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Exploring connections between competition and dialectical tensions in female friendships: A qualitative study

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Exploring Connections between Competition and
Dialectical Tensions in Female Friendships:
A Qualitative Study

A Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

by Heather Ashley Aadahl

May 2012

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Communication Studies, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts.

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Introduction

For many people, relationships provide a sense of belonging, identity and support. For other individuals who have not had as positive of an experience with people in the relational context, the presence and importance of interpersonal relationships can lead to the occurrence of negative emotions. Quite often, the unconstructive relationships that people find themselves to be in are a result of misunderstandings, the misrepresentation of expectations or competitive behaviors. While competition certainly has a place in life, inside the context of friendships may not be the most appropriate. Conversely, some individuals are grateful for the presence of competition in their relationships because it causes each partner to strive to become better in various aspects of their lives.

“Life for us has become an endless succession of contests. From the moment the alarm clock rings until sleep overtakes us again, from the time we are toddlers until the day we die, we are busy struggling to outdo others. This is our posture at work and at school...It is the common denominator of American life” (Kohn, 1986, p. 1). The quick pace and busyness of the American lifestyle affects more things than rushing to work in hopes of avoiding traffic and having time to pick up coffee in the Starbucks drive-thru on the long commute to work; it also has a major impact on relationship initiation and maintenance.

From an early age, females have performed and competed in different areas of life with the intention of being superior to other women (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1988). Though the assumption in society is often that women act certain ways to acquire attention from men, quite often the target of interest is fellow females, which could potentially occur subconsciously. When individuals fight for attention, society’s true character is seen. American society thrives on competition. Self-worth is based on the biggest houses and cars, the largest amounts of money

and the most attractive spouses. Americans are absorbed by the idea of competing to become the best.

Competition is identified in different ways, but one perspective defines competition as “a constructive process that can evolve when an experience of ‘felt difference’ occurs between two separate selves in a relationship” (Lindenbaum, 1985, p. 99). Kohn (1986) takes the definition of competition a bit further and described a more emotional approach to defining competition. “If competition has a voice, it is the defiant whine of a child: ‘Anything you can do, I can do better’” (p. 101). Researchers in the communication field differ in their descriptions of competition because it is such a broad topic. The available definitions are complimentary and can also be contradictory at times.

Another description of competition from Kohn (1986) states: “Competition by its very nature damages relationship. Its nature is mutually exclusive goal attainment, which means that competitors’ interests are inherently opposed...competition decrees that both of us cannot succeed” (p. 136). This reaction occurs when people realize that there are talents and abilities, which they may lack, at which other people may excel. When people become aware of weaknesses in their skills or personality, they often respond with their instincts and discredit the abilities of people who are stronger in other specific areas. Often this situation leads to feelings of jealousy and competition in relationships.

Jealousy is a reaction by individuals when they feel there is a threat to a relationship that is regarded as important in their life (Bevan & Samter, 2004). “Jealousy is not limited to romantic partners but can, in fact, occur in any partnership that is valued by an individual” (p. 15). Jealousy in friendships, especially between females, is quite common because when there is a perceived threat to relationships, people are quick to react on impulse. Jealousy can lead to

intense feelings of competition because someone may feel neglected and then have the desire to counteract those emotions by overcompensating and creating tension in relationships. Tensions are the foundation of dialectics in which two ideals are pulling in opposite directions. “Dialectics thinking is not directed toward a search for the ‘happy mediums’ of compromise and balance, but instead focuses on the messier, less logical..” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 46). However, the identified tensions can be damaging to relationships when partners feel as if they are continually at odds. Dialectic tensions are evident and necessary in relationships so that positive or negative changes occur and result in an increase or decrease in closeness. The tensions discussed later in this study are relational and affect the interpersonal interaction of friends.

After certain periods of time, relationships tend to stabilize in their level of closeness, but the theory of dialectics asserts that change is still likely to occur (Johnson, et. al., 2003). Forces within a relationship and forces outside a relationship are sources of change that may lead to dialectical tensions in the form of turning points. The instances in a relationship when something changed between the partners is a situational turning point, which can be seen in the form of activities shared by the friends or even negative occurrences that affected the individuals (Johnson, et. al, 2003). Internal forces include jealousy and competition, while external forces involve specific experiences and additional relationships that have an impact on the dyad. The tensions between the opposing forces are necessary aspects of close relationships and simultaneously, partners can even perceive relational development as a dialectical tension (Johnson, et al., 2003). Dialectical tensions are catalysts of pivotal moments and decisions in relationships. These turning points affect communication, but can also affect the reactions of partners to specific positive or negative occurrences.

