend. For couples in which both spouses are maintaining opposite-sex friends, each couple filled out the "opposite-sex friend" diary. Spouses were instructed to keep their diaries and diary entries confidential from their partner. They were asked not to discuss their entries until the diaries were returned to the author. Every two days the researcher contacted the participants to check their progress with the diaries and to answer any questions they might have had. On the eighth day, the diaries were returned to the researcher. At that point, the participants were given the questionnaires to complete. Upon completion of the questionnaires, the participants were asked to participate in the critical incident phase of the project.

In the critical incident phase, the couple was seated in an experimental laboratory room, and asked to respond to a pre-written scenario and several follow-up questions. A tape recorder was placed on the table with the scenario. The session was audio-taped, but the participants were assured that the tapes would remain confidential and anonymous. After the couple was given verbal instructions and participants signed an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E), the researcher pushed the record button on the tape recorder and left the room so that the couple could discuss the scenarios. Upon completion of this task, the researcher debriefed the couple.

Because of the comprehensive and time-consuming nature of these research methods, participants were paid a nominal fee (\$10 each) to

participate. Couples who participated in both the diary and critical incident phases of the study were paid more (\$15 each) than those who completed only the diary portion of the study. Paying participants may have provided added incentive to maintain the diary entries and to participate in the second phase of the project.

### Data Analysis

To answer the four research questions, data from the diaries, questionnaires, and critical incident transcriptions were analyzed inductively. Ten couples participated in the study. Four couples completed all three data collection measures (and in the critical incident method they responded to scenario one). One couple completed all three data collection methods, but responded to critical incident scenario two. (Their scenario discussion was too different from the other four scenario discussions; thus, it was not used for this study -- only their diaries and questionnaires were used). The other five couples who participated only completed the diaries and questionnaires. The diary data that these couples provided was adequate, but not elaborate enough to warrant a lengthy discussion. Therefore, to answer the four research questions, the primary data utilized came from the four couples who completed all three data collection methods (and responded to scenario one). The diary data from the other six couples will be utilized in the discussion section to further illustrate the existence of the dialectical tensions and the management strategies used by these couples to manage those tensions.

Because this study will provide an in-depth examination of the communication of four couples, the case study approach will be implemented in the data analysis. According to Creswell (1998), to report the findings in a case study approach, it is common for the cases to be analyzed and discussed separately through a detailed description of each case (called within-case analysis), followed by an analysis across cases (cross-case analysis). Chapter Five provides the within-case analysis of the four marital couples with cross-sex friends and Chapter Six contains the cross-case analysis detailing the similarities between all four cases.

Stake (1995) argues that case studies should contain four forms of data analysis and interpretation. "Direct interpretation" occurs when the researcher takes a single incident/behavior/ message and elicits meaning from it. Through "categorical aggregation," the researcher examines a series of incidents/behaviors/messages to discover an underlying issue. The third form of data analysis is the examination of "patterns" that exist within the data. The researcher makes links between issues. The final form of analysis and interpretation is "naturalistic generalizations." Stake (1995) argues that from one case, generalizations can be made. These are not generalizations in the empirical sense, but rather generalizations about what can be learned from the one case and applied to a population of cases.

The researcher established categories that arose from and made sense of the data that was collected (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, & Garner, 1991). Once the categories were refined, the researcher began to examine links between the



categories for themes that emerged. Ely, et. al. (1991) define a theme as an “inferred statement that highlights explicit or implied attitudes toward life, behavior, or understandings of a person, persons, or culture” (p. 150). In the present study, these statements reflected the dialectical tensions and management strategies experienced by the marital couple regarding their opposite-sex friends. Dialectical tensions were identified through statements that reflected oppositional forces operating in the communicative behaviors of the participants. The process of category classification is similar to the process reported by Braithwaite and Baxter (1995) and Rawlins (1983).

Because this is a case study approach, initially the data from each couple was analyzed separately. From this data “a detailed description of the case emerges, as do an analysis of themes or issues and an interpretation or assertions about the case by the researcher” (Creswell, 1998, p. 63).

Themes that emerged from the data of each couple were noted as dialectical tensions and management strategies became apparent. Interestingly, a pattern emerged among all of the couples. The dialectical tensions present in the first couple arose in all four couples.

Creswell (1998) argues that one more form of data analysis and interpretation should be added to Stake’s four forms. For Creswell, “description” of the case is most important in providing details from which to contextualize the findings. As such, Chapter Five describes each of the four cases by providing a history of the marriage and a discussion of the dialectical tensions that operate within that case. Chapter Six provides a cross-case

analysis in which the four cases are compared and naturalistic generalizations are made to illustrate how the four cases relate to previous literature on dialectics, commitment, and trust.

### **Summary**

Three methods for data collection were employed in this study: the diary, questionnaire and critical incident methods. All three methods combined provided the most efficient and effective methods for answering the research questions. Through a combination of the methods (known as a mixed method approach), a case study approach was utilized to better understand the communicative experiences of the couples who participated in the study.

The study was designed to reduce the possibility that couples would not provide information in their diaries about how they communicate with their romantic partner about their cross-sex friend. First, for each diary entry, one question (the last question of each day) was inserted that was designed to elicit information about how the participant communicates about their opposite-sex friend even if the participant did not speak to their opposite-sex friend that day. Second, the critical incident method was an excellent secondary method for capturing actual communication between couples as they communicate about their opposite-sex friends.

The case study approach provided a consistent and thorough approach to data collection and analysis leading to reliable and valid findings. Both within-case and cross-case analyses will be provided in the following chapters.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

**In this study, ten couples participated in the diary and questionnaire methods (referred to as diary-only participants). Of those ten couples, four couples completed the critical incident method in addition to the diaries and questionnaires (the four couples will be referred to as the four cases). This chapter reports the dialectical tensions evident in the diaries and critical incident scenario discussions from the four couples who completed all of the data methods. The diary information from the remaining six couples will be reported in Chapter Five as additional evidence for the existence of the four dialectical tensions presented next.**

**This chapter begins with an explication of the four dialectical tensions that emerged from an analysis of the participant data followed by dialogic evidence for the existence of these dialectics within the four highlighted cases.**

**Baxter (1988a) outlined six categories of dialectical tensions inherent in relationships: openness-closedness, revelation-concealment, predictability-novelty, conventionality-uniqueness, connection-autonomy, and inclusion-seclusion. The categories are based on the dialectical theme that is emphasized, and are constructed to house and classify previously identified tensions. Werner and Baxter (1994) elaborate on this categorization by explaining how dialectical tensions discovered by other dialectical researchers can be contained within these six dialectics. For example, Rawlin's (1983) friendship dialectic of "freedom to be dependent versus freedom to be**

independent” can be categorized under the larger “connection-autonomy” dialectic. These six dialectics have been called “universal dialectics” (Werner & Baxter, 1994) and “conventional dialectics” (Conville, 1998). Universal or conventional dialectics represent the umbrella categories under which more specific types of dialectics can be placed. Werner and Baxter refer to them as the six “family clusters of contradictions (p. 361).”

Indigenous dialectics are tensions unique to a given relationship (Conville, 1998). Werner and Baxter (1994) refer to these as “unique” dialectics. Conville (1998) argues that indigenous dialectics “serve to balance the temptation to treat existing dialectical systems as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ analytical recipe” (p. 29). Additionally, he states that neither conventional nor indigenous dialectics is superior, but rather each provides a different understanding of the dynamics of a relationship.

Werner and Baxter (1994) acknowledge the existence of dialectical tensions that do not conform to the six categories. Additionally, they seek research that examines the “complex pattern of interdependence between and among various contradictions (p. 361).” For the purpose of this study, the communication of each couple was examined to identify conventional and indigenous dialectical tensions created by the maintenance of cross-sex friendships. Examination of the dialogue between marital couples reveals the interdependence of several dialectical tensions, which will be outlined in the following chapter.

Through the analysis of the diary entries, questionnaires, and critical incident scenario discussions, several dialectical tensions were identified: self-other orientation, spouse-friend temporality, discuss-divert, and confront-avoid. Data from the diaries and critical incident transcripts were analyzed inductively. Recurrent communicative behaviors in the data were noted. Patterns of recurrent data took the form of contradictions, which were categorized as dialectical tensions. The grounds for making a claim for the identification of a dialectical tension is akin to a hermeneutic interpretation based on the readings of Baxter, Rawlins, Conville, and other dialectical theorists. Information from the questionnaires was used to qualitatively describe the trust and commitment levels of the participating couples. The trust and commitment levels are referred to throughout the discussion of the four cases (for a complete listing of questionnaire scores, see Appendix H). The emergent dialectical tensions will be explained briefly and illustrated with specific examples of participant dialogue in the following section.

#### Four Dialectical Tensions

##### Self-Other Orientation Dialectic

The self-other orientation dialectic is an intrapersonal dialectic that is communicated and negotiated within a relationship. The self-other dialectic involves choosing between fulfilling one's own needs or fulfilling another person's needs. To illustrate (using the hypothetical scenario from the critical incident method), if Jane is feeling unsettled with John's friendship with Kate, she might choose to confront John. At that point, John must make a

decision of whether to make changes in his friendship with Kate, thus privileging Jane's needs, or to continue to interact with Kate as he pleases, thus privileging his own needs. Therefore, John is forced to make a choice between his own needs and the needs of his wife. He must decide which makes him happier in order to negotiate the dialectic. Then, the consequences of that re-negotiated dialectic influence the communicative behaviors of his marriage. If he chooses to satisfy his wife's needs, her commitment to the relationship may be strengthened, yet his commitment may be weakened if he feels resentment toward his wife for the change in his friendship. If he chooses to privilege his own needs and continues to do what he wants with Kate, Jane may feel a weakened commitment to him and change her communication with him (perhaps stop speaking to him, for instance).

Lund (1991) states that committed relationships "are expected to endure and withstand periods of conflict or low rewards to the individuals in them" (p. 213). When negotiating the self-other dialectic, the individual must decide if they are willing to endure low rewards (by privileging the other dialectic) in order to please a spouse.

#### Spouse-Friend Temporality Dialectic

The spouse-friend temporality dialectic involves the amount of time spent with the spouse versus time spent with the cross-sex friend. The connection-autonomy dialectic is too broad to clearly explain the dynamic involved in marital relationships in which one or both partners maintain a

cross-sex friendship. Additionally, there are different elements involved in the perceptions of time spent with a cross-sex friend as opposed to time spent with a same-sex friend. The added element of potential sexual attraction makes the balance between spouse and friend time much more important for these marital couples.

#### Discuss-Divert Dialectic

The dialectic of discuss-divert operates differently for different couples. In their diaries, many couples reported the importance of discussing cross-sex friend issues with the spouse, but during the scenario discussion, the couples began speaking about reasons for withholding information about a cross-sex friend. The main concern for these couples is that discussing the cross-sex friendship can cause conflict. For couple one, the wife does not discuss information about the friendship because it might create concern in her jealous husband. For couple four, the husband does not talk much about interactions with his friend because his wife does not like the friend, and thus, conflict ensues.

#### Confront-Avoid Dialectic

Confront-avoid dialectic concerns confronting someone regarding the cross-sex friendship. For couple two, the dialectic involved whom to confront: should the wife confront her husband about a cross-sex friend and/or should the wife confront the cross-sex friend? For couple three, the wife indicated concern about confronting her husband about his cross-sex

friend's intentions for fear it might serve as a suggestion to her husband to consider the friend as a potential romantic partner.

These four dialectical tensions are not necessarily indigenous dialectics because they exist among several marital couples. However, Conville (1998) argues that indigenous dialectics, "on closer examination, may also be found in many other relationships and thus be conventional." The argument put forth in this study is that these dialectics are unique to marital relationships in which one or both spouses is maintaining a cross-sex friendship. Evidence will be provided in the next two chapters to illustrate the intricacies of these dialectics that make them unique to marital couples with cross-sex friendships.

The self-other orientation dialectic is an intrapersonal dialectic and cannot be contained within Baxter's "six family clusters of contradictions." Self-other is one of the dialectics that is interwoven among all of the other dialectical tensions. The existence of the "dynamic systems of dialectical tensions" suggested by Werner and Baxter (1994, p. 361) is evident in the self-other dialectic as it intersects and interacts with all other relational dialectics. The interaction will be illustrated in each of the four cases in the following chapter.

While Werner and Baxter argue that connection-autonomy is "so central to relationships that it constitutes the primary contradiction to which all other contradictions cohere (1994, p. 357)," the argument brought forth in this study is that the self-other orientation dialectic supersedes the



connection-autonomy dialectic. In determining how to manage the connection-autonomy dialectic, the individuals in the relationship must determine whether to privilege their own needs ("self") or their partner's needs ("other") or some combination of both in order to determine whether connection or autonomy is going to be chosen. For instance, if Jane wants to spend more time with John, then she hopes to re-negotiate the connection-autonomy dialectic in favor of "connection." But, if John would like to maintain the same degree of autonomy as before, then John and Jane will experience difficulty managing the connection-autonomy dialectic. During the "negotiation" of the connection-autonomy dialectic, John and Jane will engage in intrapersonal management of the self-other dialectic. John will determine if he is going to assert his own needs over Jane's needs. At the same time, Jane must decide if she is going to assert her own needs over John's needs. Therefore, the self-other dialectic will influence the negotiation of the connection-autonomy dialectic. As such, the self-other dialectic supersedes the connection-autonomy dialectic.

Werner and Baxter (1994) suggest that researchers "determine how change that is centered in one contradiction reverberates throughout a system of interdependent contradictions, that is, issues that relate to temporal sequencing (p. 364)." The self-other dialectic is the catalyst for change in all other dialectical tensions throughout the relational system. Once an individual decides that it is time to change need orientation from other to

self, then most (if not all) of the internal dialectical tensions will have to be re-negotiated to accommodate this shift in the self-other dialectic.

#### **Four Cases of Marital Couples with Cross-Sex Friends**

In this section, four case studies are reported in which four dialectical tensions will be illustrated: self-other orientation, spouse-friend temporality, discuss-divert, and confront-avoid. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their identity. A history of the relationship provides some background of the marital couple and the cross-sex friendships. Dialogue extractions are from the critical incident method in which the couple discusses a hypothetical scenario about a married couple (John and Jane) and the husband's cross-sex friend (Kate). See Appendix F for the full scenario. Additional information is gleaned from the diary entries of the marital couple. As the data are presented, it will be labeled as "in the diary" or "in the scenario discussion" to refer to which method of data collection the information was derived.

Interestingly, as the couples discussed the hypothetical scenario, they randomly interspersed their own reality. In other words, as the couples discussed what John and Jane should do, they discussed how they would handle the situation if it were occurring in their own marriage. Their conversations become stream-of-consciousness in form as they switch continuously from hypothetical to reality. There is no set pattern for when they make this switch or how they make the switch. At no point in the scenario discussion are the couples instructed to discuss how they would react

to the scenario if it were to occur in their own marriage. While they rarely assert their own cross-sex friendship dilemmas into the discussion, they do discuss how they would react in a similar situation. Perhaps this is the safest way for the couple to discuss the hypothetical without becoming too personally involved (i.e., delving into their own cross-sex friendship problems). However, as is evident from the two couples who dropped out during the critical incident scenario discussion, the hypothetical scenario touches on some poignant issues for marital couples. As such, the participating couples who remained in the study may have felt that simply discussing the hypothetical was “safer” than discussing their own cross-sex friendship problems.

This switch from hypothetical to reality phenomenon supplied the study with dialogue between the spouses about how they would communicate about a similar situation in their own marriages. Thus, the findings of this study are given more justification and credibility because the participants are discussing the reality of the issues for their marriage.

#### Case One - Marsha and Bob

Throughout their seven years together, both Marsha and Bob have maintained close cross-sex friendships. They have been married for three years. Marsha and Bob are in their mid-twenties. She is a graduate student and he works full-time outside of the university setting.

Bob has been friends with his cross-sex friend for ten years (thus his friendship began prior to his marriage). His sister introduced Bob to his

female friend in high school. Bob sees his friend about once or twice a year; however, they talk on the phone or via e-mail at least once a week. He thinks that Marsha has met the cross-sex friend once, but they do not interact. Because of the distance (the friend lives in another state), his wife and his friend have never really had the chance to meet in person. Bob and his friend have discussed being romantically involved. They went to the prom together where they kissed, but nothing more than that. Bob doesn't think it has "directly" affected their friendship, but there was a point when he and his wife weren't getting along ("really not getting along!"). During that time, Bob often wondered about being with his friend. Bob's friend is married.

Marsha has been friends with her cross-sex friend for two years (she met her friend after she married Bob). They met when a mutual friend introduced them. She generally sees him every day except weekends and days when she does not go to campus. The friends rarely talk via telephone, but they sometimes send each other messages via e-mail. "Real conversations are usually reserved for face-to-face encounters." Bob is not friends with her friend. She has introduced them, but Bob has no reason to develop a friendship with him because he and Marsha's friend rarely see each other. The friends have never been romantically involved. Marsha's cross-sex friend told her that he liked her, but when he found out she was married, he backed off. This confession came once his feelings for her dissipated (she thinks). She thinks his confession did at one point affect their friendship because she was not certain if his motives were clear. They experienced a

brief breakdown in communication, but “somehow the air cleared.” They are back to “normal” again. Marsha’s friend is single.

**Discuss-Divert Dialectic.**

Within Marsha and Bob’s marriage exists a dialectic which resembles the conventional dialectic of openness-closedness. Yet, the dialectic of openness-closedness is too broad to explain the intricate experiences of couple one. The dialectic is particular to couples with cross-sex friendships because the person must decide what information might cause conflict or concern in their spouse. In other words, should information be communicated to the spouse about sexual innuendoes or sexual interest or personal problems of the cross-sex friend? For Bob and Marsha, the dialectic of discuss-divert is salient. Both Marsha and Bob reported in their diaries that they did not discuss with each other the interactions that they had with their cross-sex friends.

During the diary period, Bob had e-mailed his friend about seeing her when he was visiting her home town. He claims that he did not discuss this “interaction” with Marsha because he “hadn’t finalized any plans to see her [the cross-sex friend].”

Marsha reported in her diary entries that on two occasions she interacted with her cross-sex friend and did not discuss the interactions with Bob. On one occasion, she commented to her friend about the fact that he was not as dressed up as usual and they talked about some computer problems.

**Marsha reported in her diary that she did not tell Bob about this interaction because:**

**I didn't see the point. Bob would not be interested in the details of my conversations with Earl unless there were sexual overtones. And then I wouldn't discuss it with him so as to keep down confusion.**

**During her second interaction with her friend that week, they discussed a range of personal and professional topics. The discussion lasted two and a half hours in a private office setting (the office door was closed). Marsha did not tell her husband about the interaction because "there was nothing spoken that would concern or interest my spouse."**

**From these interactions, it is apparent that Marsha and Bob have chosen to privilege the "divert" pole of the dialectic. They believe that their spouse would not be interested in the details of the interactions. Marsha and Bob reported lower trust and certainty than most of the other couples who participated in the diary study (see Appendix H). In his diary, Bob even remarks that, since he has gotten married, the idea of infidelity is not such a foreign concept. He states: "I've never cheated on my wife, but I know if I'm in the right frame of mind (weakened by something and my friend were in a similar situation) it is 'possible'." Therefore, even though Bob and Marsha do not overtly acknowledge a problem, cross-sex friendships may be problematic in their marriage. This is especially true if Bob considers his female friend a tempting alternative, as his statement would suggest.**

**Additionally, it is evident that Marsha does not trust Bob with information about her cross-sex friend. She states that she would not tell Bob about sexual overtones in her conversations with Earl because it would lead to confusion. Marsha must sense some insecurity that Bob feels about her friendship with Earl or she would not be so concerned about what she does and does not tell Bob about the interactions.**

**Bob's reluctance to tell Marsha about his pending plans with his cross-sex friend are enlightening as well. Does Bob believe that telling Marsha about his plans before they are set jeopardizes his ability to make the plans? In other words, if Marsha finds out that Bob is planning to visit his CSF, would she attempt to interfere with the plans by telling Bob that he cannot go to visit the friend? By not telling Marsha until his plans are set, she may have less say in the matter. Bob could make a case to Marsha that his plans have been made and they cannot be changed.**

**In her diary entries, Marsha wrote about not telling Bob about her cross-sex friends. She wrote:**

**When Bob finds out that someone (male) has e-mailed me, he will hang around to read the message over my shoulder or ask what so-and-so meant by such-and-such. The conflict starts if I make him leave the room or refuse to answer his questions. I generally answer him or avoid checking my e-mail at home when he is around. If the male friend is a mutual friend, they can say almost anything to me without raising Bob's suspicions.**

**It is evident that Marsha's reluctance to discuss her cross-sex friends raises Bob's suspicions. If she continues to avoid talking about her cross-sex friends, Bob's suspicions might grow beyond a healthy nature. He may begin suspecting her of having an affair when she simply wants to maintain some semblance of privacy with her friend. Marsha admits that if Bob knows the man who is talking to her, then he is comfortable with the friendship. However, when he has not met the man, he is much more suspicious. Bob echoes this claim during the critical incident scenario:**

**If I knew, if I was in Jane's shoes, if I knew the other person reasonably well, it would be easier to take. If I had met the other person or only saw them once, then that would probably be more unsettling because I don't know what they are like and I haven't had a chance to get a grasp for whether or not they are trying to do something.**

**Later in the scenario discussion, Bob reiterates his feelings about Marsha hanging out with men he doesn't know:**

**Yeah, George is a friend and I know him pretty well. I wouldn't have any problem with that. It would have to be somebody I didn't know [to raise his suspicions].**

**Therefore, discuss-divert becomes important, especially when the spouse does not know or does not interact with the cross-sex friend.**

**From these incidents, Marsha and Bob have chosen to manage the dialectic of discuss-divert through privileging "divert." At some point, this may become problematic for the couple because trust is an issue for them.**



Therefore, they are going to have to negotiate how they are going to talk about their cross-sex friendships in a manner that is not threatening to either spouse.

