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PREVIEW

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**The friendship triangle: The relationship between expectations,
experiences and satisfaction for dyadic and nondyadic
heterosexual women and lesbians**

Grana, Sheryl J., Ph.D.

The University of Nebraska - Lincoln, 1989

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PREVIEW

THE FRIENDSHIP TRIANGLE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
EXPECTATIONS, EXPERIENCES AND SATISFACTION FOR
DYADIC AND NONDYADIC HETEROSEXUAL WOMEN AND LESBIANS

by

Sheryl J. Grana

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Sociology

Under the Supervision of Professor Helen A. Moore

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 1989

TITLE

The Friendship Triangle: The Relationship Between Expectations,
Experiences and Satisfaction for Dyadic and Nondyadic
Heterosexual Women and Lesbians

BY

Sheryl J. Grana

APPROVED

DATE

<u>Helen A. Moore, Chair</u>	<u>May 11, 1989</u>
<u>Suzanne Ortega</u>	<u>May 11, 1989</u>
<u>David R. Johnson</u>	<u>May 11, 1989</u>
<u>Alan Booth</u>	<u>May 11, 1989</u>
<u>Theo Sonderegger (Psych)</u>	<u>May 11, 1989</u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>
<u> </u>	<u> </u>

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

GRADUATE COLLEGE

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THE FRIENDSHIP TRIANGLE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
EXPECTATIONS, EXPERIENCES AND SATISFACTION FOR
DYADIC AND NONDYADIC HETEROSEXUAL WOMEN AND LESBIANS

Sheryl J. Grana, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 1989

Advisor: Helen A. Moore

The friendship triangle is conceptually defined as the interrelationship among friendship expectations, experiences and satisfaction. Of primary importance to the research are the variables which predict satisfaction among a woman's circle of women friends. One hundred and forty heterosexual women and seventy lesbians were sampled within a midsize, midwestern city to examine these issues. A self-administered questionnaire was utilized to collect data. Various independent variables such as attitudes towards women, political identification, number of women friends and the importance level of a list of specific needs were regressed on expectations, experiences and satisfaction.

The findings indicate that, while women do differentially evaluate their satisfaction with female friends, the differences are not great. Sexual preference

is a key issue within the research. The findings suggest that lesbians and heterosexual women identify different factors which predict friendship experiences but that friendship satisfaction, when controlling for these two groups, is predicted by rather similar variables. Sexual preference is not significant in the prediction of friendship satisfaction.

Dyadic status is also an important variable within the research and is not significant to the prediction of friendship satisfaction. While women with partners and those without partners identify two different variables which predict their satisfaction with female friendship, overall, these two groups are similar in what they identify as important to satisfactory friendships. An interaction between sexual preference and dyadic status was tested for but was not significant.

An intertwining relationship exists between expectations, experiences and satisfaction. The factors which predict friendship expectations and experiences are important to satisfaction as well. Indeed, the relationship among these variables suggests that they are assessed and reassessed based on one another.

This is dedicated to my kindred spirit,

Cynthia Lee Morin Murphy,

for all the years of love,
acceptance, understanding
and friendship.

Friendship happens
in that special moment
when someone
reaches out to another,
trusts, comforts,
believes in another,
and makes
a special difference
that no one else
can make.

Anonymous

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When the microcomputer ate my dissertation disk, Sharon Selvage, of the Bureau of Sociological Research, and Professor David Brinkerhoff spent several hours trying to recover as much information as possible. Knowing that they both have other things to do, I really appreciated their willingness to help.

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doing, were always there with hugs and kisses when Mom needed a lift. To my friends - Cindy, Tracey, Bobbie, Diann, Terri, Helen, Jane - and all those whom I have not named, who have listened to endless hours of "dissertating" and graduate school trials and tribulations, I thank from the bottom of my heart. I hope, with some new insights of my own into friendship, that I will always live up to their expectations of me.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction to the Problem

"The most holy bond of society is friendship" noted feminist theorist Mary Wollstonecraft and indeed, for many of us, friendship figures prominently in our lives. Almost daily we depend on our friends to help us through the good and bad times, the high and low moments. Early in our lives, we learn that friendship is a valuable relationship. Friends socialize us into ways of dressing, of thinking, of acting; they act as mirrors for us by providing a sense of validation of our personal worth (Sullivan, 1953). Our peers who become friends are often seen as more trusted sounding boards than parents or other family members. As we progress through our life cycles, our friends remain important even though what we stress as valuable about them may change (Block, 1980; Reisman, 1981).

