

# College women's female friendships: A longitudinal view

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## College Women's Female Friendships: A Longitudinal View

I don't know what I would do without them. There is something unique about relationships between women that I cannot do without. Understanding this came in college where I think so many of us learned the intellectual and fortifying effects of a community of women—something that I find preserved in my relationships with those women today. (Kate, research participant)

From 1993 through 1997 undergraduate women attending a residential coeducational predominantly White college participated in a phenomenological research project that assessed the cognitive nature, power, and educational value of college women's female friendships (Martínez Alemán, 1997). The research project's primary goal was to gain understanding of an aspect of women's friendships routinely ignored (i.e. the educative value of women's same sex friendships in college). Grounded in feminist friendship theories and the research on learning as relational, this research project focused on women's female friendships as "a site for assessing meaning of self and of reality, a site for the experience of different perspectives and viewpoints, and an opportunity for growth through interdependency" (p. 132). Additionally, further study explored how race and ethnicity in concert with gender compose college women's female friendships as sites for cognitive growth (Martínez Alemán, 2000).

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The research data on the women who participated in these studies revealed that for the college women participants, their conversations with their female friends served as a respite from academic stress and anxiety; as validation and support of their thinking and their ideas; as a means for the development of a positive racial and/or ethnic gendered self image; as risk-free testing sites for ideas and “race talk”; as a source for different and diverse perspectives; and as sources of information and advice (Martínez Alemán, 1997, 2000). The rich data gathered from questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups from 1993 through 1997 provided a multifaceted view of these sororal relationships central to which was intellectual and academic growth and validation, and for self-determination and affirmation. Women in these studies used female friendships to validate self-knowledge, to confirm assumptions, and to effectively traverse the college landscape. The cognitive interdependence that characterized these relationships was one in which autonomy and independence were reconciled, an attribute typical of “feminist classrooms that develop voice, mind, and self” (1997, p. 145). Such cognitive interdependence is the hallmark of feminist conceptualizations of subjectivity, knowing and meaning-making, a view informed by John Dewey’s pragmatic theory’s dismissal of the knower as strictly autonomous self. As Martínez Alemán (1997) noted

Dewey’s view of the individual as integrated, interdependent, and interactive knower allows for the possibility that learning can take place within a relationship characterized by the existence of both a mutuality of interests and autonomous growth. (p. 126)

Women of color in particular marshaled the power found in their sororal friendships’ cognitive interdependence to resist negative contestations to racial and ethnic identity and self-worth. In their female friendships, these women of color engaged in the process of acquiring intelligence and progressively more sophisticated and complex thinking about their racial and ethnic identities. For African-American and Asian-American women and Latinas, “racial and ethnic self-empowerment appear[ed] to be the primary cognitive operation” (2000, p. 149) in their female friendships, a reasonable by-product of the salience of racial and ethnic difference on their predominantly white college campus. These female friendships, then, served as key cognitive developmental events in college.

The cognitive value of female friendships formed in college resides in the ways in which these relationships were vehicles for cognitive development. In these sororal relationships, young women acquired new information and engaged in more complex knowing about self and others; they rehearsed more advanced reasoning when making decisions about

life transitions in college; and through their conversations experienced “the free-flowing, playful, and risk-free performance that for them constituted purposeful, practical, and productive learning” (Martínez Alemán, 1997, p. 144). Within these relationships, women exercised interpersonal reasoning through dialogue that was inductive and frank (Noddings & Witherell, 1991). Developmentally, these sororal relationships served as a site for growth in perception and reasoning in their late-adolescent womanhood. Though it is certainly true that other affective growth is served by these friendships between college women, the focus of this study was to illuminate and validate female friendship as relationships in which learning and cognitive development are evidenced and that the cognitive interdependency found in these female friendships is worthy of examination (Martínez Alemán, 1997).

But what happens to college women's female friendships after graduation? What happens to those highly educative, cognitively interdependent sororal relationships? What characteristics and qualities of the friendship continue to inform women's cognition? What characteristics and qualities of the friendship continue to advance women's intelligence, decision-making, and reasoning into early adulthood? How have these relationships evolved and what developmental purposes do they serve these women after college? Do women need these relationships in their new post-college social locations and roles? Have new sororal friendships taken their place and do new friendship relationships with women serve the same purposes?

### *Review of the Literature*

As assessed in the original studies, “Understanding and investigating female friendship's educative value” and “Race talks: Undergraduate women of color and female friendships” (Martínez Alemán, 1997, 2000), the literature on women's friendships as learning relationships is informed primarily by feminist arguments on the personal and intellectual value of woman-woman relationships. Raymond's (1986) exposition on female friendship as a relationship of passionate interdependent self-authorship cast the motivation for the study of women's collegiate friendships as educative. Mapped onto the social sciences research landscape that casts women's same-sex friendships as cognitively complex relationships with profound implications for learning, Raymond's (1986) feminist friendship theory served as the foundation and rationale for assessing interpersonal learning in the original studies.

To grasp the temporal effects of the longitudinal data in this study, it was imperative to examine and assess the relevant developmental litera-

ture, particularly its feminist critiques. As Greene (2003) points out, conventional psychology has “failed to provide an adequate theoretical base for describing changes in the psychology of girls and women across the life span” (p. 1). Traditionally, theories and accounts of girls’ and women’s development have either neglected gender as a category of analysis or biased assessments toward the privileging of masculine traits. Important to this longitudinal study of female friendship is the critique of traditional accounts of gender development existing outside of temporality (i.e. that development is understood as an abstract condition free of concrete reality). More specific to this study of college women’s female friendships is the developmental impact of friendship and conversation (or “talk”) on women especially as it pertains to cognitive growth and self-authorship. Scholnick’s (2000) feminist accounting of the developmental impact of friendship on women underscores the cognitive value of female friendship observed in the original female friendship studies, adding that women’s cognitive development is marked by a cognitive flexibility that requires “reworking based on shifting situational demands, changing purposes, and a past history of interactions” (p. 36). Women’s conversation is also acknowledged as indispensable for self-authorship and agency. Also important in any consideration of human development as impacted by gender is the privileging of empathetic relationships as a means to understand and develop identity (Welch-Ross, 2000). Given this critical underpinning, longitudinal data should be assessed as affected by time and context, by a view that captures its “vastness and ever-present motion” (Saldana, 2003). In doing so, the “social clock projects” identified by Neugarten (1968) and updated by Greene (2003) that serve as the cultural contexts for development, are made evident. Thus, a feminist examination of the educative or developmental value of women’s female friendships should reflect gender in time and place, as a social property, and as vital to the construction of self.