### **Self-Other Orientation Dialectic.**

The dialectic of self-other orientation is interconnected with all relational dialectics. In any situation, a married person must decide whether to act in his/ her best interests or the best interests of the spouse. Should a person privilege his/ her comfort level by withholding information about their cross-sex friend? In other words, if it makes Marsha feel better personally by not sharing information about her cross-sex friend with Bob, she may be doing so by sacrificing Bob's feelings about self-disclosing information about cross-sex friends. This dialectic is salient to Marsha and Bob as evident in their unwillingness to communicate with each other about their cross-sex friends.

Another issue that encompasses the self-other orientation dialectic is time spent with the friend. In the hypothetical scenario created for the critical incident method, John and Jane are married. John spends some of his time on the weekends with his friend Kate, during which time they go hiking and kayaking without Jane. When Marsha and Bob discussed this scenario, they mentioned possible solutions to Jane's problem with John and Kate. Spending less time with the friend was the most important solution for them:

**Marsha:** I don't know, I would think that the first thing she would say to him is to spend less time with her.

**Bob:** On Jane's side, I don't think anything is going to really, I mean, they can talk and all that, she is just going to have to feel comfortable. Something is going to have to be done to make her feel comfortable and if it's less time or if it is inclusion, or

**Marsha:** Maybe they are going to have to become, but still you can't do that, like if I have a friend and this person, if it's my friend and even if I include you in those activities, there is just going to be stuff that we talk about and we laugh about and you might sit there looking like, "all right, yeah, whatever." So I don't think it would do enough for them to do things as a three-some. It might ease it a little bit, but still I don't think that really solves the issue. I think it will come down to him probably spending less time with her.

**Bob:** Especially if she is a co-worker. That is a lot of time that they are spending together.

**Marsha:** What would you do if this was you?

**Bob:** If I were John?

**Marsha:** If you were Jane. What would you recommend to me?

**Bob:** I don't know. If I were Jane, as a solution to the problem, I'd ask that you'd stop seeing her as much.

**Marsha:** What if I thought that was an unfair request because you won't do the things that I like to do with me.

**Bob:** You married me, deal with it (both laugh). Maybe they just have to figure out things that they can do together that they both like. I mean, they are married, they have to have some kind of compatibility.

**Marsha:** That's a hard one.

**Bob:** I think John is probably the one who is going to have to make the most sacrifices in this area because when you deal with an action, you can stop doing something a lot easier than you can change your emotions or feelings about something. So I think he is probably going to have to

**Marsha:** Stop doing things that he enjoys doing

**Bob:** Not completely, I mean, I wouldn't say cut it completely out, because then I think that would cause resentment. I can't do the things that I want because you are paranoid. Then you start kind of holding grudges and keeping histories.

Within this dialogue is the perfect illustration of the self-other orientation dialectic. As Bob and Marsha put themselves in this scenario, they discuss the intricacies of doing what makes you happy while sacrificing the happiness of your spouse. By limiting time with the cross-sex friend, Bob would be privileging the happiness of his wife while sacrificing some of his own happiness. But, if he chooses to privilege his own happiness to the detriment of his wife (by continuing to spend his weekend time with his cross-sex friend), then his marriage may suffer. Marsha will feel ignored, which could have further ramifications within their marriage.

The suggestion by Marsha that the spouse be included in outings was quickly retracted when she realized that the spouse would not be included in the private elements of the friendship culture, such as inside jokes and experiences shared only by the friends. Additionally, if the spouse is always included in the "friendship time," then the cross-sex friend is bound to get annoyed by the intrusion of the spouse into the friendship.

A couple must delicately manage the self-other orientation dialectic. Marsha mentions the self-other orientation in her diary. She stated:

You must always remember that where something may not bother [you], it may bother your spouse. Hence it's not enough to behave as you would want your spouse to behave; you must carry yourself in a way that would not be seen as disrespectful to your spouse.

Bob mentions the self-other dialectic in the scenario discussion:

I definitely think that John should talk to his wife and reassure her and, you know, if it means that much, maybe he needs to cut back a little bit. I mean, whoever thinks it is unfair, life isn't fair sometimes, but you know sometimes you are doing something that you think is the greatest thing in the world, but it could be hurting some other part of your relationship or your family.

To manage this dialectic, it is important to make personal decisions about what is most important to you. As Bob has eluded, many times you have to reflect on whether someone else is being hurt by your behavior. In this instance, is the maintenance of a cross-sex friend hurting a spouse? The

answer to that question becomes important because it requires the re-negotiation of the self-other dialectic.

Within the marriage, the dialectic of self-other orientation is crucial to how the partners manage incidents in their lives. Most importantly, the maintenance of cross-sex friendships can create more problems than same-sex friendships for some couples. As such, the self-other orientation dialectic is further illuminated. If Bob has problems with Marsha's friend, then Marsha must decide to privilege either her own needs or the needs of her husband. Her decision could impact the marriage in major ways. If Bob finds that Marsha is privileging her own needs to his detriment on a regular basis, conflict could ensue. Conversely, if Bob sees that Marsha is making adjustments in her behavior to make Bob feel better about her cross-sex friend, then Bob may feel more secure and more committed to their marriage.

#### Spouse-Friend Temporality Dialectic.

The connection-autonomy dialectic is best renamed for the explication of marital couples who maintain cross-sex friendships. The spouse-friend temporality dialectic illustrates the struggle that spouses encounter when making plans with a cross-sex friend. The spouse who is excluded from the friendship outing is the one who feels that not enough time is spent with the marriage. For Marsha and Bob, Marsha may spend time with her opposite-sex friend, which irritates Bob because he wants to spend more time with Marsha. Bob and Marsha discuss the spouse-friend temporality dialectic in

their critical incident scenario when asked to enact a conversation between John and Jane.

Marsha: John, I have a problem with you and Kate seeing so much of each other. It is really making me feel kind of unsettled, the amount of time that you guys spend together.

Bob: Well, what about it is making you unsettled?

Marsha: Well, I mean you work with her and then you spend your weekends with her doing these little outdoor stuff and I just feel that that's a lot of time.

Bob: Well I invited you along.

Marsha: But you know I don't like outdoor activities.

Bob: So what do you want me to do?

Marsha: Maybe just see a little less of her.

Bob: What defines less?

Marsha: Not going out every weekend with her.

Bob: Every other weekend? Every third weekend?

Marsha: Don't be funny.

Bob: I'm serious. I mean when you say less, to me less can be every weekend, but not the whole day.

Marsha: All right. What if you were in my shoes, then what?

Bob: I don't know. Well,

Marsha: I mean, can you at least see where I am coming from?

**Bob:** Yeah, I guess, but so what is your fear? I mean I spent time with you at home. We are only gone on a Saturday or a Sunday. It is not overnight or anything.

**Marsha:** Think about it. You work all day and come home and you are tired. I work all day and I come home and I'm tired. Our conversations basically consist of how was your day, what did you do today, and then we just veg out in front of the TV. I mean, our conversations have gone pretty much to pot. We just don't do anything together. And then the time that we do have on the weekends, you spend them with Kate. It is not like I have anything against her. If you like her I am sure she is a wonderful person. What about me? What about us? We need to develop us. You spend time developing your friendship, but we're kind of slipping away.

**Bob:** Again I ask, what do you want? What can I do?

**Marsha:** And again I say, spend less time with her and spend more time with me.

**Bob:** Okay, so let's say that I had planned a trip for the next two weekends to go rafting. So do you want me to cut one of those weekends?

**Marsha:** You have already made your plans so go ahead. But, you at least see where I am coming from. Because if you have no concept of where I am coming from, then all this is really pointless.

**Bob:** I guess I can understand. I guess. Do you think something is going on?

**Marsha:** If I was willing to let my mind go there, I would have those kinds of suspicions, but I try to hold that down. But let's look at this - a very attractive young man, successful, and a single female in no relationship, you guys are constantly together at work and then you carry it over to the weekend. I am not trying to accuse you of anything other than not spending enough time with me. I think it is about balance. There needs to be better balance. I mean I am not sitting here trying to deny you your friends, but

**Bob:** Tell you what. How about this. I'll tell you beforehand that we decide that we are going to do something that weekend. Let's just try, if you feel comfortable, fine, if you want to do something that weekend with me instead, fine, too. I don't know when you feel that too much is enough, too much time with Kate. So, I am going to put the pressure on you, or when you want to spend time or just have me loafing, let's just try for a while, you have to let me know so we can see how this is working.

**Marsha:** This sounds like a good plan.

The spouse-friend temporality dialectic was a recurrent dialectic throughout Bob and Marsha's discussion of the scenario and in their diary entries. For example, Bob states during the critical incident method:



I think too much time alone together on the weekends can cause problems even if it wasn't his [John's] intent in the first place. I think that much time away from your spouse, and at work all day, and on the weekend, I think that opens up a lot of doors.

Marsha indicated that time spent with her cross-sex friend can cause conflict with Bob. She stated that her cross-sex friend does not cause conflict "unless the opposite-sex friend cuts into Bob's time with me."

In the discussion of curbing time spent with the friend, Bob and Marsha converse about the impact that would have on John's friendship with Kate.

Bob: They have been married for three years and together for two, I think a lot is on John. Jane could say what she feels, but John is going to have to make a decision. He should probably quit asking as much as if Kate starts asking, then

Marsha: What, starts asking him to go out?

Bob: If you just stop cold turkey, the other person is going to be asking what is going on.

Marsha: I think they should just slow it down considerably. I mean there is a way to do it without raising suspicions. Say my wife and I are doing such and such.

Bob: I think you really have to watch people's reactions to certain things. All of a sudden they go defensive or go nuts.

**Marsha:** That is not necessarily the case. If I get used to spending a lot of time with you and all of a sudden my hanging buddy is gone, that would hurt me.

**Bob:** Who? If you were in Kate's position?

**Marsha:** Yeah. If I am used to hanging out with you and didn't even think to go that way, but just really enjoyed hanging out and spending time doing stuff that I like doing and here's someone who likes to do it, too. I don't think you have to be crazy to feel slighted.

**Bob:** No I don't think you would feel slighted, it is just how you go about that. If you start calling and

**Marsha:** Oh no. She would just need to get other friends.

**Bob:** Start doing some group things or whatever. But definitely John needs to slow it down.

This segment of Bob and Marsha's conversation illustrates the delicate balance that people have to manage between time spent with a friend versus time spent with a spouse. When a spouse decides to curb time with a friend, the friend's feelings have to be managed as well.

Additionally, the spouse-friend temporality dialectic is connected to the self-other orientation dialectic in that the spouse has to decide whether or not to curb time with the friend in order to please their spouse. By curbing time with the friend, the spouse now has to manage the self-other dialectic with the cross-sex friend by privileging their needs over the needs of the friend. For instance, if Marsha wants Bob to spend less time with his friend Ellen,

then he would have to decide whether to acquiesce to her wishes or continue spending as much time as he wants with Ellen. Suppose that Bob decides to put his wife's needs above his own (by adopting the other orientation of the dialectic). Also, he is privileging the spouse temporality pole of the spouse-friend dialectic. Now Bob must curtail the time that he spends with Ellen, which creates another dialectical tension between self-other orientation in his friendship. He must privilege his own needs over the needs of Ellen. Perhaps if Bob's wife is more important to him, then the shift to self-orientation with regard to the cross-sex friendship will not cause him too much dissonance. But, if he feels forced into such an arrangement by Marsha, then the dissonance might have long-lasting consequences to the marriage.

Bob and Marsha mention a potential solution to the spouse-friend temporality dialectic as they wrapped up their scenario discussion.

Bob: I think it is important that if we develop friendships with the opposite sex we make sure, that I make sure that you know them to make sure that you at least get along or whatever.

Marsha: We definitely need some married friends. I guess that is important to have mutual friends when you are married. I think even if it is someone you grew up with or you knew and they are married, I think it is important to make the effort to bring in your spouse in some way. Because otherwise that spouse is going to feel like a third wheel. I mean you don't want to be goofy about it. But you don't want them to feel like they are sitting on the outside of the circle either.

So for Bob and Marsha, having the same friends or including the spouse in the cross-sex friendship is a way to neutralize the spouse-friend temporality dialectic. Then the spouses do not feel neglected or suspicious of the time spent with the cross-sex friend.

The experiences of Bob and Marsha illustrate the dialectical tensions of discuss-divert, self-other orientation, and spouse-friend temporality. Bob and Marsha were relatively consistent in their remarks between their diary entries and their critical incident discussions. As stated previously, their trust levels were lower than most of the other participants, which is consistent with their lack of communication about interactions with their cross-sex friendships and with Bob's jealousy regarding Marsha's male friends.

The main difference between the diary and discussion is found in their responses to question six in their diaries on day seven. Bob stated, "I think you have to be open and honest about your feelings, even if it could hurt your spouse at the time." This statement is antithetical to his reluctance to tell Marsha about his pending visit with his cross-sex friend. Perhaps Bob is strictly talking about "feelings" rather than "actions," for Bob may be open with Marsha if he decides that he has feelings for his female friend. With lower trust levels than most of the diary participants, Bob and Marsha might experience problems in the future based on their reluctance to discuss cross-sex friends and how much time they spend with their cross-sex friends.

### **Case Two - Janet and Larry**

Janet and Larry have been together for two and a half years and married for one year. Larry and Janet are in their early thirties. Both are graduate students, but Larry works outside of the university setting. Larry has a cross-sex friend named Sally and Janet does not have any close, cross-sex friends.

Larry and Sally have been friends for five months (thus his friendship began after he married Janet). They met at work. He sees Sally three to four times a week and they talk by telephone about once a week and rarely e-mail. Janet is not friends with Sally. Janet is cordial with Sally, but does not really like her. Larry thinks that Janet perceives Sally as a threat. He has never discussed being nor has he ever been romantically involved with Sally. Nevertheless, from Larry's perspective, Janet does not believe or trust him. Sally is single.

Janet stated that she has tried to be friends with Sally, but Sally is difficult to be friends with because she constantly tells her how lucky she is to have Larry and how he is so wonderful, charming, and perfect. She feels that Sally uses Larry as a surrogate boyfriend. Sally recently began dating someone, which makes Janet "very happy."

### **Confront-Avoid Dialectic.**

A dialectic of confrontation exists within the marriage of Janet and Larry called confront-avoid. For Janet and Larry, the issue of whether or not to confront the spouse and whether or not to confront the CSF was a point of

contention. Larry was adamant about the need for spouses to confront one another when they felt unsettled about something, in this case an opposite-sex friend. Janet was hesitant to agree whole-heartedly. She stated:

I'm not positive that she should confront him about her suspicions because on the one hand if they have a good relationship where they can talk about stuff, then yes, they can have an honest discussion. But sometimes it is best to just keep it to yourself when you have irrational fears, you know, it is totally unjustified, you can just keep it to yourself and deal with it. Do you know what I mean?

Larry did not agree with her. He responded by stating:

If you keep it to yourself, it can just fester inside of you and make it worse. Then all of a sudden you are having a discussion about something else and then this comes out and it's like, "where is this coming from?" I see it happen all of the time. If you have an issue, you should discuss it. There is no reason not to discuss it.

A few minutes later, Janet argues:

Yeah, but if she doesn't really have, if Jane doesn't really have any conflict with her husband, her conflict is with Kate, and by talking about it she is only going to cause a conflict with her husband.

This prompts Janet to tell Larry that she would confront Kate, not John.

Larry was not happy with this suggestion. He replies curtly:

So you are saying that if I was hanging around chummy chummy with somebody here, you would confront the other person before you

would talk to me? That would be exactly the wrong thing to do from my perspective. Maybe not from yours. I mean, I can't say you are wrong, but I mean how awkward would that be and how, what kind of environment would that create for the people once that happened?

Janet tried to defend her position, but Larry interrupted:

Say Carrie and I were hanging out together, all the time, going to the bar, whatever. And, you know, you didn't tell me anything about it, you know, you never expressed any concern that there might be anything inappropriate going on, and there was nothing inappropriate going on other than after class we went to a bar. And then, one day here, or wherever, you confront her and I'm totally oblivious to this confrontation, I mean, how would that work?

At the heart of this dialectic of confrontation is the self-other orientation dialectic. Janet has expressed concern about Sally's motives in her friendship with Larry. If Janet remains true to her confessions in the scenario discussion, then perhaps Janet will be reluctant to confront Larry about her suspicions. It is evident from the diaries that Larry is aware of Janet's unease with Sally. Therefore, we can assume that at some point Janet has confronted Larry. However, Janet could be reluctant to continually talk to Larry about Sally so as not to appear untrustworthy. As such, Janet is sacrificing her own needs (for discussing Sally to reduce her uncertainty) and privileging Larry's needs. From the scenario discussion, Larry might feel that such a sacrifice is unnecessary as married couples should confront and openly discuss their

problems. But, Janet may feel that not confronting Larry all of the time is the best way to keep him happy.

To satisfy her own needs, however, Janet may enact her new strategy - confront Sally. Besides, who knows Sally's motives better than Sally herself? As evident from the scenario discussion, Larry was completely unhappy with such a confrontation. Larry sees the married couple as the most important variable. Therefore, Janet's attempts to gather information from Sally negates the bond between the spouses. Larry believes that trust is the ultimate aspect of the marriage and by going to Sally, Janet would be implying a lack of trust in Larry to handle the situation.

The dialectic of confrontation - whether to confront the spouse or to confront the cross-sex friend is important for this couple. Both Janet and Larry have strong feelings about who should be confronted. In fact, throughout the entire scenario discussion, the dialectic was continually mentioned, and continually a point of contention for the couple.

#### Spouse-Friend Temporality Dialectic.

The spouse-friend temporality dialectic is salient for Janet and Larry, who echo some of the same concerns as Marsha and Bob. However, Janet and Larry have discussed their problems regarding Sally. In his diary responses, Larry mentions the spouse-friend dialectic:

Honestly [having a cross-sex friend] doesn't [benefit the marriage] so I am trying to distance myself from my opposite-sex friend as much as possible both in the work area and outside the work area. While I have



told my wife that nothing has or ever will happen between my colleague and I, she does not believe me. While I have little choice about working with my opposite-sex friend, I have reduced (intentionally) the number of times I see her in the workplace and I only see her outside of the workplace when I am with my wife.

Larry and Janet have re-negotiated the spouse-friend temporality quite a bit by selecting the “spouse” pole. Larry now has Janet join them when he and Sally get together outside of their workplace. This means that Larry had to re-negotiate his self-other dialectic by privileging Janet’s needs over his own in order to make Janet feel more comfortable.

When discussing the solution for Jane and John, the following dialogue ensued between Larry and Janet:

Larry: Either cut back on the amount of times that he is going hiking and kayaking with Kate or cut them out all together. That is the only solution that I can see from her perspective to make her happy.

Janet: But that is kinda not fair to him, that’s what I am saying

Larry: It is incredibly not fair. It is incredibly not fair especially if there is nothing going on between the two of them. If there is something going on and her fear is justified, then that rationale, that approach is perfectly do-able. But if there is nothing going on, and there is no intention of anything going on, and Kate does not have any ulterior motive other than going kayaking or hiking, then you are right.

Telling them to knock it off is totally unfair. Again, to me, that goes

back to the trust issue. If John and Jane talk, and Jane says I don't trust your motives, and John says, "Look there is nothing with Kate and I, there never will be, I have no intention, you know you have to trust me, I just want to go hiking and kayaking," then to some certain extent, she should trust him on that.