The old adage "you can't pick your family but you can pick your friends" may provide some insight into our thoughts and feelings about friendship. For whatever reason, we pick and settle on people we "like." People we "like" are often quite similar and this similarity comes from homogamous characteristics -- similar social

class, interests, schooling or a conglomerate of other things (Riley and Foner, 1968; Cotton, 1975; Berscheid and Walster, 1978). Often our friendships, whether they are acted out within a dyad, a social group or some other kind of social network, run smoothly; but, as with any other social relationship, they may also have their problems. Sometimes our friends live up to what we expect of them and sometimes they do not; this undoubtedly holds true for the way our friends perceive us as well.

A growing body of literature seeks to investigate the sociology of friendship. The majority of this research focuses on defining "friend" and "friendship" as well as exploring the functions of friendship, the variables which cause friends to be drawn to one another and the friendship networks of individuals. Research has also examined the effects of dyads, whether cohabitating or married, on friendship choices and decisions. Often individuals have ideas about friends and friendship which may need to be altered when they become part of a dyadic relationship. Likewise, when individuals meet new friends outside of their dyadic relationship, these new friends must somehow be incorporated into the dyadic structure.

With few exceptions, little research investigates the expectations individuals have of friendship or the experiences they encounter within it. Because of this dearth of knowledge, we know little about the triangular relationship between friendship expectations, actual friendship experiences and satisfaction with friendship.

Thus, the major issues to be addressed will explore these neglected areas. This research will examine friendship expectations, experiences and level of friendship satisfaction for women's circle of women friends. These relationships will be examined for the entire sample and for two subgroups within the sample: lesbian and heterosexual women, and women in dyads and those not in dyads.

Dyadic Status and Friendship Satisfaction

Both women in dyads, and those not in dyads, will be studied to assess how friendship expectations and experiences interact with dyadic (or projected dyadic) issues. People in dyadic pairs are often influenced by their significant other's ideas; dyadic dynamics, therefore, may have significant implications for women's perceptions of friendship. Therefore, how partners agree on the issue of friends outside of the dyad will be

examined to investigate the dynamics of coupling and its implications for friendship choices and experiences.

Sexual Preference and a Women-only Sample

An important variable in this research is (women's) sexual preference. The use of sexual preference as a variable addresses several issues not common in friendship studies. Sexual preference is included for comparability -- in this case between groups of women (heterosexual and lesbian) instead of women and men. Secondly, the inclusion of preference allows for a study of couple dynamics -- between lesbian partners and heterosexual partners -- which may identify a range of dyadic dynamics such as power issues, jealousy over friendships and the like. Finally, assuming all women view friendship similarly while some are affected by multiple minority statuses (such as lesbianism or ageism) may be naive and therefore should be examined.

Several other reasons exist for the use of a women-only sample. First, it allows for the study of women's friendships as valuable in and of themselves without the use of male friendship groups as the normative comparison. Research on women is revealing information that for many years was left uninvestigated. Women's lives were either omitted from serious scientific

study or were assumed to be closely similar to those of men. While some research (see, for example, Tiger, 1969) proposes that male bonding in society is the strongest and most important friendship structure, other research concludes that women are actually the nurturant and caring gender of the society (Daly, 1978, for example). Thus, women may be most able to bond and form close, intimate relationships. An investigation into the particular friendships that women have can identify the range of emotionality and nurturance by women within their relationships.

Second, past research has indicated that women's friends are friends of their partners (if married). This past research has been restricted to the examination of heterosexual partners and has not, therefore, allowed for an analysis of couple dynamics per se. These studies may consequently be studies of patriarchal effects (i.e. formal or informal male control over women's lives) rather than studies of the dynamics of coupling itself. What variability exists within paired relationships that are not heterosexual? Does the dyadic relationship influence friendships regardless of sexual preference or authority patterns within the dyad? Past research (see Courtney, 1985, for example) has ignored questions such as these. Finally, the inclusion of women only in the