To understand the role that female friendships play in college women’s development Baxter Magolda’s (1992, 2001) research and scholarship on “self-authorship” and college student development, as well as her work on “learning partnerships” (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004) is useful. Baxter-Magolda’s conceptualization of “self-authorship” provides a means to understand the value of female friendships for self-definition and identity development, especially within the context of relationships formed in college and the role these relationships play in post-college development. According to Baxter Magolda, “self-authorship” is a developmental aim of college students that can be characterized as the nexus of epistemological, intra- and inter-personal develop-

ment, or the production of a balanced and sensible set of values and attitudes and self-identification. Self-authorship, Baxter Magolda argues (2001), is greatly dependent on a student's ability to integrate their contextual ways of knowing—the consideration of context to understand and make sense of new circumstances like employment, marriage, parenthood—and a “belief system” that emerges from evaluation and interpretation of frames of reference (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). Self-authorship involves the exploration of identity and subjectivity characteristic of Arnett's (2000) developmental period, “emerging adulthood.” College women, typically within the developmental period of emerging adulthood, experience neurological growth (cortical gray matter continued increase in the occipital lobe through age 20) related to reasoning, awareness, and consciousness (see e.g., Giedd et al., 1999). Thus, self-authorship is the means through which college students, in this case women students, develop stable and lifelong cognitive capital that enables them to navigate the contextual nature of knowledge and integrate that knowledge with their sense of self. Like the challenging and supportive “learning partnerships” that Baxter Magolda and King (2004) assert will promote self-authorship, it could be argued that for women in the original friendship study women friends served as a means to self-authorship. But does this relationship continue or evolve to further or enhance self-authorship in the post-college years?

### *Methods*

To capture how the experience and cognitive value of college female friendship had changed through time for the participants of the original study, a qualitative longitudinal cohort study was designed to understand the phenomenon through a period of time. The value of qualitative longitudinal study is that it gives us a temporal view of relationships enabling an examination of change “from-through” time (Saldana, 2003). An examination of same-sex friendship experience that is mediated by time can provide us with rich, layered data and thus a more complex understanding of the constancy and change or evolution in women's same-sex friendship relationships and most importantly, perspectives on the “complexities of the journey” after college (p. 8). As a cohort study, the participants shared the same event (participation in the original study) and again deliberate on the phenomenon at a period of time after the original research. As defined by the research literature, the longitudinal nature of the cohort study demanded that the group be observed over time (Menard, 2002). Here, the primary goals of the longitudinal study of women's female friendships were to understand the contextual

changes to the participants' collegiate female friendships after graduation from college, and to examine their perceptions of the characteristics and qualities of their college female friendships since graduation, or more precisely, after they leave the defining context of the friendship, the residential college campus. In particular, this longitudinal cohort study was designed to ascertain how the relationships had evolved, what impact contextual changes had on the original relational effects, and if their post-graduate lives provided them with relationships comparable to and having the same effects as sororal relationships formed while in college.

Thus, this qualitative longitudinal study was designed with three principal purposes in mind: (a) to determine consistency with the original study and its findings (*constancy*), (b) to solicit perceptions of change to the friendship relationship since college (*change*), and (c) to solicit comparisons between college female friendships and post-college female friendships (*transition*). In sum, the online questionnaire, the interview and member-checking were intended to assess the *constancy* in perceived purposes of college women's female friendships, the *change* in the form, nature of function of those friendships in the post-college years, and the *transition* (if any) to new female-friendships (the formation of new female friendships) and perceived comparisons between college and post-college same-sex friendships. Participant perceptions of constancy, change, and transition would need to be understood within a temporal context in which multiple rather than singular factors shape perceptions (Saldana, 2003). As the extension of a phenomenological study, this longitudinal qualitative study maintains the central phenomenon—the cognitive value of college women's female friendships—as focal and seeks to appraise the meaning of the phenomenon for the participants (Creswell, 2003).

#### *Participant Recruitment*

In January of 2003—ten years after the original data collection and seven years after the second phase of the research that focused on race and ethnicity—participants from the original research studies were recruited to participate in the longitudinal study through a variety of means approved by the institutional review board at my institution. The participants had been originally recruited beginning in fall 1993 through spring 1995 from an undergraduate, coeducational, predominantly white residential college. A purposeful sample was gathered from sophomore, junior, and senior women ranging from 18 to 23 years of age; only 5 women of color participated (Martínez Alemán, 1997). In the fall of 1996, 41 women of color were recruited and composed a purposeful sample of sophomore and junior women of color to participate in the

research with a particular focus on race and ethnicity (Martínez Alemán, 2000). To begin the longitudinal recruitment, first, original participant e-mail addresses were collected using several online search engines. These students were contacted by me through an e-mail letter inquiring about their interest in participating in the longitudinal project. Moreover, using a “snowball” or “chain” technique, I invited the original participants to contact other women who may have been in the study and to refer them to the electronic questionnaire site hyperlinked in the e-mail correspondence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through snowballing, a substantive list of participants was generated, but to improve the sample size additional canvassing was deemed necessary. For example, in the spring of 2003, I solicited additional participation by posting a message in the college’s alumni magazine, and by sending an e-mail through the alumni office to women in those class years. I also continued using search engines and databases to identify the e-mail addresses of participants. By the fall of 2003, 80 women had agreed to participate in the online questionnaire and after intentional reminder prompts to complete the online questionnaire throughout the fall and early winter, by January of 2004 73 women had completed the questionnaire (Appendix A). Respondents ranged in age from 28 to 33 years; among the respondents four self-identified as African American, five as Latina, and three as Asian American. Three respondents lived outside of the United States at the time of the questionnaire; those living stateside were scattered along the east and west coasts and in the upper Midwest.

#### *Data Gathering and Analysis*

Data from the online questionnaire were downloaded as text files and then analyzed using HyperResearch, qualitative data analysis software. The data were coded using the themes that emerged in the original and race-specific studies and open-coding to capture change and transition. The codes that were used from the original studies were: (a) conversations with female friends serve as a respite from stress and anxiety; (b) as validation and support of their thinking and their ideas; (c) as a means for the development of a positive racial and/or ethnic gendered self image; (d) as risk-free testing sites for ideas and “race talk”; (e) as a source for different and diverse perspectives; and (f) as sources of information and advice. To identify themes that emerged from data reflecting change in their college female friendship and transition to post-college female friendship, a category construction strategy was employed (Merriam, 1998). Once the analysis was completed, an interview protocol was constructed that reflected the inferences drawn from the analysis of the questionnaire responses (Appendix B).