Janet: Yeah, but it is not him that she doesn't trust, it's the other one

Larry: But nothing can happen if he does not let it. Nothing can happen unless two people let it happen. Nothing can happen unless he lets it happen. So, if he says nothing is going to happen, then she has to trust him on that.

As discussed previously, the spouse-friend dialectic is delicately interwoven with the self-other dialectic. From Larry's perspective, it is unfair for John to have to give up time spent with Kate, but the sacrifice must be made if it meets Jane's needs. Larry has indicated in his diary that he has given up his free time with Sally in order to placate Janet. Therefore, when managing the spouse-friend dialectic, the self-other dialectic must be taken into consideration. Larry's other-oriented behavior will be discussed next.

#### Self-Other Orientation Dialectic.

For Janet and Larry, the self-other dialectic is apparent. The dialectic is evident in their discussions of whether or not to confront the spouse or the friend and also in their discussions of time spent with the spouse and friend. But trust is an important issue for this couple. Trust is an obvious theme that runs through their scenario talk as well as their diary entries. The following

sections of dialogue illustrate the complexity of trust in relation to the self-other dialectic:

Larry: She [Jane] is just afraid that something may be happening, but there's nothing happening, but she is still going to have that fear.

Janet: Well, just supposing that there is, that Kate is trying to advance a relationship with her husband. Then it is not irrational at all.

Larry: No, but we don't know that.

Janet: How is she going to find out, though?

Larry: Asking him. That's what I said earlier.

Janet: But he might be oblivious to it, too. The only way is to ask her.

Larry: At that point she needs to just trust him. He might be oblivious to Kate's advances, but he just has to say that nothing is going to happen and she just has to trust him. And, if she says, "well I don't want you to go hiking or kayaking with her anymore," then he has to agree to what she says, or that relationship is going to change dramatically. Right? He can say no. She says, "don't go kayaking or hiking with Kate anymore," and he says, "well no I am not going to stop doing that," then that is going to change their relationship. Right?

At this point, Janet mutters her acceptance of his statement, then moves the discussion to the next question. Again, the topic focuses on the self-other dialectic.

Larry: I don't think John should do anything. If the relationship that he is having with Kate is just a friendship relationship, and they are

just going kayaking and hiking, then I don't think he should do anything at all. Why should it be a bad thing just because the friend is a woman instead of a man?

Janet: If he just does nothing, then he is putting the friendship over his primary relationship because if his wife is going through discomfort and he does nothing

Larry: He doesn't know that his wife is feeling discomfort. If she says nothing, he knows nothing

Janet: If she says nothing

Larry: Well if she says nothing, I mean if she says something then they need to have a discussion and they need to find some compromise.

She says, "well I don't want you to do that" and he says, "well I'm really into the hiking, can we do this once a month?" Well, whatever, they have to find a happy medium. But if she says nothing, he's oblivious, he's not going to act, he thinks everything is fine.

When a spouse feels uncomfortable with an opposite-sex friend, it is obvious that the self-other orientation dialectic is going to have to be re-negotiated. As Larry points out, it is often the spouse with the cross-sex friend who will have to give up something in order to satisfy the other spouse. But, the person may be willing to make sacrifices for the spouse knowing that the behavior will be returned in the future.

Larry continually mentions trust in the relationship. From his dialogue, it would appear as though Larry would consider trusting John to be

a solution for Jane. In fact, he considers it to be her primary solution. For John to assert that as a solution would certainly create self-other problems. Jane could view such a solution as a self-oriented solution, one in which John's needs are met (he can continue to spend as much time as he wants with Kate), but Jane's needs are not met (if simply trusting him does not make her feel better). As Janet mentions, Jane is not worried about John, she is worried about Kate. Therefore, trusting John is not a solution, as she already does trust John. Removing Kate as a threat is the key concern for Jane.

This plays out in Larry and Janet's relationship as well. Janet's views of trust appear naive. Janet states that she trusts Larry, she just does not trust Sally. Perhaps Janet really does not trust Larry, who could tell Sally to stop her flirting behavior (which appears to be the root of Janet's dislike for Sally as evident in her diary entries). For if he does not like the flirting, he would tell Sally to stop. Janet may realize this subconsciously, and directs her anger and mistrust at Sally instead of Larry. For Janet, Sally is a far easier target to mistrust and dislike, but Larry is her husband, whom she loves and is supposed to trust.

Obviously, for Janet, trusting Larry was not a satisfactory solution. She trusts Larry, but became jealous of Sally (by her own admission in her diary). She struggled with her jealousy of Sally and even asserted that perhaps she was not really jealous, but rather upset with a woman who could act so

**“inappropriately” around her husband. On the other hand, Larry viewed Janet’s jealousy as mistrust in him. In his diary, he stated:**

**I feel as if my wife’s level of trust in me is very low. Not sure why. I guess it’s because to a certain degree she doesn’t trust my friend and then she projects those feelings on me.**

**As mentioned previously, Larry had to curtail the time he spent alone with Sally in order to meet Janet’s needs. Therefore, Larry and Janet selected the “spouse” pole in the spouse-friend temporality dialectic and Larry selected the “other” pole of the self-other orientation dialectic. Perhaps a short time from now, the couple may experience a need to re-negotiate these dialectics, especially if Larry gets upset that he has had to curtail his cross-sex friendship. If Larry continually gives in to Janet’s needs for the next several years (without a balanced reciprocation), then Larry may feel resentment and a larger conflict could result.**

**For Larry and Janet, the dialectical tensions of confront-avoid, spouse-friend temporality, and self-other are salient. Both Janet and Larry have remained consistent in their diary entries and their scenario discussions. It is evident that they both believe that Sally is a problematic issue in their marriage. They have taken steps to alleviate this problem. But, issues of trust run deep in their marriage, which will continue to affect their management of these dialectical tensions.**

### **Case Three - Cassie and Phillip**

Cassie and Phillip have been married for seven months. They had known each other for a year and a half before getting married. Before they became romantically involved, they spent time together during breaks from school. They became engaged a year after they began dating and were married six months later. Cassie and Phillip are in their early twenties. Both are undergraduate students.

Phillip and his cross-sex friend, Mindy, have been friends for almost three years (thus his friendship began before his marriage to Cassie). For about six months before he got married, he and Mindy were really close and did a lot of things together. During that time, Cassie was in another state. Phillip and Mindy were really close, but never dated or discussed being romantically involved. He did date Mindy's best friend for a while, so dating Mindy was never an option for him. Phillip met Mindy at church, and they see each other generally once or twice a week. It varies as they rarely have pre-planned meetings. Cassie knows and likes Mindy, but she wouldn't say they are really close, mainly because they haven't really had a lot of opportunities to meet and develop a relationship much beyond acquaintances "for lack of time more than anything else."

Cassie and her friend have been friends for only a semester and a half (therefore she began the friendship after she married Phillip). She was introduced to him by Phillip, and then they ended up in a class together. They all go to the same church. Cassie sees her friend almost every day at

least once, but very briefly. They don't talk on the phone or e-mail. Cassie and her friend have never discussed nor have they ever been romantically involved.

Cassie and Phillip are a unique example of a couple with cross-sex friends. What makes them unique to this study is their overt religiosity. Their religion virtually dictates how they communicate and behave with their cross-sex friends. Therefore, their diary responses and scenario discussions should be viewed from their religious perspective. Despite this, Cassie and Phillip still experience similar dialectical tensions as those experienced by the other couples in this study.

#### Confront-Avoid Dialectic.

Phillip and Cassie report being very open with each other in terms of sharing their cross-sex friend interactions. Yet, they still put themselves into the critical incident scenario as if they were experiencing the problem that John and Jane are experiencing. Like Janet and Larry, Phillip and Cassie expressed concern for confrontation.

The dialectic of confront-avoid is salient to Cassie, who struggled with whether or not she would confront Larry (or John) about suspicions involving the opposite-sex friend. She states:

And that one of my problems is, that one of the things that would be a problem for me, like I would be afraid to bring up, like, if you were interested in Kate as more than a friend because what if that got you started thinking, 'oh, well, I wasn't, but now that you suggested it.'



**That is why I don't like to talk about past girlfriends, you know, because I trust you, but I just don't want to get you thinking about her, you know what I mean?**

**For Cassie, the dialectic of confrontation involves planting a suggestion in her spouse's mind about the romantic potential that exists in his cross-sex friendship. Unlike Janet, Cassie is not worried about the confrontation causing conflict, she is more concerned with causing him to begin to think about his friend as a potential romantic partner. Unfortunately, during this discussion, Phillip did not acknowledge what Cassie stated. Rather he just moved on to another topic.**

**A second aspect of this dialectic is similar to Janet and Larry as well. The issue of confronting the cross-sex friend was discussed by Cassie and Phillip. However, there is a slight difference between the two couples. Phillip suggests that John should confront Kate and make certain that Kate understands that Jane is most important to him and that there will be no romantic relationship between him and Kate.**

**Phillip: I think John needs to make sure that he communicates to Jane that she is number one, not Kate. Jane is number one. He may do stuff with Kate once in a while, but Jane is number one. I mean, when Jane has a problem, he stays home with Jane. At the same time, Jane needs to respect that he may need to get away and go outside and she is not willing to do anything. Then he might have to find somebody else. You know, kayaking is a lot safer with two people than one. But, he**

needs to make sure that Jane knows she is number one and that he loves her first and foremost and that there is nothing...at the same time, he needs to let Kate know that Jane is number one (Cassie says this at the same time). Kate is not the option and she never is going to be the option. She needn't be fantasizing or thinking about it or whatever about that. That needs to be something that is established from the start. Jane is number one and Kate is the friend for the athletic or outdoor activities.

Phillip's suggestion differs from Janet's suggestion that Jane confront Kate to find out her suspicions. Interestingly, Cassie and Phillip did not delve deeper into the ramifications of confronting Kate as Janet and Larry did. Cassie and Phillip both agreed that John must confront Kate, which was one of the most important solutions to the problem. Yet, as Janet and Larry discussed, such a maneuver may alienate Kate, who might be completely innocent in this scenario. In other words, what if Kate has absolutely no romantic feelings for John? Then John comes along and reminds her constantly about how important Jane is to her and how much he loves her. At some point, Kate might get upset that John would think of her as the type to go after a married man. Or, Kate might get tired of the constant reminders, despite the fact that she has no romantic interest in John. If Phillip took these possible reactions into consideration, he might find the confront-avoid dialectic more difficult to manage.

### **Spouse-Friend Temporality Dialectic.**

In the beginning of the scenario discussion, the spouse-friend temporality dialectic surfaced. Cassie discussed how she would feel if she were in Jane's shoes:

I think if it was me, I would be feeling sad that I wasn't the one that you wanted to be doing that kind of stuff with. And I know that it probably wouldn't be because you had a problem with me, but just because I wasn't into the same kind of things. So, I would just be kind of feel, kind of replaced.

Later in the dialogue, Phillip and Cassie discussed how dissimilar they are from Jane and John.

Phillip: Do you think he should quit going on all outdoor events with her?

Cassie: I don't know. I think that it's kind of a weird situation. If you and Karen just went off kayaking for the day, I would not be a happy camper and you know that.

Phillip: Well how would you react?

Cassie: I told you, I would be jealous of you.

Phillip: Well how would you tell me?

Cassie: I'd probably start crying and say, "John why are you going with her?"

Phillip: See, that's the difference between me and him. I don't know if I would even feel comfortable doing that.

**Cassie:** Well, see that's what I know.

**Phillip:** Particularly by himself. Now if it was a big group of people, maybe it would be different.

**Cassie:** That's why I don't really know how to answer this. Because when I started reading this, I thought, you would never consider the two of you just going off, you know? At least I don't think you would

**Phillip:** Not since I'm married. Before it would not have been a big deal.

While Cassie and Phillip discuss the spouse-friend temporality dialectic for John and Jane, they see no real connection to their own relationship and their cross-sex friendships. They speculate how they would feel if confronted with this situation, but they admit to feeling as though they would never end up in this situation.

Later in the discussion, Phillip and Cassie revisit the spouse-friend dialectic where Cassie explains that her concern would be with the time her spouse was spending with the cross-sex friend more than her concern that the friend was trying to steal her husband.

**Cassie:** I think that if Kate was inviting John, I don't know if Kate is inviting John all the time or if John invites her sometimes, but I am just going to think that Kate is inviting him all the time. Because it says up here that John asks Kate to go. So, let's say that Kate asks John to go hiking. Well, first of all I think it is good that you are a little suspicious, I think. But I think that Jane might really have a little bit of

a harder time, because, like me, I think I trust you and the thing that I am jealous of is Kate getting your time. I am not really worried about her stealing your love for me. I just am jealous of the time thing.

Earlier in their discussion, Cassie alluded to the time issue again. She stated:

This kind of happened last week. You had to dedicate so much time to school and I didn't see you every night. We ate together, but every night I went to bed by myself and Friday morning you got home at seven and I knew all day that you would be so tired when we got home and so I was ready and willing to let you have time to sleep. But when it came to it, I was so sad because it was my turn. So, time, priorities are important.

For Cassie, time spent with her spouse is extremely important. It extends beyond the spouse-friend dialectic. Therefore, any strain on the time that she gets with Phillip is going to cause her some concerns. In fact, in her diary she mentioned that she used to experience a lot of jealousy regarding Phillip's cross-sex friend. She stated that she has since "gotten over that because Phillip is honest and [she] realized that [she] has nothing to worry about." Cassie indicated that Phillip's friend can be possessive at times, which creates jealousy in Cassie. Phillip also alluded to Cassie's jealousy in his diary entries, but stated, as Cassie did, that she is over it. At the end of her diary, she stated that her feelings of commitment, trust, and jealousy have changed because she "used to get jealous, but he never does - so through his example

of trust in [her, she's] realized that [she] can trust in him and therefore [their] commitment has been strengthened and jealousy almost absent."

### Self-Other Orientation Dialectic.

The suggestions that Phillip and Cassie do make regarding spouse-friend temporality are entwined with the self-other orientation dialectic. When discussing possible solutions to John and Jane's problem, the self-other dialectic emerged.

Phillip: He might also be, you know, I think he is going to be wishing that Jane would participate in certain activities.

Cassie: Even if she didn't like it, she could every once in a while

Phillip: But sometimes if they don't like it, you have to be really careful about it, like I don't know if I would really enjoy doing something that you really didn't like even though you were really very careful about putting on a good front. Because in the back of my mind, I know that you are not going to like it and you would not enjoy it as much as I may have.

This aspect of the self-other dialectic is important, and one that was not raised by the other couples. If Jane decides to participate in some of the outdoor activities, how much enjoyment will John get out of that, especially if he knows that Jane hates every moment of that? In that instance, they are attempting to negotiate the self-other dialectic by both selecting the "other orientation," which makes them both miserable. Such a scenario illustrates the intricate nature of the self-other dialectic.

Later in their discussion of more solutions to the problem, Cassie and Phillip have the following dialogue:

Phillip: Being a girl, you would prefer that they do nothing together.

Cassie: Right, she would want the friendship probably to be over. But then that comes onto the fact that she's taking away a little bit of that freedom and so I don't know if she could do that without being accusing, you know what I mean. She couldn't say, "I don't want you to see her anymore" without sounding totally accusing of something that probably hasn't happened. And,

Phillip: So, she needs to present her solutions when she presents her concerns/suspensions? Be very, very careful and tactful. How about if she doesn't present solutions?

Cassie: I think that would be best because any solution is going to sound

Phillip: No because you need a solution

Cassie: I know, but her trying to give the solution, takes away that

Phillip: Present the concern and then you work out a solution together. You know, her idea of a solution might be total and absolute no contact with her

Cassie: But they could compromise. He could give a little and she could give a little

Phillip: The only way that they would be able to work out that conflict and not have the resentments and stuff is if they work it out. If John

**makes the recommendation or Jane makes the recommendation without any input from the other one, all it is going to do is cause conflict.**

**Cassie: Right.**

**Phillip; So, Jane might present her recommendations as not doing anything together or doing something a little less often and doing something more with her and maybe he could develop his indoor tastes a little more and she could develop her outdoor tastes more.**

**But, it needs to be give and take, she shouldn't make a recommendation to John that he do all the changing.**

**Cassie: Right, that's a good point. It is a two-way street.**

**When possible, couples can try to balance out the self-other dialectic. By asking both John and Jane to change their ways and each adapt to indoor/outdoor activities, a sense of balancing the self orientation and the other orientation is achieved. However, over time, this dialectic will need to be re-negotiated, especially if (for example) Jane decides that she still does not like outdoor activities.**

**Cassie and Phillip end their scenario discussion with the following:**

**Phillip: Anything else you want to say about this?**

**Cassie: Just that the key is to be gentle and not be accusing and to compromise. To not take away freedoms or enjoyment. To each of you try to propose a solution and not to try to take something that is important to him away. So we each have to give a little.**



**Phillip: Which involves each person listening to what the other has to say. But, not accusing someone of something that they get on the defense for. Calmly restate what you understood and find out if there is something to get upset about. More often than not, it is just a misinterpretation of what was said than what was actually said. So, you need to listen and restate and work it out using those two basic steps.**

**What becomes problematic for the couple is if one person perceives that he/she is always neglecting their own needs for the needs of the spouse. For instance, if John decides to curtail the amount of time he spends with Kate, and a year later, Jane has a problem with the time John spends with Roy, then he might get resentful if he has to curtail his time with Roy, too. Unless John perceives that Jane is making other-oriented behavioral choices as well, then conflict could ensue in the future.**

**For Phillip and Cassie, the three salient dialectical tensions are confront-avoid, spouse-friend temporality, and self-other orientation. Phillip and Cassie were consistent in their diary entries and scenario discussion. In their diaries, they reported that cross-sex friends used to created problems for them, but through trust in each other, the situation has improved. The fact that Phillip and Cassie are familiar with each other's cross-sex friends may aid them in their negotiating these dialectical tensions throughout their marriage.**

#### **Case Four: Rachel and Steve**

Rachel and Steve have been married for three years. Steve has a cross-sex friend named Julie and Rachel does not have a cross-sex friend. Rachel and Steve are in their early twenties. Rachel works outside of the university setting and Steve is a graduate student.

Steve and Julie have been friends for seven months (thus their friendship began after he married Rachel). They met in graduate school. They see each other about three times a week. They talk on the telephone about two times a month. Rachel and Julie are not friends because they never see each other and they have conflicting personalities. Steve and Julie have never discussed nor been romantically involved. Julie is single.

Rachel stated that she has no opportunity for interaction with Julie. She has met Julie twice at functions for the graduate program. But, she says, Julie is not someone she would choose to have as a friend. Rachel finds Julie to be pessimistic, brash, and overbearing. Rachel cannot believe that Steve would consider having a close friendship with Julie. She stated that she does not believe that Steve and Julie have been romantically involved or even discussed being romantically involved. She continued that statement with "I hope not." Throughout her diary entries, she implied a negative attitude toward Steve's opposite-sex friendship, which will be explored more deeply in the next section.

### **Discuss-Divert Dialectic.**

Rachel does not like Julie, Steve's cross-sex friend. She does not understand why Steve would be friends with Julie. Both Rachel and Steve reported in their diaries that discussing Julie created problems.

When Steve interacted with Julie throughout the diary period, he did not talk to Rachel about his conversations. When asked to explain why he did not share the interaction with his wife (if he did not share it with her), the first day he reported, "She doesn't like her and wouldn't care about the conversation." The second day he wrote, "She didn't ask; discussions did not relate to her." And the last day he stated, "She didn't ask and I left town for the weekend. We only saw each other for about 15 minutes." These responses are explained through other diary entries, such as

My wife shows a bit of jealousy about my friend, even though my friend is not anything like someone I would date or be romantically interested in. This only causes trouble if I bring my friend up in conversation, my wife will occasionally make remarks.

Rachel verifies these feelings in her own diary entries. She is clear in her dislike for Julie, which may indicate a reason for Steve to avoid the topic with her. In her diary, Rachel discusses her reaction to Steve talking about Julie:

The only time I ever even consider her is when he brings her up, and even then I only apathetically listen to his stories. I'm just not interested. Also, I'm not worried enough to be jealous.