The interaction of dialectical tensions and competition between females is an interesting combination because relationships are complex and multi-layered. Individuals do not merely experience one singular emotion and one reaction to the various events that occur in life; their experiences, felt emotions and responses are as multi-layered as their relationships. “Females exchange information more frequently and more in-depth about their doubts and fears, personal and family problems, and intimate relationships” (Aries & Johnson, 1983, p. 1193). When females are sharing with each other about the characteristics that define their lives, dialectical tensions increase and quite often cause jealousy and competition to occur hand-in-hand. However, there is not an extensive amount of research that explores simultaneous relational dialectic tensions and competition. “These competitions nevertheless [have] the potential to damage either liking or equality in a friendship” (Fife, 1999, p. 140). Digging deeper into the world of females will likely reveal the reasons why competition and dialectical tensions occur, along with the explanation why some people perceive that women may experience high levels of tension in intimate relationships, perhaps because of personal experience or stereotypical thoughts.

Review of Literature

From a woman's perspective, "competing can be an internally terrifying experience. For in the act of competing, she may feel that she is threatening the relationship with the other... as though she is both annihilating the other woman, while at the same time losing herself" (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1988, p. 122-123). Because it is assumed that women value intimacy in their friendships, the last thing one desires to do is hurt a friend and in the process lose her personal identity, which is based on that friendship. For women, competition can be a measure of self-image where a large number of close relationships represents to a woman that she is well-liked. Women crave the companionship of others and, therefore, often stick close to their friends because the bond they experience gives them a sense of purpose in life. Women seek approval and acceptance from fellow females and will act in many different ways in order to ensure that it is achieved. In order to fulfill this yearning for acceptance, some situations result in competition between women. This competitive nature can begin at a very early age. The effects of childhood and societal influences on women affect the interactions between men and women as well as their ideas of competition and cooperation. These concepts are exhibited through various models and dialectical tensions.

Influence of Childhood on Relational Development

Since childhood, females have been exposed to the idea that they should be surrounded by a large number of close friends. In elementary and middle school, the idea of "best friends forever" ran rampant as girls had necklaces, bracelets and cards that were split into two halves; one half said "best" and was given to a close friend and the other half said "friends" and was kept as a prized possession. The identity and belonging experienced in such a simple exchange was enough to motivate feelings of pride and satisfaction through possessing the object that tied

the girls together. The intimacy encouraged and developed between female friends has led to the increased importance of females investing time and resources into one another. “The psychic development of girls leads girls and women to develop permeable ego boundaries and relational, nurturing capacities that encourage them to seek intimacy within friendship with other females” (Walker, 1994, p. 247). Because women develop into mothers and child-bearers, their instinctual reaction to the emotions expressed by their female friends causes them to exhibit nurturing tendencies (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987). The idea of women as relational and fostering leads to the expectation that in female-female friendships, partners will mutually look out for each other.

Sometimes the similarities between friends are helpful factors in remaining connected over time. When people have an activity or a particular interest that they can bond over, they are more likely to maintain a close friendship because something concrete provides a connection. Females feel connected through similarities that create lasting bonds in their female-female friendships. In dialectics research, it was discovered that female dyads have higher levels of similarity than males (Erwin, 1985). The bond created between friends demonstrate the closeness of their relationship and the connections that women feel through similarities with a partner. Sometimes competition between female friends occurs because of perceived differences and changes, but quite often competition may also be present because the women are similar and comparing the varying strength of their measurable abilities. The recognition that each woman is gifted in differing areas of life leads to the opportunity for negative emotions to arise.

Influence of Society on Relationships

In addition to women feeling subordinate as a result of relationships in their lives, another factor has made a large impact on female relations. Society has built a perspective where women

are not viewed as equally educated or capable as men and a specific example of this behavior lies within the sports arena. In the American culture, sports are highly valued and some of the most widely respected and identifiable people are members of the sports world. “Women can become strong in other ways, without being athletes, but athletic strength holds particular meaning in this culture. It’s tangible, visible, measurable. It has a history of symbolic importance” (Nelson, 1994, p. 27). Nelson is a scholar in the women in sports field with her theory that sports is a main area where evident differences between males and females are found. Through research of societal pressures and the media, Nelson discovered the reasons behind the importance of sports for women.