The interview was designed to serve as one point of data convergence with the questionnaire (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990).

In February of 2004, 15 women participated in semi-structured interviews. Given that participants had relocated across the United States and internationally, the interviews were conducted over the phone, each lasting 50 or more minutes in length. Among the women who participated in the interviews, two self-identified as Latina, two as African American, one as Asian American, and two as lesbian. At the time of the interview, these women were between 28 and 30 years old. Interviews were completed in March of 2004 and were transcribed and analyzed using HyperResearch using a three-pronged coding strategy to assess constancy, transition and change: (1) original studies' codes (to appraise constancy); (2) new coding for online questionnaire that pertained to post-college female friendships (to examine change) and (3) coding for the interview data comparing post-college female friendship with new female-friendships (transition). To corroborate and assess credibility of the research findings, the data from the interviews were triangulated with the data from the questionnaire (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Additionally, in January of 2005, an arbitrary sample of the women interviewed was sent abridged research findings as a form of member checking and their email comments were examined for concerns about misinterpretations or inconsistencies (Patton, 1990). Finally, in 2007 participants were once again contacted electronically to update, revise and confirm data, and finalize triangulation.

In what follows I discuss what the questionnaire and interview data presented relative to the three temporal codes for longitudinal study (constancy, transition, and change), and the themes that emerged within each code. The themes or clusters of meaning that became apparent from the questionnaire and interview data are phenomenological in nature in that they are theoretically grounded in the original study's framework (feminist conceptualization of female friendship and interpersonal meaning-making informed by Deweyan pragmatism) and reflect the researcher's synthesis of the experience to a prevailing meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Questionnaire and interview data were first organized and grouped under the three temporal codes to conserve the longitudinal potency and then analyzed using Moustaka's (1994) coding method that included a sequence of horizontalization of the data, then developing meaning units, then constructing a structural description of the data and then composing themes that reflect the essence of the meanings made by participants. Data from member checking were used to verify or establish analytical confidence and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Findings*

The whole of the qualitative longitudinal data gathered suggests that there is constancy and reliability in the role that college female friends continue to play in women's cognitive development but that the transition from college to post-college life—often characterized by graduate education, professional commitment, marriage, and/or motherhood—shifts the focus of conversations, the time spent on the relationship, and heightens the perceived need for sororal conversations. Women's perceptions of their collegiate sororal relationships' effects on intellectual and academic confidence and self-worth suggest that in their post-college lives, their college women friends continue to provide them validation and support for their thinking, serve as a fund of information and counsel, and most importantly, as sources of diverse and challenging perspectives. As was true in college, women reported that these relationships continue to serve as respites for stress and anxiety, though the source of strain and apprehension is no longer emanating from academic demands. In sum, the data from the questionnaires, interviews and member checking put forward a view of these friendships as having the same perceived cognitive effects in the lives of these women but this is a constancy that has advanced and exhibits developmental modification. Each theme that emerged was robust, though some presented more strongly than others across the three temporal codes. Participants overwhelmingly portrayed the value of their friendships across time as being a source of intellectual validation and a resource for their development as women. The questionnaire and interviews yielded references to this theme in 87% of all coding decisions. These included discussion or mention of topics specific to the gendered development needs that these women expressed e.g., mothering and professional identity. Particularly, concerns about sororal intimacy were expressed and coded in 79% of all coding decisions.

In what follows I explore each of the temporal codes (constancy, change, and transition) and the themes that emerged within each, themes that often intertwine across codes. In other words, because by definition the temporal codes reflect evolutionary alterations characteristic of human development, emergent themes are not and cannot be categorically separate or disconnected from each other. Rather, they offer a dynamic view of women's development in accord with feminist thought (Miller, 2006). Table 1 (Dominant Themes across Temporal Categories) below provides an overview of the temporal codes and the dominant themes across them.

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TABLE 1  
Dominant Themes Across Temporal Categories

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Constancy

- Female friends as agents of intellectual growth
- Female friends as validation and challenge
- Female friendships as a reprieve from anxiety and stress
- Female friendship characterized by self-authorship deliberation

Change

- Female friendship's heightened intimacy
- Friendship talk as discourses on developmentally specific issues/topics
- Friendship talk as planned and intentional communication

Transition

- Post-graduation female friendships are typified as benefiting from college female friendship experience
  - Post-graduation female friendships must meet raised expectations
  - Post-graduation female friendships possess less intimacy than those in college
  - Post-graduation female friendships as "boutique" friendships
  - Continued need for and value of the kind of female friendships formed in college
- 

### *Constancy*

Almost half (48%) of the original participants reported that their closest female friend after graduation remains her best female friend from college. These participants characterized their sororal relationships as still having the utmost relevance and significance in their own development and individuation and describe the perceived effects of these relationships in much the same ways as they did while in college. From the questionnaire and the interviews, it was clear that these women perceived their college female friends as (a) agents of intellectual growth, validation, and challenge, and the relationships to be (b) a reprieve from anxiety and stress and (c) characterized by self-authorship deliberation.

Though now marked by changes in these women's lives, the cognitive character of the friendship relationship remains consistent with the findings from the original study. For example, as agents of intellectual growth, these women's female friendships formed in college are still perceived to have the same effects on intellectual growth as they did while in college. As one woman commented

These friendships have given us an informal forum to explore intellectual ideas. Moreover many times these friends have encouraged me to have experiences that contributed to my intellectual growth that I would probably not otherwise have and vice versa. . . . Now the intellectual ideas we discuss are

only slightly different (and with a little more of real-world perspective) and the professors and the reading assignments are gone but we're still discussing things with each other. (Gale)

When asked, "What words would you use to characterize the role you play in each other's intellectual growth?" women most often responded by saying "intellectually challenging," "stimulating" and "supportive." The 660 words entered by the respondents of the questionnaire were collapsed into meaning clusters that yielded a summative constellation that depicts a relationship that is understood as a catalyst for understanding complexity in the exigent events and issues in their lives. Repeatedly their conversations were reported to be "questioning," "informative," and "learning," underscoring the original finding that sororal friendship conversations "provide them with a stage for the rehearsal of their thinking" (Martínez Alemán, 1997, p. 138). This "stage" continues to be one in which these women rehearse thinking because they communicated that they perceive the space hospitable and didactic. Women also expressed that mutuality distinguishes these conversations in that each friend contributes criticism, provides insights and acts as a sounding board, and puts forward "new perspectives." As in the original study, the construction of knowledge through these conversations is clearly understood as interdependent and the consequential self-knowledge derived from the exchange is "about self and *for* self, and for other" (p. 140). Finally, though more clearly evident in the current topics of conversations, these descriptors resonate with the findings of the original study that suggested that college women's conversation with their female friends were "sites for intellectual play" (p. 138). In portraying their current conversations, women often used terms like "safe," "free-flowing," "experimenting," "new ideas," and "thought provoking." As Meg noted, "We provide empathy and understanding to one another but also try to introduce a more rational perspective to motivate each other."