**And:**

**He's likely to tell a story about her, some interaction they had, etc. I'm likely to listen while making personal comments about how inane I thought her comments or actions were, or while criticizing some other flaw.**

**If Rachel always responds to Steve's comments with snide remarks, then after a while, Steve may decide that it is not worth the negativity to mention Julie. Rachel may be comfortable making Julie a taboo topic as long as she trusts that Steve is remaining platonic with Julie. Once she starts to feel that something romantic may be evolving between Steve and Julie, then she may be more willing to discuss Julie.**

**The self-other orientation dialectic is directly related to Rachel and Steve in their unsettling discussions about Julie. What if talking to Rachel about his interactions with Julie is important to Steve? Because of Rachel's snide comments about Julie each time he mentions her name, he is "forced" into silence. Thus, Steve is negating his own needs for Rachel's needs and privileging the "other" orientation. At some point, Steve may grow weary of this "other" orientation and work to re-negotiate the discuss-divert dialectic to satisfy his own needs for talking about the time he spends with Julie.**

#### **Confront-Avoid Dialectic.**

**Rachel and Steve are one couple who have mentioned the confront-avoid dialectic in their scenario discussion. Yet, each couple has mentioned a different aspect of the dialectic. For Janet and Larry, the issue was whether or**

not to confront the spouse because of the potential conflict that might result. Also for them was the issue of whether to confront the cross-sex friend. For Cassie and Phillip, the dialectic involved whether or not to confront the spouse for fear of putting romantic potential ideas in the spouse's mind. Rachel and Steve have another view of confront-avoid.

Rachel: So, I think she should be forthright in expressing her concerns, but I think if she goes about it in a true confrontation, you know, in a confrontational way, no matter what John had been doing, if he had thought the relationship could be more, whether the relationship already was more, or whether it had never crossed his mind, if she confronts him and is confrontational, it is going to automatically, I think, it would push him the other way and make him, you know, no one really likes to see jealousy.

For Rachel, the issue of not confronting involves keeping jealous feelings at bay so as not to annoy, anger, or alienate the spouse. Rachel is assuming that the spouse would be so bothered by the jealous suspicions that he would retreat from the marital relationship and end up in the arms of the cross-sex friend. Each of these couples has a legitimate reason for experiencing the confront-avoid dialectic, and each provides a different angle from which to view the tension and management of the dialectic.

### **Spouse-Friend Temporality Dialectic.**

Rachel and Steve also provided a new twist to the spouse-friend temporality dialectic. Their focus was the consequences of time spent with the cross-sex friend.

Steve: I think Jane is probably just naturally thinking about what happens when a man and a woman spend a lot of time together. And whenever you invest a lot of time in somebody, you invest, you know, commitment, emotions, and I guess it is just human nature that if you are spending a lot of time with someone like that that you are very likely to create certain feelings that obviously a spouse wouldn't want you to have for someone else. So, I think that is probably what she is thinking about. It is just that when you invest time and energy in someone you create things that maybe are inappropriate.

Rachel did not immediately echo Steve's concerns. She mentions a similar perspective much later in their discussion.

Rachel: When you spend the day together you talk about things and the more you divulge, the more you reveal to each other, the more you invest in one another. Do you mean to tell me that while they are hiking and kayaking they don't have deep talks? And I really believe that you can't talk to someone that openly, at that level, and not build a bond that, in my opinion, is probably, you know, too deep a bond for opposite-sex friends to have if they are married. Or if they are involved with someone. I think that that is, it is asking for trouble and

it is kind of spreading your commitment thin. You only have so much of yourself to reveal and give and if you give it out all over the place, you know, what makes your spouse, your partner, any different? And so I know that on these trips that they are going on they are having these talks about their dreams, their goals, their frustrations with their spouse.

For Steve and Rachel, time spent with the cross-sex friend isn't necessarily bad because it is time away from the spouse, but rather because the time with the friend can become too emotionally intimate to the detriment of the marriage. In other words, the friends deepen their friendship and begin to form a bond that interferes with the marriage. Even if that was never the intent of the friends, it can happen.

Later, when role-playing John and Jane's situation, Rachel continues on this perspective.

Rachel: Well, of course, it bothers me because she is a woman. If you were going with Tim, I wouldn't worry that Tim was going to try to lure you away. Seriously, this is a real threat to our relationship. You expect me to think that in all your work together that she doesn't look up to you and that she doesn't respect you, and she obviously enjoys your company or you wouldn't be spending all this time together. So, you know, I have to imagine that there is some mutual attraction there. Even if it is just on the surface level, you are giving your time and your energy and your thoughts and your emotions, you are giving

them to someone else for an entire day while I am here by myself. And I don't mean to make you feel guilty just because I am by myself, but the fact is that I would like to be with you. You are my husband, I married you, I want to enjoy this time with you. I didn't marry you so I could watch you play with your other friends.

The main issue for Rachel and Steve regarding the spouse-friend dialectic is the intimate bond that develops between friends when they spend a lot of time together. To their benefit, both Rachel and Steve perceive this as a problem, which might help them to manage problems with cross-sex friends that they may encounter in their marriage.

In their relationship, the spouse-friend temporality appears to involve Rachel's feelings about Steve's friend Julie. Rachel does not like Julie and she experiences feelings of jealousy and distrust because she does not understand why Steve would spend time with someone like Julie. Rachel's dislike of Julie becomes problematic when Steve mentions spending time with Julie. She states:

I feel jealous and distrusting at times, especially since I don't see any positive traits worth being around. It makes me feel insecure and self-doubting.

Steve noted in his diary:

My wife shows a bit of jealousy about my friend, even though my friend is not anything like someone I would date or be romantically



interested in. This only causes trouble if I bring my friend up in conversation, my wife will occasionally make remarks.

Following her logic from the scenario discussion, one spends time with a friend whom one has some similar interests and "attraction." Therefore, when Steve spends time with someone with whom Rachel does not have any affinity, this causes her dissonance. Because Steve works with Julie and enjoys talking to her, he has to carefully negotiate the spouse-friend dialectic. But, as Steve mentions in the scenario discussion, if the relationship bothered Rachel enough, he would back off.

Steve: I think once he realizes it is bothering Jane, he needs to sit and talk about it with Jane. Let her know that for him it is nothing like that and he is sorry that she feels that way and talk it out with Jane and see if she is willing to let him continue to have this friendship and from there he needs to make the decision of whether to keep this friendship on that level or whether he needs to back off because it is threatening his marriage. If Jane can't handle it, then he needs to step away because, I mean, Jane is his wife, so he has to be committed to her first. But, uh, if she is able to realize that it is just a friendship and it is just common interests and they just like to do the outdoor things and then he comes home and is still just as committed to her and she can accept that, then fine. He can continue his friendship. But they just need to talk it out, though.

Like Cassie and Phillip, the most important issue is to make sure that Jane knows that she is number one and that she feels that is true. With that reassurance, perhaps her feelings about the cross-sex friendship will change.

Rachel echoes this in her scenario discussion:

Rachel: He should communicate to her how important she is in his life and that he loves her. I mean, obviously if there is this tension, then it is because Jane is feeling insecure and if he will reinforce to her that he does love her and that she is valuable to him, then those insecurities aren't going to be there and this situation wouldn't be there.

Rachel's thoughts are somewhat antithetical to what she says later in the discussion. A secondary issue with the spouse-friend dialectic for Rachel is the fact that the friend is an opposite-sex friend. She states that if the friend was male, it wouldn't be a problem. But with cross-sex friendships there needs to be limits.

Rachel: I think friendships need limits. I think they need boundaries. I don't think that it is wise for a man and a woman to be spending time alone together. I just don't. I don't care what the scenario. I don't care if you are working at a homeless shelter together, I don't care if you are on a mission trip together. I don't think it is good for two people to be alone together like that, especially in beautiful surroundings where you are both vulnerable.

Her ideas are similar to Cassie and Phillip who believe that men and women who are married to other people should not be alone together. But, Rachel's perspective may be problematic for her as her husband has a close, opposite-sex friend. From their diary responses, it seems as though Steve spends his free time with Julie in a group setting at school. Rarely do they spend time alone together. Knowing this, Rachel may not become confrontational about the situation. However, if Steve were to start doing things with Julie alone or on the weekends, perhaps Rachel might start to react negatively.

#### Self-Other Orientation Dialectic.

As stated previously, the self-other dialectic is enmeshed with all other dialectics. With regard to the spouse-friend dialectic, Rachel and Steve mention the sacrifice of self for the needs of the other.

Steve: I think John needs to be aware of the fact that Jane is maybe uneasy about it. I think that way he could be more sensitive and possibly make behavioral changes or whatever he needs to do to keep his relationship strong with Jane.

Such dialogue implies that John should sacrifice his time with his friend if it means making his wife happy. Therefore, the "other" pole is made dominant. Yet, later, Steve changes sides.

Steve: Let her know that for him it is nothing like that and he is sorry that she feels that way and talk it out with Jane and see if she is willing to let him continue to have this friendship and from there he needs to make the decision of whether to keep his friendship on that level or

whether he needs to back off because it is threatening his marriage. If Jane can't handle it, then he needs to step away because, I mean, Jane is his wife, so he has to be committed to her first. But, if she is able to realize that it is just a friendship and it is just common interests and they just like to do outdoor things and then he comes home and is still just as committed to her and she can accept that, then fine. He can continue the friendship. But they just need to talk it out.

It seems from his dialogue that Steve believes that trying to convince his spouse that the friend is not a threat will allow him to keep the friendship. Thus, he can make the "self" pole dominant. But, if a compromise is reached, then both Steve and Rachel must give up some of their needs and a balance between self and other orientation is achieved. If Rachel is adamant about getting rid of the opposite-sex friend, then Steve must forgo his friendship to save his marriage, thus sacrificing the "self" for the "other."

Rachel and Steve come up with an interesting compromise at the end of their discussion.

Steve: I understand that you don't want to do this with Kate, but how do you then expect me to fulfill my need to enjoy the outdoors? Do I have to go by myself all the time or are you willing to come with me? Or do I have to find another friend to do it with?

Rachel: Sometimes we can compromise. If you go to let us buy Philharmonic season tickets, I will go hiking with you quarterly.

**Steve:** Quarterly? And how often do we have to go to the Philharmonic?

**Rachel:** Season tickets is eight shows.

**Steve:** Eight shows. Well that is twice a quarter.

**Rachel:** But they happen all at once. And a show is two and a half hours and hiking is more like five. Therefore, I'll go quarterly hiking with you (Steve laughs). I think it is a fair compromise. And if you want to go with some of your guy friends, that is fine. And if you want to go with a group of people, that is fine as well. But I just don't think that one-on-one time with friends like that in a secluded place where there is no one to be accountable to, I don't think that is appropriate.

**Steve:** Okay

**Rachel:** You would not say that

**Steve:** I'd say that

**Rachel:** You'd say it so there wouldn't be a fight.

**Steve:** Well maybe or well if you really felt that way, then what am I supposed to do?

**Rachel:** Okay, question over.

Through this compromise, Rachel can go with Steve to the Philharmonic and Steve and Rachel can go hiking. Rachel has agreed that he can go hiking with other men or in a group, but she is not comfortable with the time spent alone with an opposite-sex friend. From the dialogue presented above, it is evident that Steve and Rachel have some difficulties handling conflict. Rachel

mentions that Steve would not give in to her demands/suggestions so quickly. Such tension could create problems for the couple if cross-sex friendships become a larger issue for them.

Self-other dialectic is an obvious concern for Rachel and Steve. They spend a majority of their discussion focusing on the needs of Jane and John. The negotiation of these needs is at the heart of the self-other dialectic. There is a delicate balance regarding where a spouse's needs are met - either in the marital relationship or the friendship. For Steve and Rachel, it is imperative that most, if not all, needs are met in the marriage. Not only was this an important part of their verbal discussion, but needs were identified by both Rachel and Steve in their diary entries as a key issue in marriages in which cross-sex friends are maintained. Steve wrote:

Important issues would be trust and compartmentalization. Without trust, the marriage or friendship would fold. By compartmentalization, I mean a distinction of need-fulfillment. My wife is the only one I should or would allow to fulfill certain needs (i.e., sexual, deep emotional intimacy, belonging). In return, she is the only person I should fulfill those needs for. If an opposite-sex friend wants me to fill those needs, or they fill those for me, I should end or re-negotiate the friendship. If I don't, my marriage will suffer.

Rachel also discussed need fulfillment:

I think trust and loyalty and commitment are key issues. I think there's a thin line you walk on whenever one of the partners has such

a friend. Sometimes the boundaries get blurry and it's easy to compare partner to friend and recognize what the friend has that the partner does not. I think it's also easy to glamorize the friend and look to them to fulfill unmet needs by the partner. It's easy to go to that friend with your problems and complaints which I think causes two problems. 1) You're not sharing it with your spouse so you're sharing commitment to someone else and 2) sharing personal issues opens you up and makes you vulnerable and I think often leads to emotional intimacy, if not emotional and physical. I think ideally a couple (dating or married) should not maintain these types of intimate friendships because it only provides greater risk for relationship failure; and yet, these friendships are usually the first thing we look to when a relationship gets rocky; probably because we're looking for someone to meet those unmet needs and a friend feels safe. It's all risky territory.

Need fulfillment is essential to the management of the self-other dialectic. A person must decide who fulfills the majority of his/her needs in attempting to manage self-other orientation. In other words, if the majority of Steve's needs are met by his wife, then he may be more willing to cater to her needs and privilege the "other" pole when negotiating about the cross-sex friend. However, if Steve feels that more of his needs are met by the cross-sex friend, then he may be more reluctant to privilege the "other" pole in favor of his wife's needs.

For Steve and Rachel, all four of the dialectics are evident: confront-avoid, discuss-divert, spouse-friend temporality, and self-other orientation. There are some jealousy issues for Steve and Rachel to deal with. Their reports of trust, commitment, and satisfaction were lower than for any other diary couple (see Appendix H). The self-other orientation may be the catalyst for some change in their relationship if Steve grows tired of not discussing with Rachel the details of his interactions with Julie.

In this chapter, four dialectical tensions were outlined that are salient to marital couples who maintain opposite-sex friends. The four tensions are: self-other orientation, spouse-friend temporality, discuss-divert, and confront-avoid. Dialogic evidence was provided for the existence of these four dialectics through an examination of the four cases.



## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

**Cross-sex friendship can be a problem for marital partners as evidenced by the number of couples who refused to participate in the second phase of the study and perhaps by those who refused to participate in the study at all. Diary participants did not provide much information about their communication about cross-sex friends. Socially desirable entries could be the result of concern that the spouse might read the diary. Short responses to open-ended questions could be a sign of disinterest in the subject matter, a lack of awareness of their problems with cross-sex friends, or a desire to keep marital problems hidden. As such, the diary data did not yield substantial information, but data from the four couples contains a rich description of how married couples manage cross-sex friendships.**

**Of interest is the fact that experiences did not differ between couples in which one spouse had a cross-sex friend and couples in which both spouses had cross-sex friends. Perhaps this is an indication that, in the marriages in which both spouses had cross-sex friends, spouses still do not feel comfortable with their spouse's cross-sex friends. The dynamics of both types of marriages are similar. Additionally, experiences did not differ between couples in which the cross-sex friendship developed before the marriage or couples in which the cross-sex friendship developed after the marriage. Such a finding can be an indication that couples have a difficult time discussing their cross-**

sex friendships regardless of how long the spouse has maintained the friendship.

Marital couples have to manage several dialectical tensions that exist because of their maintenance of cross-sex friendships. This chapter will provide the answers to the research questions posed in this study. The research questions will be answered primarily by data analysis of the diaries, questionnaires, and critical incident conversations of the four highlighted couples. However, diary data from the other six couples will be included as further evidence for the findings of this study.

### Dialectical Tensions

Experiences of marital couples were recorded in diaries, questionnaires, and critical incident scenario discussions to answer four research questions. The first question asked, "What dialectical tensions are present in romantic relationships in which one or both partners maintain a cross-sex friendship?" Four dialectical tensions were discovered: self-other orientation, spouse-friend temporality, confront-avoid, and discuss-divert.

The self-other dialectic is an intrapersonal dialectical tension, which influences the management of all other dialectical tensions. Rawlins (1983, 1992) discusses an individual's personal desire for autonomy or connectedness in a relationship (through the dialectic of freedom to be dependent versus freedom to be independent). Baxter (1990) also discusses an individual's need for autonomy and connectedness. These personal needs represent the dialectic of self-other as it is identified in the marital couples in

this study. In order to negotiate the management of a dialectical tension, both individuals in the couple need to determine if they are going to privilege their own needs or the needs of their spouse. However, the argument brought forth in this study is that the self-other dialectic exists in all individuals, and, thus, affects all types of relationships.

Previously it has been argued that the internal integration-separation dialectic of connection-autonomy is the dialectic that is central to the management of all other dialectical tensions (Baxter, 1988a). Yet, an individual must determine whether their own needs ("self") or the spouse's needs ("other") are most important. Once the intrapersonal dialectic of self-other is negotiated, the connection-autonomy dialectic (and all other interpersonal dialectical tensions for that matter) can be managed. From the experiences of the four couples discussed in the previous chapter, it is evident that the self-other dialectic is integral to the management of the spouse-friend temporality, confront-avoid, and discuss-divert dialectics.

Not only does the self-other dialectic supersede all other dialectical tensions, but it is also interconnected with all other dialectical tensions. Whenever a dialectical tension needs to be re-negotiated, the self-other dialectic is the culprit. In other words, if John and Jane are married and John and his friend Kate spend time together on the weekends, Jane may begin to experience jealousy regarding John's time. Therefore, she may approach John and ask him to spend more time with her and less time with Kate. At that point, they will need to re-negotiate the connection-autonomy dialectic. John

must decide which is more important: his own needs (and his desire to spend time doing outdoor activities with Kate) or his wife's needs (namely, her desire to spend more time with him). If he decides to be other-oriented and curtail the time he spends with Kate in order to satisfy his wife's needs, then the couple will choose connection over autonomy (or some increasing degree of connection). Over time, John may begin to resent having to curtail his outdoor activities, and the connection-autonomy dialectic will be revisited when he begins to re-negotiate the self-other dialectic. As such, the self-other dialectic is interdependent with all other dialectical tensions.

As stated previously, Werner and Baxter (1994) argue that dialectical research should demonstrate "the complex pattern of interdependence between and among various contradictions (p. 361)." The self-other dialectic represents the thread that weaves between and among all dialectical tensions.

Boon and Holmes (1991) discuss the development of trust using the concept of relational stages. Within the evaluative stage, partners begin to take notice of whether their partner is acting selfishly toward the relationship. The relationship can strengthen and trust can be solidified if partners perceive consistent acts of unselfish behavior. In the evaluative stage, partners are aware of their incompatibilities. It is during the accommodation stage that conflicting needs and preferences are negotiated. Understanding a partner's motives and dispositions is the key. Knowing how the partner will act during a conflict will enhance the bonds of trust. Thus, when partners get to know each other through courting and marriage, they begin to perceive

whether their partner is maintaining a balance of selfish and unselfish behaviors. These selfish and unselfish behaviors represent the self-other dialectic. Trust can be enhanced if the partners perceive a balance in self-other dialectical management.

The self-other dialectic is important to the maintenance of the marriage. Elaborating on comments by Holmes and Rempel (1989) regarding uncertainty reduction, if an individual perceives that a spouse's maintenance of a cross-sex friendship is self-interested, then uncertainty may increase and trust will decrease. Such a situation will continue until the self-other dialectic is re-negotiated, thus creating a re-negotiation of all other dialectical tensions in the marital relationship.

The spouse-friend temporality dialectic is a second dialectical tension identified among marital couples with cross-sex friends. The spouse-friend dialectic represents the delicate nature of time spent with the cross-sex friend. Several issues are involved in this dialectic. First, too much time spent with a cross-sex friend was perceived as problematic for the married couple and could produce jealousy and concerned feelings. Second, by spending a great deal of time alone together, the cross-sex friends could share a deepening bond that is perceived as inappropriate for some married individuals.

The spouse-friend dialectic contains similar elements to connection-autonomy. Yet, it is unique in a distinct way. Cross-sex friendships offer the prospective romantic potential if the two friends are both heterosexual. Therefore, the marital couple may be more concerned with time that a spouse

spends with his/ her cross-sex friend than with a same-sex friend because of that potential sexual attraction. As Couple Four pointed out, the friends could develop a deep emotional intimacy that could become sexually intimate. As such, spouses become much more interested in the time spent with the opposite-sex friend than with a same-sex friend. Several couples mentioned that if John had been going hiking and kayaking with a male friend, then they would be fine with the situation. But, because he was engaging in these activities with a woman, there was some uncertainty. The same holds true for the couple's real experiences in their marriage.