“Feminism is about freedom: women’s individual and collective liberty to make their own decisions. For women, sports embody freedom: unrestricted physical expression, travel across great distances, liberated movement” (p. 31). The opportunity to engage in individual sports such as running or swimming, along with the chances to play within a team context provides women with time where they can truly focus on themselves instead of the to-do lists full of jotted notes and shopping items. “For a group of people who have historically been defined by their ability to nurture others, the commitment to nurture themselves is radical” (p. 31). Regardless of the differences between men and women, if people do not set aside time to focus solely inwardly on themselves, they lack the abilities to externally spend their time and energies on other people in their lives.

Nelson suggests that historically, male children have been taught to avoid dolls while little girls were warned to stay away from toy pistols that were considered to be toys for young boys. “We don’t just say that football is for boys and cheerleading is for girls. We say that playing football is more valuable than cheerleading or field hockey or volleyball or Double

Dutch jump rope or anything else girls do—more important, more interesting, more newsworthy: better” (p. 63). When women have grown up already feeling inferior to the opposite gender, the additional pressure faced within friendships of their same gender is overwhelming. They internally battle how to handle situations they are faced with and whether it is socially appropriate to allow their true feelings to be shown or if they instead need to bottle them up inside. Many women would rather suffer alone than share their inferiorities with men or other females who make them feel demeaned in various ways, even though it is not the healthiest way to cope with emotions (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987).

Female Catalyst for Competition

Relationships are a deeply complex connection between two or more people. Even within this context, there are bonds of varying degrees and between differing groups of people. “Close same-sex relationships shared some characteristics with romantic partnerships in their expectations of fidelity, commitment, intimacy (though not admittedly sexual), longevity and mutual support” (Duncan, 2004, p. 148). The closeness of female bonds can often lead to friendships that exhibit similar qualities to those of romantic relationships. Women vie within their own group of friends to have closer bonds with some females than with others and this occurrence leads to competition. In Fife’s (1999) work on the competition within female friendships, he focused on “competition unique to the female pairs, which included competing for dating status, physical appearance, and societal status” (p. 140). Women often find their identity in the men who they are dating because they feel like a significant member of something special, which boosts their self-confidence.

Consequently, women want to appear as attractive as possible because not only are they able to potentially attract men to date, but they also feel superior to women around them. How

women dress is a signifier of their social status and perhaps the resources they have available to improve themselves and their image. Though the aspects of dating, appearance and status are extremely important to females because of how they are perceived by others, the idea of physical appearance may be the most prominent.

Physical appearance is a central topic for females because when in a group of women, comparisons continuously occur and instill in females a recurring desire to be perceived as the best-looking. “Female pairs also discussed competing for superior appearance more than the other pairs” (Fife, 1999, p. 142). However, between males and females, there is a clear distinction as to which topics are most discussed in the respective gender. While “women share more about themselves, their feelings, homes, and close relationships; men share more about sports and amusements; competition and aggression; and things they have seen, read, or heard” (Aries & Johnson, 1983, p. 1185). When women are talking about themselves, conversation usually centers on their appearance and abilities. Along with discussing the latest fashions and newest purchases, women speak often of male counterparts. Similarly, it has been observed and reported that men discuss women on a consistent basis.

Men as Instigators

In male locker rooms, competition is essential to male bonding (Curry, 1991). Men may define themselves through how masculine they appear and how crude and tough they talk with other men. Males have learned to avoid publically expressing their emotions because the admission could easily be seen as ‘weak’ or ‘feminine’ to the men around them (Curry, 1991). Through not being encouraged to display emotions toward other men in the locker rooms, men compensate by increasing the amount of time that women are a central topic of conversation. Men on a sports team or other group with similar interests find their sense of self through how

well they excel at a specific task or skill, so women are inserted into such a category; the women become an accomplishment that the males can attribute to their own self-confidence in order to boost their esteem when around other men. “Such basic insecurities do not promote positive social relationships in the locker room, and they help explain some of the harshness of the talk that the athletes directed toward each other and toward women” (p. 123).

For the men in the locker rooms, women are viewed as either a person or an object and the differentiation affects the way that men converse. The discussion between males “highlights the fact that the use of women’s bodies is more important than knowing them as people....women as persons are emotional and cannot be easily controlled; women as objects, however, have no volition and can be more easily controlled” (p. 129). When this is the mentality that men have about women, there is evidence why women feel the need to compete with one another: they try to establish themselves as people instead of objects.