Though the purposes of women's friendship conversations in the present appear to be consistent with those identified when the participants were in college, the topics of conversation educed in the questionnaire and interviews suggest that some change has entered this sororal space. However, what remains unchanged is that as they did in college, the topics of women's conversations are developmentally important. For example, talking about relationships with family members, romantic partners, and other friends were three topics of conversation that occurred with similar frequency then and now. Talk about family and relationships with family members was listed as frequently as it had been while the students were in college, approximately 7% versus 9% for talk about family then and now; 9% versus 6% about other friends then and now.

These topics of conversation were described in the interviews as content that as they did in college, drive “the execution of knowledge, for the realization of their thinking” (Martínez Alemán, 1997, p. 141). Now as in college, what women talk about with their female friends is content necessary for the “self-authorship” identified as critical in the college years (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001). In their conversations, these women deliberate on self-authorship (i.e. they gather contextual knowledge) to interpret their post-college environments and work to integrate this knowledge with their identities. Sheryl captures this sentiment when she notes when she describes her conversations with her friend as deliberations about her identity:

My college female friendships are very important to my personal growth and understanding of who I am. I cherish the fun memories we have but probably even more important is the self-understanding gained through our discussions and through seeing my reflection through my friends.

As deliberations for the purposes of constructing identity or self-authorship, these relationships and the conversations within were characterized as significant by the participants. The relationship’s cognitive interdependence served as a means to acquire and advance knowledge of self.

Central to the self-authorship that was evident in the original study was the extent to which women’s female friendships had served to enhance self-knowledge about being women, or more precisely, “to understand their place in the world as gendered selves” (Martínez Alemán, 1997, p. 141). In both the questionnaire and the interviews, women portrayed their female friendships as relationships in which and through which their gendered position in the world could be examined, interpreted, and comprehended. Though it can be argued that gender is salient in all their conversations, as a category of analysis within the conversations (i.e. as the precise subject of the exchange), *being* women and authoring femininity was significant. Topics most frequently listed as the focus of their conversations on the questionnaire were work or graduate school, relationships with romantic partners, life aspirations, parenting, women’s bodies, sex and sexuality, and politics. Each of these topic areas was couched in a gender analysis informed in college but now requiring novel scrutiny. When discussing work, for example, many of the same gender concerns that they had in college about power differentials between women and men (in this case, dealing with male professors and male friends) are now manifest in the complexities of work relationships with male superiors. College concerns about being women students (dealing with the stress and demands of courses) are now supplanted by concerns about the stress of work demands and work-life

balance as women and explicitly “feminist” concerns. How women understand gender in the workplace is mediated in these conversations. How can her contributions be as valued as her male coworkers’? How can she reach her professional goals in light of this? How can work-life balance be negotiated in the workplace? For women in graduate school, conversations with their women friends served to reduce the stress that, as Sydney noted, comes from “graduate school woes and troubles” in part “because they aren’t all that different from [college] workload issues.” For some women in male-dominated graduate programs, their college female friendships provide both respite and support in ways similar to those found among women of color in earlier studies (Martínez Alemán, 2000). As Martha noted, without her college female friends, “I think that I would have never finished graduate school. I am in a male-dominated field and pretty much all hard science remains quite sexist. Without those women in my daily life I think I would have quit long ago.” For women like Rachel living outside the United States, understanding the implications of being a woman in intensely patriarchal cultures is critical. In her conversation with her friend they explore “being women in Latin America and in a male dominated medium.”

In sum, women use their female friendships to dissect “sexism” in the workplace, in graduate education, in their post-college experiences, and to weigh and consider their responses to it.

Together with work or professional life, negotiating the demand of parenting and romantic relationships appears as a prominent theme in conversations. In both the questionnaires and the interviews, women asserted a desire to think through “life decisions” with their female friend, especially in the more dense and multifaceted areas of parenting and love relationships. Here, gender was obvious in their conversations, and more importantly, in their telling of the conversations’ effects on their thinking. Though these topics were certainly rich with information and advice-giving (a purpose of women’s friendships that arose in the original studies), women perceive these conversations as incorporating another dimension in self-definition and authorship. Women confer about being or becoming a mother, and about being or becoming a life-partner not only as information exchange but in ways that are probative, analytical and deliberative. Frustrations about their roles as mothers and partners are certainly aired in these conversations but women describe the conversational objective to be about individual discernment. Reminiscent of early feminist treatises on the meaning of motherhood like Adrienne Rich’s (1976/1995) *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and as Institution* and more recent interpretations of mothering like Judith Warner’s (2005) *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of*

*Anxiety*, friends' talk of mothering is yet another way in which female friendship serves as a site for "identity construction and self-assessment" (Martínez Alemán, 1997, p. 139). Self-authorship and understanding now entails making sense of a culturally loaded identity, "mother"—new terrain that must they now must or will lay claim to in the near future.

Overall, though some new topics of conversation were introduced into the relationship after college, women's female friendships continued to exhibit the same characteristics as they had in the original study. As learning relationships, these sororal friendships appear to sustain their educative power.

### *Change*

When women from the original study were asked to describe what changes since graduation they perceived in their college female friendships, they responded that the relationships are now distinguished by (a) heightened intimacy, (b) discourses on developmentally specific issues/topics, and (c) planned and intentional communication.