The third dialectical tension discovered is the confront-avoid dialectic. The confront-avoid dialectic involves confronting someone regarding the cross-sex friendship. Some of the participants expressed concern about confronting their spouse about suspicions regarding the cross-sex friendship. In the following illustrations, the dialectics are discussed as if they were pertaining to the actual couple who participated in the study. However, on the whole, the couples were discussing how they would react if they were faced with a situation similar to that in the hypothetical scenario. Janet, in couple two, stated that she was not sure if she would confront Larry about his cross-sex friend for fear that a conflict would result. She also felt that her problem would not be with Larry, but rather with his friend. So Janet would confront Larry's friend about suspicions that the friend is romantically interested in Larry. Upon hearing this, Larry became upset. He felt that the friend should be kept out of the marital concerns.

For Cassie, in couple three, the confront-avoid dialectic concerned whether or not to confront her husband with suspicions about a cross-sex friend for fear of putting ideas in his head. She expressed concern that if her husband was not even thinking about the romantic potential of his friendship, by confronting him he would now start thinking about his friend from a romantic perspective.

Discuss-divert is the fourth dialectical tension present in the communication of the marital couples. Discuss-divert entails whether or not to discuss interactions with cross-sex friends. Most participants reported the importance of being open about interactions with cross-sex friends. However, many of the couples do not discuss their cross-sex friends. For some, discussing cross-sex friends can cause conflict. Marsha, in couple one, indicated in her diary that she does not inform her husband of information about her cross-sex friend to avoid creating unnecessary jealousy in her husband. Steve, in couple four, does not tell his wife, Rachel, about his interactions with his friend, Julie. Rachel does not like Julie. Therefore, when Steve does mention Julie, Rachel makes snide comments. Such communicative behavior inhibits Steve from discussing Julie.

In conclusion, there are four dialectical tensions present in the couples who maintain opposite-sex friends. The self-other orientation dialectic is an intrapersonal dialectic that, when re-negotiated, affects the management of all other dialectics. The spouse-friend temporality dialectic is unique to marital couples with cross-sex friends because time spent with the friend becomes

more disconcerting with the addition of potential for romantic involvement. Discuss-divert dialectic involves whether or not the couple discusses the cross-sex friend. Confront-avoid concerns who to confront and the ramifications of confrontation.

As mentioned previously, the couples who did not participate in the critical incident scenario provided their experiences in the diaries. Many of the diary entries were wrought with socially desirable responses. This does not necessarily imply that these couples are not happily married; nor does it mean that they do not believe that they trust each other implicitly. However, two of the five couples who did not participate in the critical incident dropped out of the study in the middle of the critical incident because they found the scenario too painfully similar to their own situations. Thus, inferences can be made that these couples included socially desirable rather than completely candid responses regarding trust and honesty in their relationships.

The diary data from non-critical incident participants provides further justification for the existence of the four dialectical tensions. One participant stated that the maintenance of a cross-sex friendship has not affected his marriage. He wrote,

I believe this is true because we both offer information about our opposite-sex friends. We do not hide that we talked with them, but we also do not spend inordinate amounts of time with our opposite-sex friends. I believe we both look to our relationship for our primary



opposite-sex attachment, and since we nurture and care for our relationship, having other friendships does not harm our marriage. For him and his wife, the dialectic of discuss-divert is managed with selection, for which they privilege the “discuss” dialectic. He also indicates the presence of the spouse-friend temporality dialectic for which time with the spouse is most important.

Later in his diary, he reported:

In general, having an opposite-sex friend could create conflict in our marriage if one of us perceived that our opposite-sex friends were taking too much time or that we were sharing more with our opposite-sex friends than with each other. However, this situation is not present with [his cross-sex friend]

Again, he indicates the problematic nature of the spouse-friend dialectic. If he were to spend more time with his cross-sex friend, then his wife might get upset.

Another male diary participant, Dean, explained the conflict between him and his wife before they were married. In his diary, he wrote:

There was a time in college when I had an opposite-sex friend who I was very close with. My spouse (then my girlfriend) greatly disliked my opposite-sex friend. My spouse thought that the opposite-sex friend was after me. It turned out that my wife had good reason for feeling this way. Once the spouse begins to view the opposite-sex friend as competition then conflict occurs.

The confront-avoid dialectic was important for this couple before they were married. His wife confronted him with her suspicions of the opposite-sex friend. She did this to alleviate some of her disconcerting feelings about her then-boyfriend's cross-sex friendship. As Dean stated, her suspicions about the friend's feelings were correct.

Dean's wife, Ursula alluded to the spouse-friend dialectic in her diary. She stated:

I don't feel this friendship has changed my perceptions [of trust, commitment, and jealousy]. It's not at all threatening to me in terms of jealousy or trust. I suppose if Eve phoned Dean constantly or needed his help on a regular basis, I would feel a little left out and possibly upset at the amount of time they were spending together. Happily, that is not the case.

At this moment, she is secure in their management of the spouse-friend dialectic. However, if Dean began spending too much time with his friend, then the spouse-friend dialectic would need to be re-negotiated.

Not only are the four dialectical tensions presented in this study salient for the four couples highlighted in the previous chapter, but also they are salient for the diary-only participants as well. Dialectical tensions must be negotiated continuously throughout the lifetime of the relationship. These marital couples mentioned several management strategies that they utilize to negotiate the tensions. Their strategies will be presented next.

## **Management Strategies**

The second research question asked, "What management strategies do romantic partners utilize to manage dialectical tensions that arise from the maintenance of cross-sex friendships by one or both partners?" Baxter (1988a) identified six "coping strategies" for managing dialectical tensions. She grouped the six strategies into four categories: selection, separation, neutralization, and reframing.

Selection involves relationship partners reducing a contradiction by "minimizing or devaluing one of the dialectical poles" (Werner & Baxter, 1994, p. 363). For instance, with the spouse-friend temporality dialectic, the spouses can decide that they will spend all of their time together and forsake the time spent with the cross-sex friend if it provides the spouses with more certainty regarding their relationship.

Diary responses suggest that the marital couples are completely open with each other regarding the cross-sex friend (and hence they privilege the "discuss" pole), yet two couples refused to continue their participation in the critical incident scenario because the topic "hit too close to home." This situation illustrates that the exact opposite is occurring in these marriages. Rather than being completely open (discuss), they are avoiding the topic because it is too painful (divert). So, for these two couples, separation is not in favor of "discuss," but rather "divert."

Other couples indicated that they are open and honest, yet there are times when they do not talk about their interactions, as indicated in their

scenario discussions. Some participants reported that they are “completely open and honest” with their spouse, yet they report not telling their spouse about interactions with the cross-sex friend because the spouse “won’t care” or the discussion would cause a conflict. If that is the case, then these couples are really not choosing to “discuss” issues, but rather they are “diverting” issues. The management strategy that these couples typically utilize is separation.

Separation occurs when the couple manages a tension by “seeking to fulfill each demand separately” (Werner & Baxter, 1994, p. 363). With separation, contradictions can be separated temporally or topically. If the couple uses cyclic alteration, the contradictions are separated temporally. For instance, assuming the topic of cross-sex friendship causes conflict for them, if John and Jane are married and Jane is experiencing a great deal of stress at work, she may ask John to refrain from talking about his friend Kate until her stress dissipates. Such a negotiation of the discuss-divert dialectic represents cyclic alteration because the couple is choosing to divert a topic for a specified period of time. None of the ten couples indicated that they were managing dialectical tensions through cyclic alteration at the time of the study.

If the couple decides to negotiate a tension by separating the contradiction by topic, then the strategy of segmentation is implemented. Couple one provides an excellent example of this. Marsha reported that she does not tell Bob about a lot of her interactions with her friend.

**My husband is sometimes suspicious of my male friends if he does not have a close relationship with them. To him, any man wants to have sex with me if given the opportunity. This keeps me from discussing things. At times I may mention something if I think it is warranted, however, I do generally request that any necessary confrontations be left for me to handle.**

**Here Marsha indicated that only certain information is discussed with Bob. Everything else is kept from him. This behavior illustrates the segmentation management strategy. With segmentation, the dialectic is maintained by dividing topics into areas of appropriateness and non-appropriateness. There are some topics that Marsha and Bob feel are appropriate to discuss and others that are not.**

**Topic avoidance, according to Afifi and Guerrero (2000), occurs when “an individual strategically decides *not* to disclose information on a particular topic to another person” (p. 166, emphasis in original). In the marriages of the participants, certain topics regarding cross-sex friends may be taboo. Baxter and Wilmot (1985) discuss taboo topics. One taboo topic that pertains to the couples in this study is “extradyadic relationship activity,” which Baxter and Wilmot state “was avoided most frequently because of what it would imply about commitment” (p. 267). Another taboo topic for these marital partners is “conflict-inducing topics,” which usually involve the cross-sex friendship (p. 267).**

Therefore, while many couples reported using selection to manage dialectical tensions, they appear more likely to use segmentation, based on the critical incident discussions.

The third category of management strategies is neutralization in which partners “respond to both dialectical demands at once” (Werner & Baxter, 1994). There are two strategies in the neutralization category. Moderation entails “compromise efforts by the relationship parties in which each dialectical pole is fulfilled in part” (Werner & Baxter, 1994, p. 363). All of the couples reported this as a strategy for the John and Jane scenario. John would curtail the amount of time he spends with Kate, but still be able to do outdoor things with her on occasion. In this respect, Jane’s needs are met through John’s reduced time with Kate, while John is still able to do the outdoor activities that he enjoys. They compromise on the spouse-friend temporality dialectic by each giving up some of their needs. Additionally, couple two enacted such a strategy in their own relationship when Larry opted to bring Janet along when he met his friend outside of their work setting. Larry can still spend time with his friend, while Janet is able to spend more time with Larry.

Disqualification involves addressing “both dialectical demands at once, relying on ambiguity and indirectness to sustain the impression that both dialectical demands are being met” (Werner & Baxter, 1994, p. 363). None of the couples reported this management strategy in any of the data collection phases.

The final category of management strategies is reframing. Reframing occurs when the couple reframes a contradiction so that the contradictions are no longer viewed as oppositional, but rather complementary. Because Janet dislikes Sally, their management strategy exemplifies moderation rather than reframing. For with reframing, the contradictions are not longer regarded as opposites. However, Janet would prefer that Larry not spend time with Sally outside of their work environment. So, she still views the spouse-friend temporality as contradictions. The spouse-friend dialectic is still salient for her because Larry continues to see Sally outside of work. If Janet were content with the new arrangements and viewed Larry's time with Sally as enriching his personal autonomy and their marriage, then reframing would occur.

During the scenario discussions, all of the couples mentioned that John could invite a third person, either male or female, to join him and Kate during their outdoor activities. Each of the female participants indicated that they would have no problem with John's weekend excursions if he was in a "group" setting. Such a suggestion illustrates how reframing could be an effective management strategy for these marital couples. If the time that John spends with Kate also involves other people, then the time spent with the friend is not so threatening. If Jane viewed his new group friend time as positive to his growth as an individual (and thus an integral part of the growth of their marriage), then she and John could reframe the spouse-friend contradiction as complementary.

Through an examination of all of the management strategies outlined by Baxter (1988a), it is evident that several of them are implemented successfully by the marital couples in this study. While selection is reported, the couples are really more likely to utilize segmentation to manage dialectical tensions. Couple two reported using moderation, and all of the couples suggested that the scenario couple should attempt reframing.

### Confrontation.

Making a spouse aware of a concern is the best way to have a mutual re-negotiation of dialectical tensions. There was consensus among the critical incident couples that confrontation was the key to solving marital problems, but all of the participants mentioned the delicate nature of confrontation. The key is to discuss an issue, not point fingers and create defensiveness.

Marsha and Bob discussed the need for Jane (in the scenario) to confront John about his time spent with Kate. Marsha and Bob had the following conversation about confrontation:

Bob: Definitely she should talk about her suspicions. I don't know if she should talk about them as suspicions, just concerns. Because if she comes off as, okay, how long have you all been sleeping together...I think she should confront John and let him know her feelings.

Marsha: I don't know about confrontations. Maybe she should talk to him but not be accusatory.



**Bob:** But if she feels uncomfortable, then I definitely think she needs to talk to John about it. And, how should she communicate her suspicions? How would I communicate it?

**Marsha:** Just sit down and talk to him. Just come out with it. You know, your time with Kate is kind of making me nervous because I don't know her. She needs to at least say why, not just make a blank statement and leave it out there.

**Bob:** If she never says anything, then she is just going to get more mad. It is not going to be his fault because he thinks everything is hunky-dory. You know he is having a good time and I don't know what his frame of mind is all about.

**Marsha:** Now if she tells him and he don't do nothing about it, then maybe that is another question. We'll wait.

So for Marsha and Bob, confrontation is important to help solve the situation. But, the confrontation must be accomplished in a non-threatening, non-accusatory manner. The confronter must not attack the spouse so as to put them on the defensive. Bob mentions the potential consequences of not confronting, which include continued stress and heightened suspicion about the situation. The importance of confrontation is illustrated in the fact that the spouse may have no indication that the other is experiencing dissonance regarding the situation, as Bob points out.

Bob and Marsha discussed confrontation later in their scenario discussion. This time their conversation turned personal.

**Marsha:** Well, think about you and Tammy. The two of you have been best friends forever and you confess your feeling that you had for her. I don't know. I mean, it's not that I don't trust you or anything like that. Let's say that this was you and this was her. I think that you would say something to her, but I think. I don't know what, but I think you would kind of blow me off or something. I really do (laughs).

Like, oh girl, you are just going through whatever.

**Bob:** I would. If I had no idea or no want to pursue anything any further than just having a close friendship, then I would be like, what are you talking about? But, I think if you kept pressing, to me it would seem ridiculous that you are pressing and that you are jealous or whatever, but I guess if you continue to badger me then at some point I would have to take it seriously.

**Marsha:** Well, that's not good.

**Bob:** I wouldn't feel anything was wrong, but if you said something about it, then I would have to think about it. In this marriage, if they are really committed to this marriage, I would think he would, if he is really committed to this marriage, he should as far as communicating to Jane, I think he should reassure her how things are and maybe he needs to be a little bit more attentive to just reassure, "hey this is just a friend."

Therefore, despite the confrontation, behaviors may not be changed. Yet, at least the spouse would be made aware of the unsettled feelings of the

confronter. In the diary entries, both Bob and Marsha referred to their behaviors of confrontation in their marriage. Marsha stated that “when an issue presents itself, we discuss it; this way we can at least know each other’s point of view (whether we understand it or not).” Bob states that “you have to be open and honest about your feelings, even if it could hurt your spouse at the time. It’s much better to get the whole picture instead of things kind of festering until they boil over.” For Bob and Marsha, confrontation is important in order to maintain openness and honesty in a relationship.

Other couples mentioned confrontation as well. Dialogue from each of the four couples includes:

Larry (couple two): I mean, there’s a right way and a wrong way to confront somebody, isn’t there? (Later he mentions confrontation again.) Well, I think she should try and have an open discussion with him without accusing him of anything. And without trying to corner him about anything that may have gone on. It just needs to be simple, open, honest discussion.

Cassie (couple three): I think [Jane] should [confront John] because if she just keeps it in, she is just going to keep building up this jealousy or anger or whatever. And remember before we got married we said communication was the key because if I don’t tell you something that is bothering me, I get quiet, you don’t know what is going on, I don’t know what is going on. Even though I think she should, I think that she needs to do it in a way that is not saying, making accusations of

him being unloyal or unfaithful and just needs to make sure she does it in the right spirit.

Steve and Rachel provide deeper impressions about confrontation:

Steve (couple four): I think initially she should communicate her suspicions to John in a very easy-going, maybe even a joking way, you know, just kind of probe the issue with John. But I think it is important for her to communicate them because I think I would wonder if I had a relationship with another woman like that, I would wonder if you weren't asking questions. I guess I would expect you to naturally be a little uneasy about it and have questions, especially if you didn't know the person like in this situation. So, I think that is why she should ask because it shows that there is interest and there is concern and that there is just this communication going on that I guess is admitting that there is tension. I think John needs to be aware of the fact that Jane is maybe uneasy about it. I think that way he could be more sensitive and possibly make behavioral changes or whatever he needs to do to keep his relationship strong with Jane.

Jane (couple four): I do think that she should confront John about her suspicions, but I don't think she should do it in a joking manner because to me that implies, that just to me seems childish and immature to joke about it. I think that if they are in a committed relationship, she outta be able to go to him in a very serious tone and say, "I need to let you know that this makes me uncomfortable." You

know, I don't know that it is even right to ask, "are you in a relationship with them?" but just to let them know, this makes me uncomfortable. I don't know if confronting him about her suspicions, you know, if that would entail saying, "are you doing this, what do you talk about when you are there...." So, I think she should be forthright in expressing her concerns.

The participants in this study must have felt that the situation in John and Jane's marriage warranted enough concern that Jane should confront John. Research on conflict avoidance posits that one reason that an individual does not disclose a grievance is that the "conflict is insufficiently important to warrant disclosure" (Roloff & Ifert, 2000, p.154). This is especially true for highly intimate relationships (Cloven & Roloff, 1994). Each of the participants stressed the importance of not avoiding the cross-sex friend problem, thus it was not considered unimportant by the participants. Hence, confrontation is warranted.

### Commitment

The third research question asked, "How is commitment related to the maintenance of cross-sex friendship by marital couples?" All of the couples reported strong commitment to their relationship (see Appendix H for a complete listing of commitment scores for each participant). The Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998) was utilized in the questionnaire to measure the commitment of the participants to their marriage. The data was analyzed qualitatively to provide further description

of the couples, in addition to reports of commitment found in their diaries and discussions of the critical incident scenario.

Couples indicated that commitment to the marriage was more important than a cross-sex friendship, which could account for all of the critical incident couples agreeing that John should curtail the amount of time that he spends with Kate. Lund (1991) stated that “committed relationships are expected to endure and withstand periods of conflict or low rewards to the individuals in them” (p. 213). Partners’ willingness to re-negotiate dialectical tensions resulting from cross-sex friendships indicates a deep commitment to the marriage.

Ursula, a diary-only participant, reported in her diary that her husband’s cross-sex friend does not cause conflict in their marriage. She wrote:

We trust each other and don’t keep secrets about our friends and friendships from each other. We’ve been together long enough to just relax and appreciate that the other has a special friend - one whom the other spouse may or may not be friends with, too. Our love and commitment aren’t going to be jeopardized by an opposite-sex friendship.

Ursula’s comments are similar to many of the participants. Her statement illustrates the notion that these couples are committed to the marriage and that the cross-sex friendship will not ruin the marriage. In several years,

these reports may change depending upon how the cross-sex friendships (and the marriages) strengthen or deteriorate.

Commitment is comprised of a number of properties (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). One that is especially salient for these couples is the dependence level, specifically the comparison level for alternatives. For some couples, the cross-sex friendship was not perceived as a threat because the spouse saw the friend as someone who would not be an attractive alternative. For instance, Rachel reported in her diary about comparison levels. She wrote:

I think trust and loyalty and commitment are key issues. I think there's a thin line you walk on whenever one of the partners has such a friend. Sometimes the boundaries get blurry and it's easy to compare partner to friend and recognize what the friend has that the partner does not. I think it's also easy to glamorize the friend and look to them to fulfill unmet needs by the partner.

Bob also mentioned the problem with comparing his spouse to his friend:

It's easy to make comparisons when the marriage is still young.

Things that I like about my friend can be unfairly used as 'examples' of how my wife should be.

One reason that cross-sex friendships create problems in any romantic relationship is that the cross-sex friend could be compared to the current romantic partner. If the spouse perceives the cross-sex friend as an

alternative that his/her spouse would find attractive, jealousy will result, especially regarding the spouse-friend dialectic.

Larry reported about Janet's concerns with his friend Sally. In his diary, Larry wrote:

Having an opposite-sex friend does occasionally cause conflict between my spouse and I. The conflict typically revolves around my opposite-sex friend's neediness and how she likes to have men around her. (At least that's what my wife says.) I try to manage by telling my wife that there is nothing between me and my friend. Lately there has been no problem because my friend has a new boyfriend and I don't think my wife sees her as a threat anymore.

For Janet and Larry, the concern is not with Larry's feelings for Sally (and hence his comparison level of alternatives) because Larry has emphatically stated in his diary and to Janet that he is not interested in Sally. The problem for Janet and Larry is the existence of a "tempting alternative." For Larry, Sally is not a "tempting alternative." But, Janet seems to perceive Sally as a "tempting alternative" for Larry. This remains at the heart of their conflict.

Janet's perceptions of Sally as a "tempting alternative" are a catalyst for her jealousy. Guerrero and Afifi (1991) state that "romantic jealousy occurs when the presence of a (perceived or actual) rival threatens the existence or quality of a valued relationship" (p. 220). Janet perceives Sally as a threat to her marriage, perhaps not as someone who will take Larry away from her, but



rather someone who may take Larry's time away from her. Jealousy will be further elaborated on later in the chapter.