The most significant change in the relationship revealed by the questionnaire and interview data is the deepening of the relationship, or as was often put by the participants, "we have become closer friends than we were in college . . . the friendship has gained intimacy," "our closeness has developed to a comfortable intimacy," and as Francesca noted, "It's definitely evolved . . . we were casual and we became closer. We have similar issues related to weight, relationships, etc. These issues became more important as we got older and this has strengthened our relationship." "Becoming closer" by discussing "shared experiences in work and in our lives" is often characterized as more profound and full of richer meaning than it had while in college. Discussions of both shared and disparate experiences, life changes, and body image issues are now focused on attaining deeper understanding made possible by the sororal familiarity cultivated in college. As Jean noted, "[My friendship] has evolved to deeper conversations." Susan remarked that "in many ways our friendship has matured—but the core remained the same . . . because of our rich history and years and years of love and support we will be life-long friends even as we continue to change." Heightened intimacy for these participants broadens meaning-making that takes place in sororal talk. Their deepened intimacy is often expressed as a key learning process in their increasingly complex relationships. Women often said that they "needed" this closeness, that they considered it necessary for "all of my major decisions" (Deb).

Their friendship is now marked by advanced discriminating talk that enables women to make life decisions more judiciously. Now attending to children, employers, life partners, etc. these women seek out sororal talk in order to take action confidently and wisely. Though still talk that is fundamentally “free-flowing, playful, and risk-free performance” (Martínez Alemán, 1997, p. 144), their talk has evolved to be more developmentally consequential. Now after college, it is talk that enables productive decision-making within the much more complex and higher stakes relational environment of young adulthood. Women friends engage in talk that enables them to mediate the sometimes competing and conflicting demands of larger relational systems. And though the more immediate challenges of post-college life—children, romantic partnerships, work relations, family—take up much of their talk, women added that it is also a space in which they talk about the larger good (or values) and how life decisions are informed by ideals formed in college. In other words, their expanded relational worlds now are tested by a broader set of values and through sororal talk women compare and evaluate value systems as well as work out their positions in these systems. For some, it is talk about doing “good in the world,” or as Liz remarked, “how to be moral agents in an immoral world.” Additionally, because politics is a frequent theme in their conversations, it is not surprising that women use their female friendship as a space for further refinement of political principles and views. Different perspectives or relational positionality—one friend may be married and a young mother and the other in a PhD program—refine their young adulthood assessments. As Liz continued in her evaluation of the value of her friendship conversations, “I am in a PhD program (still in school) and she is an affluent stay-at-home mother so our lives could not be more different. But in talk about our differences, we mediate the whole ‘grass is greener’ mentality.”

More detailed, penetrating, and incisive, the women friends’ conversations are perceived to have intensified despite geographic separation. Many women are now living substantial distances from their college female friend so all noted that their conversations are now planned and to a certain extent intentional. Friends make it a point to talk on the phone and to communicate frequently on e-mail. As a generation that predates Facebook and other online social networking platforms, these women rely on and appear to prefer phone communication over online, computer mediated communication. E-mailing is also a means of communication for women in the study, especially when time zone differences make timing phone calls tricky. Many women reported that they schedule or plan meetings with their college friend, some even plan trips

together. Nicole sums up this theme when she notes that “[our friendship] is different today in that we don’t see each other in person so often but speak on the phone at least weekly and e-mail regularly and manage to see each other about once a month.”

These women perceive geographic distance as a difficulty to be worked out but many of the study’s participants couched this theme in a weightier concern. Often women who were separated geographically from college female friends spoke of concerns about isolation, inability to make new, deep female friendships, and experience the level of sororal intimacy that they perceive necessary for self-authorship and growth. Julia writes that

I have found making friends out of college very difficult. Women are slow to warm up and don’t seem as interested in being playful as they were in college. I have definitely built an expectation in my mind that female friendships should be like the ones in college (despite how unrealistic this may be).

Or as Jessica remarked,

It is very difficult to make friends outside of college which is a topic that comes up frequently with folks my age. After your college friends drift to different parts of the country all you are left with is co-workers but they don’t share a very important part of who you are. And outside of work there is no other place available in which to grow close enough to people that you would want to develop friendships with them.

Many women find themselves at great distances from their female friends and though phone conversations and e-mails ease their feelings of isolation, the absence of frequent face-to-face intimacy and their perceived inability to recreate that intimacy in a new female friend troubles them.

### *Transition*

Despite the prevalence of continued college female friendships among the participants, a good number of women reported that their closest female friend now is a graduate school peer, or family member, or co-worker. Among the participants, 29% reported that they now consider a female friendship formed in graduate or professional school as being their most intimate or closest female friend. Twenty-one percent of the women reported that their closest female friend after college is a high school friendship, a sister or mother, or a friendship established through their social and cultural activities while only 2% reported that their closest female friend since leaving college is a co-worker. The transition from college sororal friendship to post-college sororal friendship among all women (those who maintained their college female friend-

ships and those who established new female friendships) is characterized as one informed by the sororal intimacy achieved in college and by the expectations for female friendship established in college. Thus, whether or not participants maintained their college women friends, the post-graduation female friendships are typified as (a) benefiting from college female friendship experience, (b) having to meet raised expectations, (c) possessing less intimacy, and (d) being “boutique” friendships (i.e. only situational or one-dimensional friendships). Additionally, women expressed (e) a continued need for and value of the kind of female friendships formed in college in their evolution to young womanhood.

When asked to discern how female friendships formed in college affected those formed after college, participants by and large asserted that new women friends benefit from the personal growth they themselves had achieved through their college sororal friendships. Participants were very animated when responding to this inquiry, almost uniformly articulating how through college female friendships they had “learned more trust from connecting with some really strong women during college” (Jessica), or saying such things as, “I think my friends now benefit (get a better me) because of the intense friendships I had in college” (Sheryl). Women observed that an important reason for their growth was their college female friendships’ positive effects on self-authorship or how they have “grown as individuals.” Maggie writes,

The friendships I have with college friends are truly amazing. They were there through my development stages into a woman. They saw good and bad choices that I made. They supported me through an incredibly wonderful (but sometimes challenging) time in college. They know me better than anyone. My friendships now are strong—but are based on who I am now—not who I was then but who I developed into.

Perhaps as a consequence of the perceived importance that college women’s friendship holds for these participants, new female friendships are held to a higher standard and much is expected of them. As Jo says, her college women friends, “made me more discriminating” and this sentiment is strongly shared by this longitudinal cohort. College female friendships “spoiled” women; they “raised the bar” on sororal friendship. Out of college, these women are “a bit pickier now” as a result of having experienced very intimate and intense mutuality with women in college. Expectations are raised in new friendships. Samantha, like many women, offers the following observation,

I expect more from female friendships since graduating from college and I tend to judge potential new friends on the basis of my college friends.

Because my college friendships were incredibly close, friendships [now] come out wanting. I have had a difficult time giving people a chance to become friends since graduating from college.

Women compare post-college friends to their collegiate women friends and often observe that new friendships “always seem to be lacking the depth my college friendships contained” (Deb). College women friends are “archetypes” for a peer-learning relationship that is still perceived to be necessary in this next life juncture.

For some, the dissatisfaction with female friendships after college is likely that these women are without true developmental peers. Unlike their time in college, women often find themselves connected socially—especially at work—with other women who are older or at different life stages. No longer having central, shared experiences as they did with women in college, participants observed that the absence of that developmental correspondence makes it difficult to establish a sororal connection. As a consequence, the potential for intimacy is limited. Real, social conditions also serve to check these work friendships. Sydney observes,

I don't think that I have made new [women friends] since quite like those that I formed during college. Again the word I would use is intense . . . the shared experiences creates [*sic*] an intense bond. I now meet women who are pulled in a lot of different direction [*sic*] so they don't have much time outside of work and family, for example. Also difference in status (like professional staff vs. support staff) seems to matter a lot in my current work environment and makes it hard.

New women friends are often co-workers, other women graduate students, or other mothers. These situational friendships or “boutique friendships” reflect the “busy-ness of life” and are based on “working together, being neighbors, attending the same childbirth class” (Kate). Boutique friendships appear to lack the intimacy that women expect and need from their female friendships and are either actively or de facto restricted by their social location e.g., work or neighborhood. In their responses women exhibited realism concerning the demands of life after college and its effects on the potential for intensely intimate peer same-sex friendships. Becky's observation illustrates this sentiment: “I look back at my relationships then [in college] and there is no way that I could maintain similar friendships now because I simply don't have the time. The demands of work, children, and marriage are simply too great.” Despite these developmental or life-stage realities, on the whole these participants expressed a desire to attain a sororal intimacy like those established in college. Women were hopeful that conditions that produced college sororal friendship could be repeated in their lives, that

their importance—how these relationships are appreciated for their cognitive value—could be reconstituted despite their life changes. Or as Susan observed,

My female friendships in college have truly encouraged me to open up to other friendships, too. I am blessed to have such incredible female friends from college and I wouldn't want to pass up the opportunity to meet more amazing women. I also feel that the dedication I feel to my college friends has reminded me how important female friendships are—especially when women are beginning to get married and focus on their relationships and families.

For some, this new sororal space is a new or transformed intimacy with sisters and mothers, and women-only book clubs that present the opportunity to experience “spontaneous, creative conversations” like those with women in college.

### *Discussion*

The women who participated in this longitudinal examination of college female friendship articulated perceptions of the cognitive value of these relationships in ways that are consistent with feminist developmental theories and research, as well as other constructivist suppositions about life-span development. In evaluating the longitudinal data, it was apparent that across all three longitudinal constructs—constancy, change, and transition—these women understood their college female friendships as developmentally necessary and potent relationships whose effects carry over into their post-collegiate lives in countless ways.

The data from this longitudinal examination of female collegiate friendship are certainly supported by early relationship research by Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto (1989) in which the importance of close friendship is confirmed, and Mendelson and Aboud's (1999) findings that undergraduate women rate friends higher on all friendship functions. But more importantly, the data underscore key claims made by feminist developmental theorists and psychologists about the role of relationality in women's cognitive development. The women in this study enlist their women friends to provide the cognitive space for constructing the “internal foundation for meaning making” described by Baxter Magolda (2001) as fundamental to young adult development and as necessary for “learning partnerships” that promote self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2004). The relational character reflected in their meaning-making is consistent with the literature on the value and importance of empathy for women (Goodman & O'Brien, 2000), research that finds that the intimacy and self-actualization attained

through women's same-sex friendships has a positive impact on psychosocial well-being (Knickmeyer, Sexton, & Nishimura, 2002), and that in general, women's friendships are typified by greater intimacy and confession (Candy, Troll, & Levy, 1981). Taken together with the research literature on the value of sororal relationships through the life-span (e.g., Brown, 1981; Depner & Ingersoll-Dayton, 1988), these participants' perception that college women's female friendships are invaluable to their sustained self-determination and continued growth is convincing.

The developmental value of these sororal friendships corresponds to recent scholarship on women's life transitions, personality development across the life-span and the role of relationships in women's development. As women educated in Western society, the participants in this study reflect the concrete developmental characterizations found research among their generational cohort. Their developmental changes will reflect both age-related change and generational changes the consequences of social locations (Miller, 2006). In an analysis of the early life transitions among Canadian women, for example, Ravanera, Rajulton, and Burch (1998) note that though more recent generations of women exercise more options in the timing and sequence of life transitions as a consequence of women's enhanced access to education and work outside the home, they still face normative transitions—economic independence, marriage, children—nonetheless. As a consequence of their higher levels of education, recent generations of women take longer to enter these transitions than earlier generations of women. For example, recent generations of college educated women achieve “first birth” or the “terminal event of transition to adulthood,” much later than generations with lower levels of education (p. 198). But despite the fact that the transition into motherhood occurs later and that women carry into this transition broader experiential and developmental capital, women must still negotiate this role. Despite the fact that such a normative developmental role occurs later for recent generations (Arnett, 2000), negotiating an adulthood life change like the transition to motherhood, is developmentally complex and is increasingly more so for American women (Fussell & Gauthier, 2005).

The data in this study of the value of female friendship for college educated women reveal a discrete need for the relationship as a site for the deliberate negotiation of these transitions. Women in this longitudinal study explained their female friendships as indispensable relationships they utilized to navigate their tangible and particular life transitions like motherhood, graduate and professional school demands, and work conflicts. Their life transitions often demand that they resolve interpersonal

disagreements at work, with life-partners, or with graduate school advisors and their female friendships appear to serve as the developmental space for problem-solving. Consonant with Weitzman and Weitzman's (2001) and Weitzman's (2001) research on younger adult and older adult women's interpersonal problem-solving strategies, such interpersonal tensions appear developmentally salient for the women in this longitudinal study. As Weitzman and Weitzman point out, resolving interpersonal difficulties is particularly relevant to women's development. Citing research on women's cognitive development, Weitzman and Weitzman (2001) conclude that "interpersonal problems may be especially germane to women's cognitive development because of research suggesting women are often more cognitively engaged in interpersonal aspects of everyday living than men" (p. 282). Certainly among the women in this longitudinal study of women friends we see women using their friendships to author a course of action and attend to these concrete developmental transitions as adult women.