The marital status of the cross-sex friend can be important in how a spouse perceives the cross-sex friend. For example, before Sally had a significant other, Janet viewed her as a threat to her marriage with Larry. After Sally became romantically involved with someone else, Janet did not feel so threatened, and the conflict between Janet and Larry subsided. However, as will be discussed in the next section, the trust between Janet and Larry has been greatly damaged by his maintenance of the cross-sex friendship.

Interestingly, the four couples who were highlighted in Chapter Four reported the lowest scores for all four components of the Investment Model (in addition to low scores on the other three scales). They had high commitment scores, but not as high as the other six couples. Their satisfaction levels were lower, they reported more alternatives to the marital relationship, and were less invested in the relationship. Three of the four couples reported that they withheld information about interactions with their cross-sex friend, which may reflect the lower satisfaction levels (although the cross-sex friendships may not be entirely responsible for the lower levels).

The six couples who did not participate in the critical incident scenario reported high commitment levels, high satisfaction in the relationship, few quality alternatives to the marital partner, and a large investment size. Again, because the couple has made a formal commitment to the relationship

by becoming married, they might feel more committed to the marital partner than to a cross-sex friend. Their investment size may be larger than the other four couples because they have been married longer than the four highlighted couples.

For the participants in this study, commitment levels were high. That is not to say that the cross-sex friend is never compared to the spouse because that has occurred in the marriages contained within this study. However, these couples feel a strong sense of commitment to each other. If they have a conflict regarding a cross-sex friend, it does not immediately affect their commitment levels, but it does affect their trust levels, which will be discussed next.

### Trust

The fourth research question asked, "How is trust related to the maintenance of cross-sex friendships by marital couples?" Trust is defined as "confident expectations in the benevolent intentions of another" (Boon & Holmes, 1991, p. 190). On the whole, couples reported high levels of trust and strong commitment to their marital partners (for a complete list of trust scores for each participant, see Appendix H). Yet, more salient than commitment for these couples is trust. Couples reported that they are committed to their marriage, and they reported knowing that their spouse is committed to the marriage, but trust is a more important issue. Perhaps this is true because they have made a "formal" commitment through marriage. Still, trust was an issue for several couples.

According to Boon and Holmes (1991), degree of interdependence is one of the fundamental cores of trust. They state that interdependence is crucial because “the degree of interdependence between individuals determines the relevance of trust for the interaction between them: the greater the interdependence, the more crucial the state of trust” (Boon & Holmes, 1991, p. 191). Marital couples experience a high level of interdependence because of the nature of the committed relationship. Therefore, trust is a crucial component of a stable marriage. The marital couples must be able to trust that one spouse has only a platonic relationship with a cross-sex friend.

Rachel states the trust issue well. She discussed the idea (in reference to the hypothetical scenario) that just because you trust the spouse does not mean that you will not question their motives.

Rachel: I think it is natural to feel threatened even if you do trust your spouse just because you know that as humans we are fallible, and, you know, can be tempted, and so I think she is probably threatened and a little scared and frustrated by the time that they spend together and jealous that they have the common interest of the outdoors.

The amount of trust that a couple reported in their questionnaire was related to the management strategies utilized by the marital couples. Couple one and couple four reported lower trust scores than the other couples in the study. As a result, they were the only couples to report in their diaries that they did not discuss their cross-sex friend interactions with their spouse.

A lack of trust or unease with the idea of cross-sex friendship can lead to avoidance of communication about the cross-sex friend. Both Bob and Marsha reported not talking to each other about their opposite-sex friend. Bob was withholding information about his discussions with his friend about an upcoming visit (an out-of-town visit). Marsha did not discuss with Bob her two-hour long, closed door conversation with her friend. Their reported trust level was not low by many standards, however, it was lower than most of the other participating couples. Again, perhaps topic avoidance is related to the type of information being withheld. In other words, if Marsha considers the information unimportant, then she may avoid discussing it with Bob. Bob may be deceptively withholding information from Marsha in order to protect himself against her reaction to his cross-sex friendship visit. Therefore, they may not trust each other to not get upset when they discuss their cross-sex friends.

For Steve and Rachel, Steve has had to limit his discussions with Rachel about his opposite-sex friend (Julie) because Rachel does not like her. Rachel reported feeling jealous at times of his friendship with Julie. Yet, she states that she does trust Steve, she just does not understand why he would be friends with Julie. Rachel and Steve reported the lowest trust levels among all of the couples, yet their trust levels were not alarmingly low (see Appendix H for complete listing of questionnaire scores). But, a trend has been set for the two to not discuss his friend because Rachel makes snide comments about Julie. Therefore, when Steve does find something of great

importance to tell Rachel regarding his friendship, he may feel threatened about doing so for fear of causing a conflict.

One exemplary non-participant situation is Luke, who was mentioned in the beginning of chapter one. Luke has a couple of opposite-sex friends at work. He has lunch with them on occasion and also spends time during the day talking with them about non-work related issues. He did not want to participate in the study because he does not tell his wife about these cross-sex friend interactions. Therefore, he was worried that she would start asking too many questions and get jealous of the women with whom he has lunch.

By avoiding the topic of cross-sex friends, any uncertainty experienced by a spouse cannot be reduced easily. In other words, if couples talked about their cross-sex friends, then they might be able to reduce uncertainty about the friendship. Holmes and Rempel (1989) state that "feelings of uncertainty about a partner's motives have a pervasive influence on people's intimate lives" (p. 20). Even if Jane trusts John, she can feel some uncertainty about Kate and her appearance as a tempting alternative. If Jane avoids communicating to John about her uncertainty, then she will feel no sense of relief, thus restoring certainty, about the issue.

Avoidance was a key issue for Janet and Larry. In her diary, Janet stated:

We argue about things [Sally] does, the underlying meanings of certain things [Sally] says, and the way [Sally] leans on him for emotional support. Usually when we have a discussion about Sally it ends in

some kind of disagreement. We both tend to avoid the topic of Sally just to keep from arguing.

By avoiding the topic, Janet's uncertainty about Sally cannot be reduced. Perhaps that is why Janet suggested that she would confront Sally to reduce her uncertainty about Sally's feelings for Larry.

Roloff and Ifert (2000) provide an appropriate passage that illustrates what might be taking place in Janet and Larry's marriage.

It is possible that such frequent engagement might prove frustrating as individuals make it clear that they are resistant to change. Although a resolution might be possible, the costs associated with continued engagement are not offset by the benefits resulting from resolution and partners choose to quit talking about their conflict. Perhaps out of exasperation, they agree to never discuss the topic again (p. 159).

Larry and Janet have been having a conflict regarding Sally for some time. As Janet has indicated, they have just gotten tired of the continual conflict involved. While Larry has acquiesced and diminished the time that he spends with Sally, both Larry and Janet are not going to change their minds about Sally's motives for maintaining the cross-sex friendship (which appears to be at the heart of Larry and Janet's conflict). Therefore, their way of coping with it is through avoidance of the topic. As suggested by Roloff and Ifert, Janet and Larry must avoid the topic in order to prevent further destruction of the marriage with continued arguing.

All of these examples illustrate the volatile nature of communicating to a spouse about a cross-sex friend. Despite the fact that each of these couples reportedly trust each other, the underlying jealousy created by the cross-sex friendship can create avoidance behaviors.

Again, trust was related to jealousy for some. Janet, in couple two, indicated that she was jealous of the time that her husband spent with his cross-sex friend. In fact, she stated that she didn't realize the extent to which she could experience jealousy until Larry began his cross-sex friendship with Sally.

For Steve, his cross-sex friendship has created jealousy in Rachel. In his diary he stated:

My opposite-sex friend is not someone who I would ever be romantically involved with. I am never challenged concerning commitment, trust, or jealousy. The only way I have been affected is to see the jealousy in my wife regarding someone for whom I have no romantic/sexual attraction.

Steve and Rachel rarely talk about Steve's interactions with his friend. Her jealousy may cause her to make negative comments about his friend, which, in turn, keeps Steve from discussing his friend.

In couple three, Cassie discussed in her diary how her jealousy has changed over the year she has been with her husband. She wrote:

I don't think my opposite-sex friendship has changed too much our perceptions, at least my perceptions of commitment, trust, and

jealousy. Actually it probably has now that I think about it because I used to get jealous, but he never does - so through his example of trust in me, I've realized that I can trust in him and therefore our commitment has been strengthened and jealousy almost absent. I'm a lot better now with those three "worries" than I was when we first got married. His dedication to them and to me has been the greatest help in helping me change the negative.

So, for Cassie, by perceiving her husband's trust in her and commitment to their relationship, she strengthened her trust and commitment to him. This is consistent with the findings of Bui, Peplau, and Hill (1996) with regard to the investment model. If Cassie perceives that her husband trusts her and that she has nothing to worry about regarding his friend (in other words, his friend is not a tempting alternative for him), then she will adjust her trust and commitment levels to meet his (i.e., raise her trust and commitment levels).

Participants, especially those who participated in the critical incident scenario, indicated that trust in the relationship can be strengthened (and jealousy reduced) if a spouse is made to believe that they are more important than the cross-sex friend. All four couples indicated in the scenario discussion that John should communicate to Jane that she is more important than Kate. According to Bowman (1990), improving the emotional quality of the marriage is one way of coping with marital problems. The improved emotional quality of the marriage was correlated with marital happiness.



**Thus, as these participants illustrate, one method of improving the emotional quality of a marriage is for a spouse to reiterate continuously to the partner that the partner is number one. An excerpt from each participant that illustrates this concept follows.**

**Bob (couple one): In this marriage, if they are really committed to this marriage, I would think he would, if he is really committed to this marriage, he should as far as communicating to Jane, I think he should reassure her how things are and maybe he needs to be a little bit more attentive to just reassure her, "hey, this is just a friend."**

**Larry (couple two): If John and Jane talk, and Jane says, "I don't trust your motives" and John says, "Look there is nothing with Kate and I, there never will be. I have no intention, you know you have to trust me, I just want to go hiking and kayaking," then to a certain extent, she should trust him on that.**

**Phillip (couple three): I think John needs to make sure that he communicates to Jane that she is number one, not Kate. Jane is number one. He may do stuff with Kate once in a while, but Jane is number one.... At the same time, Jane needs to respect that he may need to get away and go outside and she is not willing to do anything, then he might have to find somebody else.... But he needs to make sure that Jane knows she is number one and that he loves her first and foremost and that there is nothing.**

**Cassie (couple three, in response to Phillip): I think that hit the nail on the head, but also, just him making sure that Kate knows that Jane is number one.**

**Rachel (couple four): He should communicate to her how important she is in his life and what he loves about her. I mean, obviously if there is this tension, then it is because Jane is feeling insecure and if he will reinforce to her that he does love her, and that she is valuable to him, then those insecurities aren't going to be there and this situation wouldn't be there.**

**Steve (couple four, a few minutes later): If she is able to accept that he is just having a friendship and nothing else, then she just needs to recommend to John that he takes steps to reassure her that everything is okay, that he loves her and that he is committed to her and that this is just a friendship and he can do that by making sure that he does special things for her and making sure that they have good quality time together. That way there is no other reason for Jane to feel insecure about the relationship.**

**From the scenario discussions, it is evident that the key to dissipating jealousy and enhancing trust in the marriage is for the spouses to communicate their commitment to each other. While each couple has their own way of saying it, reassuring the spouse that the cross-sex friendship is platonic is important. Making sure that each spouse knows that they are number one is crucial to helping a spouse cope with the friendship. So, if**

**Jane feels more comfortable about John's relationship with Kate because she is continually reminded (both verbally and nonverbally) that John loves her and not Kate, then she may feel less threatened by the time that John spends with Kate. But, for the participating couples, continuously (and sincerely) reinforcing commitment to the relationship is an important step in enhancing trust.**

## **Chapter VI**

### **Conclusion**

#### **Conclusions and Implications**

**This chapter will provide a discussion of the major findings of the study, theoretical and pragmatic implications for the communication discipline, limitations of the study, directions for future research, and concluding remarks.**

#### **The Research Questions**

**Dialectical tensions. The findings of this exploratory study are enlightening. Four dialectical tensions were identified: self-other orientation, spouse-friend temporality, confront-avoid, and discuss-divert. The self-other orientation dialectic is the tension between fulfilling one's own needs versus fulfilling the needs of the other (in this case a spouse).**

**The spouse-friend temporality dialectic is unique to the participating couples because time spent with a friend involves spending time with someone of the opposite-sex who could be perceived as a tempting alternative to a spouse. As such, the dialectical tension is important to the marital couple because they must manage time spent with the spouse and time spent with the cross-sex friend. A spouse can be much more threatened by his/her spouse's time spent with a cross-sex friend than time spent with a same-sex friend.**

**Confront-avoid dialectic involves confronting the spouse regarding the cross-sex friendship (e.g., suspicions about romantic attraction in the**

friendship). Discuss-divert dialectic involves whether to discuss with the spouse the details of interactions with a cross-sex friend. Some participants reported that discussing the cross-sex friend created conflict.

With the exception of the self-other dialectic, the dialectical tensions are unique to romantic relationships in which one or both partners maintains a cross-sex friendship. The self-other dialectic is the primary tension in all relationships that affects the negotiation of all other dialectical tensions. The identification of these four dialectical tensions enhances our understanding of dialectical theory and provides further justification for the salience of dialectical theory in the study of interpersonal communication.

Management strategies. The examination of dialectical tensions would not be complete without an examination of how those tensions are negotiated. Data from this study validates Baxter's (1988) dialectical management strategies. Baxter identified four categories of strategies: selection, separation, neutralization, and reframing. Among the participants, selection was reported, but the couples were really more likely to utilize segmentation to manage dialectical tensions. Segmentation is a type of separation strategy.

The separation strategy is separated temporally and topically. Cyclic alteration involves negotiating the dialectical tension temporally. For example, a couple might agree to not discuss painful topics during stressful periods. No couples reported using cyclic alteration. Segmentation is the separation of dialectical tensions topically. While the participants reported

being completely open with one another (selection), they were actually more deliberative in their disclosures regarding their cross-sex friends, suggesting that they are really more likely to use the segmentation strategy.

The third category of management strategies is neutralization, which is comprised of moderation and disqualification. Moderation occurs when a couple compromises by sacrificing a small portion of each of the contradictory tensions. All of the couples reported that moderation should be used by the scenario couple (John and Jane). Only couple two reported using moderation in their diary entries. Disqualification was not reported by any of the participants.

Reframing is the final category of management strategies. None of the couples mentioned utilizing reframing. However, in the scenario discussions, all of the couples suggested that John and Jane should attempt reframing by having other people join John and Kate during their outings.

Commitment and trust. Commitment and trust are essential components of marital relationships. Couples indicated that commitment to the marriage was more important than maintaining cross-sex friendships. The key to dissipating jealousy and strengthening trust in the marriage, according to these couples, was for spouses to communicate their commitment to each other.

### Theoretical and Pragmatic Implications

Dialectical theory provides researchers with a method for understanding relational communication from a dyadic perspective by

identifying the dialectical tensions inherent within a relationship. This study enhances the usefulness of dialectical theory by asserting the existence of four dialectical tensions inherent within marital couples who maintain cross-sex friendships. Previously, dialectical theory has not been applied to these unique relationships.

Of particular interest to the study of communication and dialectical theory is the discovery of the self-other orientation dialectic. Self-other dialectic is an intrapersonal dialectic, a type of dialectic that is not widely studied. Additionally, Werner and Baxter (1994) argue that connection-autonomy "constitutes the primary contradiction to which all other contradictions cohere (1994, p. 357)." The argument asserted in this study is that the self-other dialectic, not connection-autonomy, is the fundamental contradiction to which all other contradictions are negotiated. The self-other dialectic supersedes the connection-autonomy dialectic, for an individual must determine whether to privilege his/her own needs over the needs of the other before negotiating the connection-autonomy dialectic (or any other dialectic).

The discovery of the self-other dialectic answers the call put forth by Werner and Baxter (1994) for researchers to "determine how change that is centered in one contradiction reverberates throughout a system of interdependent contradictions, that is, issues that relate to temporal sequencing (p. 364)." The self-other dialectic is the dialectic that influences change in all other dialectical tensions within a relationship. When an

individual decides to change their self-other orientation, then most (if not all) internal dialectical tensions will need to be re-negotiated to reflect this shift in orientation.

In addition to implications for dialectical theory, this study has implications for mixed method research. The utilization of mixed method research through the use of diaries, questionnaires, and critical incident scenario discussions provided a variety of data collection tools from which to analyze marital couples. The mixed method approach helped reveal intricacies in marriages that couples apparently aren't aware of (as discovered in the discrepancies between their diary reports and critical incident conversations). This finding in particular illuminates one of the many benefits to implementing a mixed method approach. Discrepancies would not have been discovered if the diary method was the only method used to collect the experiences of these married couples.

The critical incident method provided data about the couples' real experiences through the discussion of a hypothetical scenario. Interestingly, couples continually switched from discussion of the hypothetical to discussion of their own marital relationship. Such a method enabled the collection of actual conversations between marital couples in which they discussed communicating about their own cross-sex friendships. The critical incident also prodded participants into less socially desirable responses because they were communicating with each other. Hence, the critical



incident data illuminated discrepancies between the couples' diary reports and their scenario discussions.

This study also highlighted the positive and negative aspects of utilizing the diary method for data collection. Negative aspects of the diary method will be elaborated in the following section. However, the diary method is not without benefits. Participants provided rich responses to daily questions about marriages and cross-sex friendships. The diaries also enabled the discovery of the underlying conflict that exists for many of these couples regarding their cross-sex friendships. In other words, the diaries contained socially desirable responses (such as, "we are totally open and honest with each other") that were later disputed in the critical incident discussions (inherent in the fact that two couples dropped out of the study during the discussion). Additionally, the diaries provided more "real-time" responses rather than recalled information usually garnered from surveys and interviews.

The combination of these data collection methods enabled the researcher to assert that cross-sex friendship will be a potential source of future conflict for the couples who purport to believe that cross-sex friendships are not a threat to their marriage, but whose critical incident conversation might indicate otherwise. Inherent within the critical incident discussions is underlying tension regarding cross-sex friendships. Because they believe that they are open and honest, yet there exists some inherent unease about cross-sex friendships, these married couples may experience

serious conflict in the future if the cross-sex friendship issue is not managed successfully. The two couples who terminated their participation during the critical incident method provide additional proof of this future conflict for some of the other participants. Both of the couples who dropped out of the critical incident method wrote in their diary entries that cross-sex friendship was not a problem for them.

Cross-sex friendship is a difficult subject for couples to manage, as illustrated in the difficulty in acquiring participants for study. This study began with a quotation from one potential participant, who did not want his wife to start asking him too many questions if they participated. His statement was not uncommon. Another potential participant thought that she and her husband could benefit from highlighting this issue in their marriage, but he refused to participate. For him, the subject was too intense.

The intensity of this topic was also exemplified in the drop-out rate between the diary method and the critical incident method. Two couples agreed to participate in the critical incident method, began the scenario discussion, and then terminated their involvement before ending their discussion. For one couple, the scenario "hit too close to home" and the wife refused to continue to participate. For another couple, the husband had been concealing his issues with his wife's cross-sex friend. Until they began the study, the wife had believed that her cross-sex friend was not problematic for her husband. When she asked him to participate in the critical incident method, he refused. She indicated to the researcher that after all of these

years together she is finally aware that her cross-sex friendship is a problem for her husband. Now she knows that she will have to confront her husband about her male friendships in hopes of coming to a mutual solution to their problem.

### **Limitations**

This study was designed to eliminate the limitations of a previous study conducted about romantic partners communicating about their cross-sex friends (Froemling, 1999). The current study utilized both partners in the data collection and did not collect data from an unstable, undergraduate single population. Instead, the study privileged the voices of both spouses in marital relationships. Yet, this does not imply that the present study was without limitations.

To begin, the participants were not representative of the wide diversity of marital couples that exist in this country. There were nine Caucasian couples and one African-American couple. The study utilized a wide age-range, but not enough representation among different age groups. Most of the participants were in their mid- to early thirties. Additionally, homosexual partnerships and homosexual cross-sex friendships were not included in this study. Curtailing these limitations in future research will be discussed in the following section.

The number of participants in this study (ten couples) may be perceived by some as a limitation of the study. However, because of the rich

**data provided by these ten couples, the study is no less valid because of the use of only ten couples.**

**Another limitation involved the diary method, which posed three problems. The first problem was that participants were not overly generous in their written responses in terms of the quantity of information disclosed in the diaries.**

**The second problem with the diaries was that the spouses tended to write socially desirable responses to questions. In the diaries, participants reported that they trusted their partner and that the cross-sex friendship was not a problem for them. Yet, two of those couples terminated their involvement during the scenario discussion because the issues were too personal (they “hit too close to home”). Such responses were most likely written more for the spouse who might stumble upon the diary during the seven-day period than for the researcher. Yet, perhaps the participants were simply unaware of their problems with cross-sex friendship, thus creating socially desirable answers.**

**The diaries posed a third problem because the entries were written for only one week. Many researchers would argue that one week does not necessarily provide sufficient information about dialectical tensions in a marriage. However, the study was designed to provide multiple methods for data collection to ensure that rich data was garnered from the participating couples. Additionally, because of the use of paper diaries in a qualitative**

format, participants may have become fatigued with a more lengthy diary period.

One way to overcome the limitations of the diary method is to use e-mail for future diary studies. To use e-mail diary entries, the researcher would e-mail the daily diary each morning of the time period to each of the participants. That evening, the participant could access the diary entry, type in the necessary information, and then send it off to the researcher. For many people in this age of computers, typing information is much easier and faster than hand-writing information. Therefore, future research should be conducted using e-mailed diary entries to see if participants are more willing to type lengthy entries than to hand-write them. In fact, one participant in the present study typed all of his entries and stapled them to the actual diary, thus providing further justification for the desire by participants to type rather than hand-write.

The second diary issue was the reporting of socially desirable answers, which might also be curtailed with the use of e-mail diary entries. If the spouse is worried that their partner is going to read their diary sometime during the week, then a daily e-mail entry could ensure that the diary response would be sent away without a trace, as the spouse is very unlikely to ever see the e-mail that was sent to the researcher (unless the participant's spouse felt so compelled to search the computer for a copy of the e-mail). The assumption that the socially desirable responses are the result of potential spousal readings could be incorrect. If so, there is no way to ensure that

participants are not providing socially desirable responses to make themselves look good to the researcher.

Another advantage of the e-mail diary is that the researcher would have instant access to the data. This would enable the researcher to see if the participant was understanding the questions and responding appropriately.

More important than the diary method problems is the problem that these participants were self-selected into the study. Those couples who may have serious problems with communicating about their opposite-sex friends elected not to participate. As a result, couples who experience the most conflict regarding their cross-sex friends were not part of the results of this study. Future research would benefit greatly from their inclusion in the study, but their cooperation and willingness to participate is not likely to change.

### Future Research

Several dialectical tensions were discovered among the marital couples who participated. Future research should seek to validate the existence of these tensions among other marital couples who maintain cross-sex friendships. Dating couples should also be studied to examine the dialectical tensions present in those less stable, less committed relationships.

As previously stated, an argument has been made that the self-other dialectic supersedes all other dialectical tensions. Future research should examine the existence of the self-other dialectic and its influence on the re-negotiation of other dialectical tensions.

**Mixed method research has proven beneficial to the discoveries of this study. Future studies should implement mixed methods to provide a means of data collection that emphasizes the strengths of each individual method while countering the weaknesses of each individual method.**

**Researchers should attempt new approaches to the use of the diary through conducting diary research via the internet. E-mailed responses may curb some of the negative aspects of the diary method, such as socially desirable responses (written in case a spouse reads the diary) and short diary entries.**

**Continued use of the critical incident method could provide excellent dialogue from couples in which they discuss cross-sex friendships. Future studies should utilize different scenarios to examine different aspects of marital relationships and cross-sex friendships.**

**Regarding romantic relationships and cross-sex friendships, future research should focus on dating relationships as well as the influence of homosexual cross-sex friendship on romantic relationships. Researchers could examine how homosexual couples communicate about their same-sex friends as well as the influence of gay cross-sex friends on heterosexual romantic relationships.**

**Additionally, participants from diverse backgrounds should be examined. Future studies should examine marital relationships and cross-sex friendships across the life-span to determine if there are different issues facing different age groups and different marital stages regarding cross-sex**

friendships. In other words, is sexual attraction for a cross-sex friend an issue across the life cycle, or is it age-specific?

### **Concluding Remarks**

The present study was an exploratory study about an intense topic that couples do not like to talk about: marital partners and their cross-sex friends. Some couples communicate openly about their cross-sex friends. But, based on the unwillingness of some people to participate as well as the responses of some participants, far too many couples do not communicate openly about their cross-sex friends, and the cross-sex friend becomes a taboo topic.

In addition to the discovery of several dialectical tensions, this study has shed light on a difficult topic for many couples. Married couples are not likely to end all of their cross-sex friendships. For some individuals, ending the friendship might be their only chance of saving their marriage. But, through communication, the couples might be able to come up with a way to collaborate on a solution to the problem, such that Jane could feel comfortable with the time that John spends with Kate and John can still spend some time with Kate. Such a collaboration or compromise might be difficult to negotiate, but it would be far better for the marriage in the long run. Cross-sex friendships provide individuals with many benefits, not only to self, but also to their marriage. It would be a shame for marital couples to feel compelled to end all of their cross-sex friendships simply because of a lack of communication between spouses.



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**APPENDIX A**  
**Informed Consent Form for Research**  
**University of Oklahoma, Norman**  
**Department of Communication**

This research is being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus. This document is your consent form for participation in this research project.

**Principle Investigator:** Kristin K. Froemling  
Department of Communication  
**Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Sandra Ragan  
Department of Communication

**Title of Project:** "Romantic Partners' Communication About Their Cross-sex Friends: Dialectical Tensions and Management Strategies"

**Description:** The purpose of this study is to explore communication in romantic relationships about opposite-sex friendships. Participants will be asked to respond to a series of questions about their communication with their partner in a diary format for a period of seven days.

Participation in this study poses no foreseeable risks to the participant. Participants will receive \$10 for their participation. Also, participants may benefit from clarifying their own understanding of the impact of opposite-sex friendships on their romantic relationship.

**Approximate Duration of the Subject's Participation:** Seven days

**I hereby give my consent to participate in this study. I understand that:**

1. My participation is entirely voluntary, and I may terminate my participation at any time prior to the completion of this study without penalty. However, if I am participating in this research to obtain the monetary reward and I decide to withdraw from participating, I might not receive the money associated with the research project.
2. Any information I may give during my participation will be used for research purposes only. In other words, responses will not be shared with anyone not directly involved in this study.
3. All information I give will be kept confidential and will be used in such a way that identification of me as a participant is impossible. The diaries will be strictly protected from any non-project personnel by the researcher who will store the data in locked cabinets to which only the researcher has access. Additionally, the Informed Consent Form will be kept separate from the raw data and destroyed when no longer needed.
4. I understand that there are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study. I do not have to answer any question that may incriminate me. Any information given regarding abuse must be reported by the interviewer. The phone number for counseling at Goddard Health Center is (405) 325-4611.
5. The investigator is available to answer any questions I may have regarding this study. In case I have any questions in the future, I can reach the investigator at (405) 325-3003 extension #21128; by email at [froemling@ou.edu](mailto:froemling@ou.edu); or by contacting the Department of Communication, 101 Burton Hall, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, 73019. If you have any questions about the rights of the research participants, please contact the Office of Research Administration at (405) 325-4757.

**Print Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B**

### **ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP DIARY (Opposite-sex Friend)**

#### **Instructions for Completing the Diary**

Thank you for participating in this diary research. You have been asked to complete the following diary pages over the next seven days. Below you will find some extra information that will help you to complete the diary.

- An interaction is defined as an encounter (of any length) with another person in which the participants pay attention to one another, converse (whether face-to-face or by telephone), and adjust their behavior in response to one another. Behaviors such as sitting next to someone on a bus or in class do not count, nor do mere exchanges of greetings, unless conversation occurs and you feel that the encounter is significant.
- Each diary entry should take you approximately 15 minutes per day depending on whether or not you have had an interaction with your opposite-sex friend and your partner.
- The questions for each day are similar. The first four questions are designed for days in which you interact with your opposite-sex friend. The fifth question is one that you should answer every day regardless of your interactions. The fifth question is the only question that changes and simply asks about a variety of issues regarding the maintenance of an opposite-sex friendship and your communication with your romantic partner.
- Please keep your diary entries confidential from your partner. Please do not discuss your diary entries until after the end of the study. It is important that the entries are truthful and confidential.
- Do not put your full name or any other distinguishing identifying marks on the diary. In the diary entries, identify your romantic partner and your cross-sex friend by initials or first name only.
- I will be calling you during the seven day period to remind you to complete the diary entries and to answer any additional questions you may have.
- Please answer the questions as completely and comprehensively as possible. If you need more space than is provided, please feel free to continue writing on the back of the diary pages.

### **History of Opposite-Sex Friendship**

Please respond to the following questions, which may help the researcher better understand your romantic relationship and your closest opposite-sex friendship. All of the questions pertain to the opposite-sex friend for whom you will discuss this week in your diary. Please be sure that each answer you provide pertains to only one friend (the same friend for each question).

1. How long have you been friends with your opposite-sex friend?
2. How did you meet your opposite-sex friend?
3. How often do you see your opposite-sex friend? How often do you talk on the telephone or via email?
4. Are your spouse and your opposite-sex friend also friends? Why or why not?
5. Have you and your opposite-sex friend ever discussed being romantically involved at any time throughout your friendship (i.e., dating)? Have you and your opposite-sex friend ever been romantically involved?
6. If you answered yes to either question in #5, has that affected your friendship? If so, how?

Please respond to the following question, which may help the researcher better understand your romantic relationship. This question pertains to your spouse for whom you will discuss this week in the diary.

1. How long have you been in a romantic relationship with your spouse (including courtship and marriage)?

## **DAY ONE**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Opposite-sex Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

1. If you interacted with your opposite-sex friend today, what was the topic(s) of your conversation?
2. Describe the setting of your interaction with your friend (include location, length of interaction, and privacy of interaction).
3. If you talked with your opposite-sex friend today, did you discuss the interaction with your spouse?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No (if no, please skip to question #5) \_\_\_\_\_
4. If you answered yes to question #3, please describe your discussion with your partner about your opposite-sex friend (i.e., how did you tell your partner, what did you tell your partner).  
Location of interaction: \_\_\_\_\_  
Length of interaction: \_\_\_\_\_
5. If you talked with your cross-sex friend, but did not discuss it with your spouse, why did you not tell your spouse?
6. In what ways does having a close opposite-sex friendship make your marriage better?

## **DAY TWO**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Opposite-sex Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

1. If you interacted with your opposite-sex friend today, what was the topic(s) of your conversation?
2. Describe the setting of your interaction with your friend (include location, length of interaction, and privacy of interaction).
3. If you talked with your opposite-sex friend today, did you discuss the interaction with your spouse?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No (if no, please skip to question #5) \_\_\_\_\_
4. If you answered yes to question #3, please describe your discussion with your partner about your opposite-sex friend (i.e., how did you tell your partner, what did you tell your partner).  
Location of interaction: \_\_\_\_\_  
Length of interaction: \_\_\_\_\_

5. If you talked with your cross-sex friend, but did not discuss it with your spouse, why did you not tell your spouse?

6. For some couples, the existence of a close, opposite-sex friend can create problems. In what ways does your having an opposite-sex friend negatively influence your marriage?

### **DAY THREE**

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Your Partner's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Opposite-sex Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

1. If you interacted with your opposite-sex friend today, what was the topic(s) of your conversation?

2. Describe the setting of your interaction with your friend (include location, length of interaction, and privacy of interaction).

3. If you talked with your opposite-sex friend today, did you discuss the interaction with your spouse?

Yes

No (if no, please skip to question #5)

4. If you answered yes to question #3, please describe your discussion with your partner about your opposite-sex friend (i.e., how did you tell your partner, what did you tell your partner).

Location of interaction:

Length of interaction:

5. If you talked with your cross-sex friend, but did not discuss it with your spouse, why did you not tell your spouse?

6. Do you communicate about your opposite-sex friend with your social circle (i.e., family members, co-workers, same-sex friends)? If so, explain their impressions and reactions to your having an opposite-sex friend. If not, why do you not discuss the opposite-sex friend with the social circle?

### **DAY FOUR**

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Your Partner's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Opposite-sex Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

1. If you interacted with your opposite-sex friend today, what was the topic(s) of your conversation?

2. Describe the setting of your interaction with your friend (include location, length of interaction, and privacy of interaction).

3. If you talked with your opposite-sex friend today, did you discuss the interaction with your spouse?

Yes

No (if no, please skip to question #5)

4. If you answered yes to question #3, please describe your discussion with your partner about your opposite-sex friend (i.e., how did you tell your partner, what did you tell your partner).

Location of interaction:

Length of interaction:

5. If you talked with your cross-sex friend, but did not discuss it with your spouse, why did you not tell your spouse?

6. If you and your spouse typically talk about your opposite-sex friend, what are you likely to discuss?

### DAY FIVE

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Opposite-sex Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

1. If you interacted with your opposite-sex friend today, what was the topic(s) of your conversation?

2. Describe the setting of your interaction with your friend (include location, length of interaction, and privacy of interaction).

3. If you talked with your opposite-sex friend today, did you discuss the interaction with your spouse?

Yes

No (if no, please skip to question #5)

4. If you answered yes to question #3, please describe your discussion with your partner about your opposite-sex friend (i.e., how did you tell your partner, what did you tell your partner).

Location of interaction:

Length of interaction:

5. If you talked with your cross-sex friend, but did not discuss it with your spouse, why did you not tell your spouse?

6. Does your having an opposite-sex friendship ever create conflict between you and your spouse? If so, what usually causes the conflict and how do you manage it? If not, to what do you attribute the ease of your communication with your spouse?



## **DAY SIX**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Opposite-sex Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

1. If you interacted with your opposite-sex friend today, what was the topic(s) of your conversation?
2. Describe the setting of your interaction with your friend (include location, length of interaction, and privacy of interaction).
3. If you talked with your opposite-sex friend today, did you discuss the interaction with your spouse?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No (if no, please skip to question #5) \_\_\_\_\_
4. If you answered yes to question #3, please describe your discussion with your partner about your opposite-sex friend (i.e., how did you tell your partner, what did you tell your partner).  
Location of interaction: \_\_\_\_\_  
Length of interaction: \_\_\_\_\_
5. If you talked with your cross-sex friend, but did not discuss it with your spouse, why did you not tell your spouse?
6. Has your opposite-sex friendship changed your perceptions of commitment, trust, and/or jealousy in your marriage? If so, how has it changed your perceptions and why do you think that your perceptions have changed? If not, why have your perceptions not changed?

## **DAY SEVEN**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Opposite-sex Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

Your Partner's Friend's Pseudonym \_\_\_\_\_

1. If you interacted with your opposite-sex friend today, what was the topic(s) of your conversation?
2. Describe the setting of your interaction with your friend (include location, length of interaction, and privacy of interaction).
3. If you talked with your opposite-sex friend today, did you discuss the interaction with your spouse?  
Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No (if no, please skip to question #5) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. If you answered yes to question #3, please describe your discussion with your partner about your opposite-sex friend (i.e., how did you tell your partner, what did you tell your partner).**

**Location of interaction:**

**Length of interaction:**

**5. If you talked with your cross-sex friend, but did not discuss it with your spouse, why did you not tell your spouse?**

**6. What do you consider to be important issues for married couples in which one or both partners has an opposite-sex friend? Are there different issues for married partners than for dating partners? Please explain your response.**

## **CONCLUSION**

Thank you so much for participating in this research project. I greatly appreciate the feedback that you have provided. After the data has been analyzed, I would be happy to provide a completed copy of the finished paper for you. Please indicate to me your interest in obtaining a copy.

When I gave you the diary at the beginning of the week, I asked you to complete a short questionnaire when you return your diary to me. This second phase of the project will require 15 to 20 minutes of your time.

There is a second phase of this project that I would like to invite you to participate in. The second phase is less time-consuming. If you are interested, you and your partner will come to Burton Hall on the University of Oklahoma campus for approximately 30 minutes at a time that is convenient for you. You will be placed in a room and asked to respond to several pre-written questions. The questions will ask you to reflect on previous conversations about your opposite-sex friends and issues about having opposite-sex friends while being in a romantic relationship with someone else. You and your partner will be alone in the room for this phase of the project, however, your conversation will be tape recorded on audio tapes (no video taping will take place). You will be asked to communicate with each other for approximately 20 minutes. When you are finished, you will be debriefed. You and your partner will receive additional \$5 each for completing this phase. Please indicate to me your interest in participating in the second phase of the study.

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Form for Research University of Oklahoma, Norman Department of Communication

This research is being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus. This document is your consent form for participation in this research project.

**Principle Investigator:** Kristin K. Froemling  
Department of Communication  
**Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Sandra Ragan  
Department of Communication

**Title of Project:** "Romantic Partners' Communication About Their Cross-sex Friends: Dialectical Tensions and Management Strategies"

**Description:** The purpose of this study is to explore communication in romantic relationships about opposite-sex friendships. Participants will be asked to respond to a series of questions and scales about their communication with their partner in a questionnaire format.

Participation in this study poses no foreseeable risks to the participant. Completion of this questionnaire is the second part of the diary method for which participants will receive \$10 for their participation. Also, participants may benefit from clarifying their own understanding of the impact of opposite-sex friendships on their romantic relationship.

**Approximate Duration of the Subject's Participation:** 20 minutes

**I hereby give my consent to participate in this study. I understand that:**

1. My participation is entirely voluntary, and I may terminate my participation at any time prior to the completion of this study without penalty. However, if I am participating in this research to obtain the monetary reward and I decide to withdraw from participating, I might not receive the money associated with this research project.
2. Any information I may give during my participation will be used for research purposes only. In other words, responses will not be shared with anyone not directly involved in this study.
3. All information I give will be kept confidential and will be used in such a way that identification of me as a participant is impossible. The questionnaires will be strictly protected from any non-project personnel by the researcher who will store the data in locked cabinets to which only the researcher has access. Additionally, the Informed Consent Form will be kept separate from the raw data and destroyed when no longer needed.
4. I understand that there are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study.
5. The investigator is available to answer any questions I may have regarding this study. In case I have any questions in the future, I can reach the investigator at (405) 325-3003 extension #21128; by email at [froemling@ou.edu](mailto:froemling@ou.edu); or by contacting the Department of Communication, 101 Burton Hall, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, 73019. If you have any questions about the rights of the research participants, please contact the Office of Research Administration at (405) 325-4757.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

#### SECTION ONE:

Sex: M F

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you and your partner been together (both dating and married)?

\_\_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ month(s)

Do you have an opposite-sex friend? Y N

If yes, how long have you been friends with your opposite-sex friend?

\_\_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ month(s)

Does your partner have an opposite-sex friend? Y N

If yes, how long has he/she been friends with his/her opposite-sex friend?