As Welch-Ross (2000) has noted, feminist developmental frameworks present a view of women's self-authorship as a function of empathetic relationships and not through modernist ideals of self-sufficiency and isolated reflection. Cognition, understood (in part) as a gendered experience, is interdependent, empathetic discernment. Cognitive development is a function of the gendered nature of these relations (i.e. that women's cognitive development requires a "cognitive flexibility" demanded in relationships). In this framework, women's intellectual growth and maturity necessitates the conditions found in female friendship: the revision and correcting of self-knowledge as they experience life-changes, and the modification of goals informed by the experiential narrative of relationships (Scholnick, 2000). In other words, women's friendships and their cognitive development are inextricably coupled in feminist developmental schemes, and corroborated by the data presented here. Consonant with Miller's (2006) view that feminist theories should consider developmental relationships to assess women's empowerment, these sororal friendships appear to be a critical social location in which these women change and progress through life transitions.

What is not clear from the data, however, is a rich view of how African American and Asian women's and Latinas' college female friendships continue to affect their post-college growth. Very little was specifically said about race or ethnicity by the women in the study, though three women of color did make note of the fact that their collegiate female friends were no longer their closest women friends. This is consistent with the earlier study's focus on race and ethnicity in which women of color understood their female friends of color as advocates for

their racial and ethnic self-worth (Martínez Alemán, 2000). For these women of color, female friendship with other women of color while in college was most often a matter of racial or ethnic convenience. While in college, these women sought out other women of the same race or ethnicity as a response to racism and ethnocentrism in a pre-dominantly white college, a deliberate act of self-preservation. As a way to “build and protect self-esteem within a racist and an ethnocentric institutional culture” (2000, p. 147), these women understood same-race/ethnicity female friendship as a respite from cultural tension and weariness. As a result, these were friendships often developed “because of racial and/or ethnic similarity” (p. 147) and did not give priority to other developmentally important topics. Thus, it was not surprising to hear from the women of color in the longitudinal study that in their post-college lives, women other than their college friends are closest relationally. Now, these women choose friends within a much broader palette of personal characteristics—not principally because of race or ethnic sameness. As Darlene, an African American participant observed,

Back then we almost had to be friends because there were hardly any Black women on campus and you really couldn't choose your Black women friends all that much. Now I live in a city and work with many Black women and my friends and I share a lot of the same experiences like where we grew up, how we were raised, what we think about things, stuff like that.

This sentiment was reinforced by Asian American participant, Carol:

In college we had to be friends because we were “Asian” and there weren't many of us, so we had to bond over that because it was so important . . . to be able to identify as Asian even though we all weren't from the same backgrounds.

The perceptions of the women in the study who self-identified as lesbian suggests that their female friendships, whether or not they included romantic involvement, were very integral to their development and continue to be so after college. These women often spoke about their collegiate women friends quite passionately, repeatedly referring to the relationship's intensity and significant impact in their lives. Consistent with Rose's (2000) finding that lesbians are more likely to have more close friends and engage in “more intimacy and shared activities” (p. 323) than heterosexual women, lesbians in the longitudinal study were very conscious of the intensity and intimacy of their female friendship and its effects on their own intellectual growth and self-authorship. Echoing Baxter-Magolda's (2001) claim that self-authorship demands “intense self-reflection and interaction with others” in order to construct identity and matching ethics and ideals (p. 120), these lesbians' college female friendships are perceived to be significant for self-actualization.

The impact of college on individual development has long been a concern of higher education researchers and higher education professionals. Models of student cognitive and intellectual growth, identify construction, self-concept, and self-esteem are foremost in higher education scholarship (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Much of this research presents paradigms informed by twentieth-century critical theories, especially feminist and constructivist critiques of modernism, that help us to better understand the impact of college on women's cognitive development. As stated earlier, this longitudinal study of college women's female friendships supports feminist developmental frameworks, but I would add, also reinforces several contentions posited by constructive stage theories of development. Though an extensive consideration of the congruence between the study's findings and constructivist developmental theories is beyond the scope of this paper, several inferences from the study relative to constructivist developmental theory do warrant deliberation here.

The need for and value of intimacy in female friendship with the same female friend or with new women friends after college supports Kegan's (1982, 1994) contention that our environments are critical in meeting our developmental needs, as well as corroborating feminist scholarship on the psychological development of girls and women across the life span (Greene, 2003). In young adulthood, especially, how it is that we manage the stress and anxiety brought on by transition and change is integral to our "orders of consciousness" (Kegan, 1994, p. 29). Tension between isolation and intimacy, for example, demands a "curriculum" necessary to mediate the interplay between these two conditions. During this time, the shifts in meaning-making require us to organize our experiences actively and in order to do so we seek environments that attend to those "objects." As young adults, these women study participants perceived a need to "reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate on" things (1994, p. 32) necessitating a setting in which they could reorganize or newly order meaning. In their female friendship, they create meaning that is more complex, fluid, inclusive, and empathetic and in which difference is acknowledged, and according to constructivists like Kegan (1982, 1994) consequently accomplish cognitive development.

Just as they met many cognitive developmental needs in college (Martínez Alemán, 1997, 2000), *women's female friendships continue to serve as a significant "curriculum" (Kegan, 1994, p. 3) for these post-college women's cognitive development.* In the longitudinal data we see a snapshot of young women's development in which the stresses of isolation and the need for intimacy are significant, in which the need to

make meaning of new and/or shifting “objects” (motherhood, profession, etc.) is paramount. In this time of developmental change and transition, these women look to their female friends to contemplate, author and make sense of incongruent ideas. Many of these participants engage in friendship relationship maintenance behaviors that reflect levels of sororal intimacy and self-disclosure (Fehr, 1996; Finchum, 2005) deemed critical for developmental progress, and which are evident in women’s increased levels of emotional closeness from early adulthood on (Carstensen, 1992). Rather than developing self through a “private, neutral process of separating self from others” (Welch-Ross, 2000, p. 115), these young women self develop through empathic sororal relationships constructivist and feminist in character. The salience of relationality in these accounts of women’s cognitive development finds support throughout the literature on women’s psychological development (e.g., Baxter Magolda, 1992; Jordan, 1997; Jordan, Caplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991).

### *Conclusions*

As I once encouraged us in the original studies to understand more fully the value of women’s female friendships for their cognitive growth, I do so again. In 2007, member checks with the participants further heightened the need to comprehend more completely the intersection of women’s female friendships and development in the college years and into adulthood. Nicole writes, “My life is a lot better because of my women friends.” Kris writes that “having female friends in college and grad school was an integral part of my success in both places.” Kate contributed the following:

This is no doubt redundant but . . . I don’t know where I’d be without them (female friends). I would not give them up for anything. My friends are as much my family as they are my friends. Life would not be nearly as rich, full, interesting or joyful without my women friends. I certainly would not have nearly as much support. I also wouldn’t be very bright. I learn a tremendous amount from my women friends. They never cease to amaze me with their intelligence, wisdom, maturity, selflessness, humor, strength, character, and kindness. And they always throw me a rope when I am in over my head.

In these communications, women confirmed my interpretation that the female friendships formed in college are cognitively valuable because they serve as a critical means for women’s self-authorship and development while in college and after college. Yet very little is known about the role women’s same-sex friendship plays in their cognitive development. The women in this longitudinal study reveal that their friend-

ships with women while in college have an enduring impact on their cognitive development. They describe these friendships as relationships in which and through which their intelligence and increasingly advanced thought is nurtured and tested. We know that the college years are developmentally rich and potent years and in women's collegiate female friendships appear to be a relational structure for women's development and consequently, their empowerment. Without negating the affective value of their friendships with women, the women in this longitudinal study distinguish their friendships as we would other means (e.g., self-reflection) or relationships (e.g., a teacher or mentor) through which their intelligence, problem-solving and intellectual sophistication is developed. As described by the participants, the interpersonal reasoning and its effects (e.g., decision making regarding motherhood or work conflicts) found in these sororal conversations are very much a location of gendered cognitive development.

The salience of female friendship in college for the women in this study, especially the intimacy that epitomized their interpersonal reasoning, does not seem to be replicated in their post-college lives. For many of these women, the friendships formed post-graduation are "boutique" relationships that they often find lacking. Based on the interview data beginning with those conducted in 1994 through those conducted most recently, I will speculate that these boutique friendships lack the earlier developmental relevance to these women (i.e. these friendships do not contain the friends' cognitive history and shared developmental context). Learning about self and re-creating self into adulthood for these women seems to demand an intimacy cultivated by the friendship saga; an intimacy that has a history and that has matured along with the relationship.

As we continue to rightly concern ourselves with how college affects students, and worry that in the post modern world they may be "over [their] heads" (Kegan, 1994), can the years after college recreate the college conditions that nurtured these developmentally potent relationships for women? Two women attending graduate school who participated in the longitudinal study commented that their new friendships with women graduate students in their programs were somewhat reminiscent of the college female friendships, though they lacked the "history" that engendered intimacy. Graduate education does not recreate all of the developmental conditions of the college years (typically), but its focus on independent thinking and academic agency is not so dissimilar from these same demands in college. Interview data from the original study certainly suggested that women's intellectual agency, intellectual risk-taking and validation were aspects of their identities as women students

in and outside the classroom (Martínez Alemán, 1997, 2000). Natalie commented that though her new female friendships in graduate school are “not as deep” as her college friendships, these women do “inspire” her and “challenge” her ideas. The intimation here, I would argue, is that the cognitive value of these friendships is emergent within the context and experience of graduate education and perhaps have the potential to be developmentally important in this particular adulthood transition. At minimum, as depicted by Natalie, female friendships among graduate students do show signs of being relevant to women’s cognitive development. In light of this heuristic hunch, research to understand the cognitive value of female friendships formed during graduate education seems reasonable to undertake.

Higher education faculty and professionals should view women’s friendships as being developmentally important relationships and as having a bearing on women’s cognition that from this study appears long-lasting. Consequently, all of the structural occasions that colleges and universities provide for the growth and enrichment of sororal friendship can be understood as ways in which the undergraduate experience provides for the cognitive development of women on campus. Whether construed as a form of “engagement” or development of the “whole student” or as a “value-added” measure, colleges and universities should find ways to engender, support and validate women’s female friendships. As researchers I encourage us to critically examine more extensively how these gendered college relationships impact development through a woman’s life span.

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## APPENDIX A

### Online Questionnaire

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#### **Introduction**

In this questionnaire you are asked to share your perceptions of your female friendships since graduating from college.

Your responses will remain strictly confidential. Each respondent's questionnaire will be assigned a pseudonym and, therefore, your name will not be associated with your responses at any point during the study. We might, however, wish to contact you in the future if responses are lost or missing, or to follow-up on earlier responses.

Additional questions can be directed to the principal investigator, [author], at [e-mail].

By clicking the Submit button below you are agreeing to participate in the questionnaire.

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#### *Thoughts on your current friendships*

1. How would you characterize your friendships with women now/after graduating from college?
2. Who is your closest friend now (e.g. a "co-worker," "friend from graduate school")? Please do not give names.
3. How, when and where was this relationship formed?
4. Was this person your closest friend in college?

#### *Changes in your friendships*

1. How is this relationship different or the same as those in college? [only for respondents who answered "yes" to #3 above]
2. How has the relationship evolved and stayed the same?

#### *Your conversations*

1. Describe your conversations with a close female friend.
2. What do you talk about?
3. What ten words characterize these conversations?
4. What words would you use to characterize the role you each play in each other's intellectual growth?

#### *Your friendships at and after college*

##### *Think back to your college female friendships . . .*

1. How would you compare those friendships with your current female friends?
2. How did your female friendships in college affect those female friendships you've formed since graduating from college?

#### *Additional comments*

1. Is there anything else about your female friendships that you would like to tell us?
-

## APPENDIX B

## Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

1. The evolution of college female friendship
  - What were the topics of conversation then and now?
  - What were the means and frequency of conversation then and now?
  - How would you describe your conversations then and now?
2. The impact of female friendship
  - What is the perceived impact of these friendships on self-awareness then and now?
  - What is the perceived impact of these friendships on intellectual development?
  - What is the perceived impact of these friendships on new female friendships (after college)?
3. The changes in female friendships and the perceived causes of those changes
  - What changes are perceived?
  - What importance is given to the relationship?
  - What predictions do you have about the friendship?
4. Other comments?
  - What are we missing?
  - How else do you perceive or understand this relationship as a learning relationship?

*Notes.* <sup>1</sup>All participant names that appear in the text are pseudonyms.

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