\_\_\_\_\_ year(s) \_\_\_\_\_ month(s)

Certainty is defined as the ability to explain and predict your romantic partner's actions. Regarding your romantic relationship: "How much CERTAINTY do you experience about your relationship?" (circle one of the following with 1=none, 5=extreme)

|      |        |          |       |         |
|------|--------|----------|-------|---------|
| None | Little | Moderate | A Lot | Extreme |
| 1    | 2      | 3        | 4     | 5       |

#### SECTION TWO:

Please complete the scale below regarding TRUST (circle one response per question):

1. My partner is primarily interested in his/her own welfare.

|                        |                      |          |         |       |                   |                     |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Completely<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly<br>Agree | Completely<br>Agree |
| 1                      | 2                    | 3        | 4       | 5     | 6                 | 7                   |

2. There are times when my partner cannot be trusted.

|                        |                      |          |         |       |                   |                     |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Completely<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly<br>Agree | Completely<br>Agree |
| 1                      | 2                    | 3        | 4       | 5     | 6                 | 7                   |

**3. My partner is perfectly honest and truthful with me.**

| Completely<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly<br>Agree | Completely<br>Agree |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1                      | 2                    | 3        | 4       | 5     | 6                 | 7                   |

**4. I feel that I can trust my partner completely.**

| Completely<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly<br>Agree | Completely<br>Agree |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1                      | 2                    | 3        | 4       | 5     | 6                 | 7                   |

**5. My partner is truly sincere in his/ her promises.**

| Completely<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly<br>Agree | Completely<br>Agree |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1                      | 2                    | 3        | 4       | 5     | 6                 | 7                   |

**6. I feel that my partner does not show me enough consideration.**

| Completely<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly<br>Agree | Completely<br>Agree |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1                      | 2                    | 3        | 4       | 5     | 6                 | 7                   |

**7. My partner treats me fairly and justly.**

| Completely<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly<br>Agree | Completely<br>Agree |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1                      | 2                    | 3        | 4       | 5     | 6                 | 7                   |

**8. I feel that my partner can be counted on to help me.**

| Completely<br>Disagree | Strongly<br>Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly<br>Agree | Completely<br>Agree |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------|---------|-------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 1                      | 2                    | 3        | 4       | 5     | 6                 | 7                   |

**Please complete the scale below on INFORMATION SEEKING (circle one answer per question)**

**1. I have asked my romantic partner a number of questions about his/ her opposite-sex friend.**

| Strongly<br>Disagree | Moderately<br>Disagree | Slightly<br>Disagree | Undecided | Slightly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Strongly<br>Agree |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2                      | 3                    | 4         | 5                 | 6                   | 7                 |

**2. I have not sought out information about my partner's opposite-sex friend.**

| Strongly<br>Disagree | Moderately<br>Disagree | Slightly<br>Disagree | Undecided | Slightly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Strongly<br>Agree |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1                    | 2                      | 3                    | 4         | 5                 | 6                   | 7                 |

**3. I have tried to find out more about my partner's opposite-sex friend.**

|                      |                        |                      |           |                   |                     |                   |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly<br>Disagree | Moderately<br>Disagree | Slightly<br>Disagree | Undecided | Slightly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Strongly<br>Agree |
| 1                    | 2                      | 3                    | 4         | 5                 | 6                   | 7                 |

**4. I have asked my partner for more information about his/ her opposite-sex friend.**

|                      |                        |                      |           |                   |                     |                   |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly<br>Disagree | Moderately<br>Disagree | Slightly<br>Disagree | Undecided | Slightly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Strongly<br>Agree |
| 1                    | 2                      | 3                    | 4         | 5                 | 6                   | 7                 |

**5. I have asked others about my partner's opposite-sex friend.**

|                      |                        |                      |           |                   |                     |                   |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly<br>Disagree | Moderately<br>Disagree | Slightly<br>Disagree | Undecided | Slightly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Strongly<br>Agree |
| 1                    | 2                      | 3                    | 4         | 5                 | 6                   | 7                 |

**6. I haven't encouraged my partner to tell me about his/ her opposite-sex friend.**

|                      |                        |                      |           |                   |                     |                   |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly<br>Disagree | Moderately<br>Disagree | Slightly<br>Disagree | Undecided | Slightly<br>Agree | Moderately<br>Agree | Strongly<br>Agree |
| 1                    | 2                      | 3                    | 4         | 5                 | 6                   | 7                 |

**Please respond to the following questions regarding RELATIONAL COMMITMENT (circle one response per question)**

*Satisfaction Level*

**1. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship (circle one answer for each item).**

**a) My partner fulfills my needs for intimacy (sharing personal thoughts, secrets, etc.).**

|                       |                   |                     |                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Don't Agree<br>At All | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Moderately | Agree<br>Completely |
| 1                     | 2                 | 3                   | 4                   |

**b) My partner fulfills my needs for companionship (doing things together, enjoying each other's company, etc.).**

|                       |                   |                     |                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Don't Agree<br>At All | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Moderately | Agree<br>Completely |
| 1                     | 2                 | 3                   | 4                   |

**c) My partner fulfills my sexual needs (holding hands, kissing, etc.).**

|             |          |            |            |
|-------------|----------|------------|------------|
| Don't Agree | Agree    | Agree      | Agree      |
| At All      | Slightly | Moderately | Completely |
| 1           | 2        | 3          | 4          |

**d) My partner fulfills my needs for security (feeling trusting, comfortable in a stable relationship, etc.).**

|             |          |            |            |
|-------------|----------|------------|------------|
| Don't Agree | Agree    | Agree      | Agree      |
| At All      | Slightly | Moderately | Completely |
| 1           | 2        | 3          | 4          |

**e) My partner fulfills my needs for emotional involvement (feeling emotional attached, feeling good when another feels good, etc.).**

|             |          |            |            |
|-------------|----------|------------|------------|
| Don't Agree | Agree    | Agree      | Agree      |
| At All      | Slightly | Moderately | Completely |
| 1           | 2        | 3          | 4          |

**2. I feel satisfied with our relationship (please circle one number).**

|              |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------------|
| 0            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8          |
| Do Not Agree |   |   |   | Agree    |   |   |   | Agree      |
| At All       |   |   |   | Somewhat |   |   |   | Completely |

**3. My relationship is much better than others' relationships.**

|              |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------------|
| 0            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8          |
| Do Not Agree |   |   |   | Agree    |   |   |   | Agree      |
| At All       |   |   |   | Somewhat |   |   |   | Completely |

**4. My relationship is close to ideal.**

|              |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------------|
| 0            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8          |
| Do Not Agree |   |   |   | Agree    |   |   |   | Agree      |
| At All       |   |   |   | Somewhat |   |   |   | Completely |

**5. Our relationship makes me very happy.**

|              |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------------|
| 0            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8          |
| Do Not Agree |   |   |   | Agree    |   |   |   | Agree      |
| At All       |   |   |   | Somewhat |   |   |   | Completely |

**6. Our relationship does a good job of fulfilling my needs for intimacy, companionship, etc.**

|              |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------------|
| 0            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8          |
| Do Not Agree |   |   |   | Agree    |   |   |   | Agree      |
| At All       |   |   |   | Somewhat |   |   |   | Completely |



### *Quality of Alternatives*

1. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement regarding the fulfillment of each need in alternative relationships (e.g., by another dating partner, friend, family).

a) My needs for intimacy (sharing personal thoughts, secrets, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships.

| Don't Agree<br>At All | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Moderately | Agree<br>Completely |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1                     | 2                 | 3                   | 4                   |

b) My needs for companionship (doing things together, enjoying each other's company, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships.

| Don't Agree<br>At All | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Moderately | Agree<br>Completely |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1                     | 2                 | 3                   | 4                   |

c) My sexual needs (holding hands, kissing, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships.

| Don't Agree<br>At All | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Moderately | Agree<br>Completely |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1                     | 2                 | 3                   | 4                   |

d) My needs for security (feeling trusting, comfortable in a stable relationship, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships.

| Don't Agree<br>At All | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Moderately | Agree<br>Completely |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1                     | 2                 | 3                   | 4                   |

e) My needs for emotional involvement (feeling emotionally attached, feeling good when another feels good, etc.) could be fulfilled in alternative relationships.

| Don't Agree<br>At All | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Moderately | Agree<br>Completely |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1                     | 2                 | 3                   | 4                   |

2. The people other than my partner with whom I might become involved are very appealing (please circle a number).

| 0                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8                   |
|------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|---|---|---|---------------------|
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |   |   |   | Agree<br>Somewhat |   |   |   | Agree<br>Completely |

3. My alternatives to our relationship are close to ideal (dating another, spending time with friends or on my own, etc.).

|              |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------------|
| 0            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8          |
| Do Not Agree |   |   |   | Agree    |   |   |   | Agree      |
| At All       |   |   |   | Somewhat |   |   |   | Completely |

4. If I weren't married to my partner, I would do fine - I would find another appealing person to date.

|              |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------------|
| 0            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8          |
| Do Not Agree |   |   |   | Agree    |   |   |   | Agree      |
| At All       |   |   |   | Somewhat |   |   |   | Completely |

5. My alternatives are attractive to me (dating another, spending time with friends or on my own, etc.).

|              |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------------|
| 0            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8          |
| Do Not Agree |   |   |   | Agree    |   |   |   | Agree      |
| At All       |   |   |   | Somewhat |   |   |   | Completely |

6. My needs for intimacy, companionship, etc., could easily be fulfilled in an alternative relationship.

|              |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |            |
|--------------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|------------|
| 0            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4        | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8          |
| Do Not Agree |   |   |   | Agree    |   |   |   | Agree      |
| At All       |   |   |   | Somewhat |   |   |   | Completely |

#### *Investment Size*

1. Please indicate the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your current relationship (circle one answer for each item).

a) I have invested a great deal of time in our relationship.

|             |          |            |            |
|-------------|----------|------------|------------|
| Don't Agree | Agree    | Agree      | Agree      |
| At All      | Slightly | Moderately | Completely |
| 1           | 2        | 3          | 4          |

b) I have told my partner many private things about myself (I disclose secrets to him/her).

|             |          |            |            |
|-------------|----------|------------|------------|
| Don't Agree | Agree    | Agree      | Agree      |
| At All      | Slightly | Moderately | Completely |
| 1           | 2        | 3          | 4          |

**c) My partner and I have an intellectual life together that would be difficult to replace.**

|                       |                   |                     |                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Don't Agree<br>At All | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Moderately | Agree<br>Completely |
| 1                     | 2                 | 3                   | 4                   |

**d) My sense of personal identity (who I am) is linked to my partner.**

|                       |                   |                     |                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Don't Agree<br>At All | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Moderately | Agree<br>Completely |
| 1                     | 2                 | 3                   | 4                   |

**e) My partner and I share many memories.**

|                       |                   |                     |                     |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Don't Agree<br>At All | Agree<br>Slightly | Agree<br>Moderately | Agree<br>Completely |
| 1                     | 2                 | 3                   | 4                   |

**2. I have put a great deal into our relationship that I would lose if the relationship were to end (please circle one response).**

|                        |   |   |   |                   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|---|---|---|---------------------|
| 0                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8                   |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |   |   |   | Agree<br>Somewhat |   |   |   | Agree<br>Completely |

**3. Many aspects of my life have become linked to my partner (recreational activities, etc.) and I would lose all of this if we were to divorce.**

|                        |   |   |   |                   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|---|---|---|---------------------|
| 0                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8                   |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |   |   |   | Agree<br>Somewhat |   |   |   | Agree<br>Completely |

**4. I feel very involved in our relationship - like I have put a great deal into it.**

|                        |   |   |   |                   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|---|---|---|---------------------|
| 0                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8                   |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |   |   |   | Agree<br>Somewhat |   |   |   | Agree<br>Completely |

**5. My relationships with friends and family members would be complicated if my partner and I were to divorce (e.g., partner is friends with people I care about).**

|                        |   |   |   |                   |   |   |   |                     |
|------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|---|---|---|---------------------|
| 0                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4                 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8                   |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |   |   |   | Agree<br>Somewhat |   |   |   | Agree<br>Completely |

**6. Compared to other people I know, I have invested a great deal in my relationship with my partner.**

|                        |          |          |          |                   |          |          |          |                     |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|
| <b>0</b>               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>          | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b>            |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |          |          |          | Agree<br>Somewhat |          |          |          | Agree<br>Completely |

***Commitment Levels***

**1. I want our relationship to last for a very long time (please circle one number).**

|                        |          |          |          |                   |          |          |          |                     |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|
| <b>0</b>               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>          | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b>            |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |          |          |          | Agree<br>Somewhat |          |          |          | Agree<br>Completely |

**2. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner.**

|                        |          |          |          |                   |          |          |          |                     |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|
| <b>0</b>               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>          | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b>            |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |          |          |          | Agree<br>Somewhat |          |          |          | Agree<br>Completely |

**3. I would not feel very upset if our relationship were to end in the near future.**

|                        |          |          |          |                   |          |          |          |                     |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|
| <b>0</b>               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>          | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b>            |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |          |          |          | Agree<br>Somewhat |          |          |          | Agree<br>Completely |

**4. It is likely that I will date someone other than my partner within the next year.**

|                        |          |          |          |                   |          |          |          |                     |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|
| <b>0</b>               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>          | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b>            |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |          |          |          | Agree<br>Somewhat |          |          |          | Agree<br>Completely |

**5. I feel very attached to our relationship - very strongly linked to my partner.**

|                        |          |          |          |                   |          |          |          |                     |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|
| <b>0</b>               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>          | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b>            |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |          |          |          | Agree<br>Somewhat |          |          |          | Agree<br>Completely |

**6. I want our relationship to last forever.**

|                        |          |          |          |                   |          |          |          |                     |
|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------|----------|----------|----------|---------------------|
| <b>0</b>               | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>          | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b>            |
| Do Not Agree<br>At All |          |          |          | Agree<br>Somewhat |          |          |          | Agree<br>Completely |

**7. I am oriented toward the long-term future of my relationship (for example, I imagine being with my partner several years from now).**

|                     |          |          |          |                 |          |          |          |                   |
|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| <b>0</b>            | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b>        | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>8</b>          |
| <b>Do Not Agree</b> |          |          |          | <b>Agree</b>    |          |          |          | <b>Agree</b>      |
| <b>At All</b>       |          |          |          | <b>Somewhat</b> |          |          |          | <b>Completely</b> |

## APPENDIX E

### Informed Consent Form for Research University of Oklahoma, Norman Department of Communication

This research is being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus. This document is your consent form for participation in this research project

**Principle Investigator:** Kristin K. Froemling  
Department of Communication  
**Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Sandra Ragan  
Department of Communication

**Title of Project:** "Romantic Partners' Communication About Their Cross-sex Friends: Dialectical Tensions and Management Strategies"

**Description:** The purpose of this study is to explore communication in romantic relationships about opposite-sex friendships. Participants will be asked to respond to a series of questions about a hypothetical scenario in a laboratory setting during which their conversation will be audio-taped. The researcher will leave the couples alone in the lab room to discuss the questions. Upon completion of their discussion, the researcher will debrief the couple. At that time, the couple will be made aware of the availability of a counselor at Goddard Health Center.

Participation in this study poses no foreseeable risks to the participant. Participants will receive \$5 for their participation. Also, participants may benefit from clarifying their own understanding of the impact of opposite-sex friendships on their romantic relationship.

**Approximate Duration of the Subject's Participation:** 20-30 minutes

**I hereby give my consent to participate in this study. I understand that:**

1. My participation is entirely voluntary, and I may terminate my participation at any time prior to the completion of this study without penalty. However, if I am participating in this research to obtain the monetary reward and I decide to withdraw from participating, I might not receive the money associated with the research project.
2. Any information I may give during my participation will be used for research purposes only. In other words, responses will not be shared with anyone not directly involved in this study.
3. All information I give will be kept confidential and will be used in such a way that identification of me as a participant is impossible. The audio tapes will be strictly protected from any non-project personnel by the researcher who will store the data in locked cabinets to which only the researcher has access. Additionally, the Informed Consent Form will be kept separate from the raw data and destroyed when no longer needed.
4. I understand that there are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study. I do not have to answer any question that may incriminate me. Any information given regarding a abuse must be reported by the interviewer. The phone number for counseling at Goddard Health Center is (405) 325-4611.
5. The investigator is available to answer any questions I may have regarding this study. In case I have any questions in the future, I can reach the investigator at (405) 325-3003 extension #21128; by email at [froemling@ou.edu](mailto:froemling@ou.edu); or by contacting the Department of Communication, 101 Burton Hall, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, 73019. If you have any questions about the rights of the research participants, please contact the Office of Research Administration at (405) 325-4757.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX F**

### **CRITICAL INCIDENT**

#### **Romantic partners and their opposite-sex friends**

*Please read the following scenario and discuss the questions that follow. Within each scenario, the facts are presented. Some facts may not be apparent, and are left for your interpretation.*

#### **SCENARIO I**

Jane and John have been married for three years. They dated for 2 years prior to their marriage. John has a close, opposite-sex friend named Kate. John and Kate have been friends for one year. John and Kate work in the marketing department at the XYZ company. John loves the outdoors, as does Kate. However, Jane does not like outdoor activities. As such, John asks Kate to go hiking or kayaking on the weekends. The outings are always day trips (no overnight stays).

Jane is becoming unsettled by their friendship. She believes that John is trustworthy and committed to their marriage. Kate is not married, nor is she involved in a romantic relationship. Jane is concerned that Kate may be trying to persuade John to become more than friends. Jane is also jealous of the time that John spends with Kate.

- 1) In your own words, describe what may be going through Jane's mind.
- 2) Should Jane confront John about her suspicions?
  - If so, how should she communicate her suspicions to John?
  - If not, why should she keep her suspicions from John?
- 3) What might be going through John's mind?
- 4) What do you think John should do about this situation?
  - Based on your ideas about what John is thinking, what should he communicate to Jane?
  - Based on your ideas about what John is thinking, what should he communicate to Kate?
- 5) What can Jane recommend to John as a solution to her problem?
- 6) For the next few minutes, you are Jane and John (in your respective genders). Enact a conversation between Jane and John about this issue.
- 7) Would your thoughts about this scenario change if Kate was inviting John to go hiking or kayaking? Please explain your response.

**APPENDIX G**  
**Institutional Review Board Approval**





# *The University of Oklahoma*

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

January 12, 2000

Ms. Kristin K. Froemling  
University of Oklahoma  
Communication  
CAMPUS MAIL

Dear Ms. Froemling:

The Institutional Review Board-Norman Campus has reviewed your proposal, "Romantic Partners' Communication About Their Cross-Sex Friends: Dialectical Tensions and Management Strategies," under the University's expedited review procedures. The Board found that this research would not constitute a risk to participants beyond those of normal, everyday life, except in the area of privacy, which is adequately protected by the confidentiality procedures. Therefore, the Board has approved the use of human subjects in this research.

This approval is for a period of twelve months from this date, provided that the research procedures are not changed significantly from those described in your "Application for Approval of the Use of Humans Subjects" and attachments. Should you wish to deviate significantly from the described subject procedures, you must notify me and obtain prior approval from the Board for the changes.

At the end of the research, you must submit a short report describing your use of human subjects in the research and the results obtained. Should the research extend beyond 12 months, a progress report must be submitted with the request for re-approval, and a final report must be submitted at the end of the research.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Wyatt Sedwick".

Susan Wyatt Sedwick, Ph.D.  
Administrative Officer  
Institutional Review Board-Norman Campus

SWS:pw  
FY00-129

Cc: Dr. E. Laurette Taylor, Chair, Institutional Review Board  
Dr. Sandra Ragan, Communication

## APPENDIX H

### Summary of Scores for Questionnaire Data for All Participants

| Participant  | Trust Score | Info-Seek Score | Investment Model Score* | Certainty   |
|--------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| 1A           | 4.750       | 4.333           | 8.0, 3.6, 7.6, 8.0      | 5           |
| 1B           | 6.125       | 2.333           | 7.6, 1.8, 6.8, 8.0      | 5           |
| 2A           | 7.000       | 3.500           | 8.0, 8.0, 8.0, 8.0      | 5           |
| 2B           | 7.000       | 3.833           | 8.0, 8.0, 8.0, 8.0      | 5           |
| 3A (Bob)     | 6.125       | 3.667           | 7.0, 4.0, 5.8, 8.0      | 3           |
| 3B (Marsha)  | 5.25        | 1.50            | 5.6, 1.6, 5.2, 8.0      | 4           |
| 4A (Larry)   | 6.0         | 4.8333          | 7.0, 4.0, 5.8, 7.7      | 4           |
| 4B (Janet)   | 6.375       | 6.0             | 7.0, **, 3.8, 8.0       | 4           |
| 5A           | 6.125       | 4.167           | 6.6, 5.4, 5.4, **       | 5           |
| 5B           | 6.25        | 5.5             | 7.8, 1.6, 7.2, 8.0      | 5           |
| 6A           | 6.25        | 4.0             | 7.0, 5.0, 5.6, 7.6      | 4           |
| 6B           | 6.5         | 4.833           | 7.2, 2.8, 4.6, 8.0      | no response |
| 7A (Steve)   | 4.0         | 2.833           | 4.2, 4.6, 6.2, 7.7      | 3           |
| 7B (Rachel)  | 5.625       | 2.667           | 4.2, 3.2, 6.8, 7.1      | 4           |
| 8A           | 6.875       | 5.0             | 7.6, 1.0, 8.0, 8.0      | 5           |
| 8B           | 6.125       | 3.0             | 7.4, 2.6, 6.0, 7.7      | 5           |
| 9A (Phillip) | 6.75        | 1.667           | 8.0, .4, 7.8, 8.0       | 4           |
| 9B (Cassie)  | 6.875       | 6.0             | 8.0, .2, 4.8, 8.0       | 3           |
| 10A, 10B***  |             |                 |                         |             |

One question was included to measure certainty using a 5-point Likert scale. The Trust Scale and Information-Seeking Scale contain a 7-point Likert scale. Each section of the Investment Model contains an 8-point Likert scale. Quality of Alternatives section of the Investment Model should yield low numbers because a low score indicates that the participant does not have quality alternatives to his/ her present romantic partner.

\* The Investment Model contains four parts: Satisfaction, Quality of Alternatives, Investment Size, and Commitment. The scores for each part are reported in that order.

\*\* Scores could not be computed because the scale contained items with no response.

\*\*\* The questionnaire data from this couple was incomplete.