Women not only seek to impress and compete with their female friends, but desire the attention of men. The difficulty is that because men see women as either someone to get to know or something not worth their time, women are forced to compete with one another in order to be seen as a person with genuine emotions and a quality personality. Some men act in such a way that “emotional intimacy with any one women [is] discouraged by the very nature of the competition, and any existing fear of intimacy, of a “relationship,” or being “tied down” [is] never a factor” (Fife, 2007, p. 51). This idea was introduced by two close male friends that Fife interviewed about relational competition. The men had a uniquely devised scoring system to determine who had been more successful in his conquests and dated the most girls. Because some men have a competitive mindset of sexually “scoring” with women, the result is that women feel the need to make themselves appear “score” worthy. This competitive lifestyle

influences women to compete for the attention of the same men, leading to jealousy and unrest in dyadic pairs. When attempting to achieve the attention of surrounding men, there is usually one woman in a female friendship who is more domineering than the other and, therefore, has an effect on how both women behave.

Dyadic Dominance

In friendships, one individual who is more of an opinion leader than the other holds greater influence over the friendship's present and future actions. "Relational dominance requires two individuals as information sources, assessed relative to one another as they exhibit controlling behaviors" (Montgomery, 1984, p. 319). Often when people feel as if they are being controlled by an individual, they counteract the emotions by becoming overly competitive and attempting to become superior to the other person in order to prove their personal value. There are countless times when partners showcase controlling or demanding behaviors. Particularly in female friendships, one woman may try to control the other's behaviors, fashion choices and perhaps even relationship possibilities.

Though culture influences women to independently fight for what they want in competition with one another, "females' satisfaction is only affected by the degree to which dyad members behave cooperatively" (Fisher & Gregoire, 2006, p. 213). Women compete and strive to be the best but there exists the possibility that working with one another could actually increase their chance for success. In many situations, women are stronger when working together to achieve a goal. There have been multiple research studies conducted about whether women are more competitive or cooperative in relationships and though some researchers argue that the competition levels between men and women are comparable, others claim that "males tend to be more competitive whereas females tend to be more cooperative" (Messman & Mikesell, 2000, p.

24). Women want to feel desired and sought after, but simultaneously have a maternal instinct to watch out for other people around them. Being cooperative allows women the opportunity to repair relationships and ensure that people are content even in the midst of interpersonal competition.

Conversational Topics between Women

As previously mentioned, Aries and Johnson (1983) discovered that females share more information to one another than male friends do. The specific topics of their relationships and intimate feelings are all personal situations and confessions that increase self-disclosure between friends. In conversation, “women also speak more frequently about their daily activities and their shared interests and hobbies” (p. 1194). When women disclose increased amounts of information about their lives, there are two possible results. The first is quite common: the women may feel threatened by another woman’s increased abilities and talents, which lead to jealousy and competition. The second option is that women may bond over the shared information and, therefore, have the tendency to be more cooperative in their relationships.

In conversations, “the idea of competing seemed to imply that a woman had to be competitive in order to be noticed, but the confident person could merely let her own good qualities show through” (Fife, 1999, p. 148). Though women become increasingly bonded over sharing personal information with one another, competition may arise when a woman attempts to explain and divulge her emotions to female friends. Exchanges between men and women contain an underlying feeling of competitive nature as conversational partners jostle for speaking time and a chance to feel superior by relaying information to the group. “Competitive behaviors are conceptualized as a formative construct composed of persuasive tactics that consumers might use to impose their preferences on the other member of the dyad” (Fisher & Gregoire, 2006, p. 320).

The competitive nature of society has contributed to the almost aggressive lifestyle of people wanting to be noticed. For women, this is applicable when they are competing with one another for attention and recognition of their abilities and accomplishments.

Though women are thought to be cooperative and desire increased intimacy with one another, problems often arise from experiencing competition that is caused from feeling threatened. When females are accustomed to being the individuals who bring others together and create a loving, caring environment, competitive emotions may arise when other women attempt to take over that role as well, even when others' best interests are in mind. The aspects of liking, goodwill and equality in friendships "may be threatened through the process or results of competition" (Fife, 2007, p. 44). The ideal cooperative and nurturing environment desired by many women is not achievable when intense levels of competition exist in relationships. Therefore, in female relationships, cooperation is a beneficial quality to possess in order to ensure intimacy and closeness.

Competition versus Cooperation

Cooperation may be a possible reaction to female bonding, but "competition and cooperation are both driven by self-interest. Under competition, the role of self-interest is obvious because the goal is to win" (Fisher & Gregoire, 2006, p. 317). In the American culture, people have been conditioned to look out for themselves for relational and monetary satisfaction. The presence of materialistic possessions and the increase in status perceptions based on acquiring items has created a society of people desiring to appear elite. Competition occurs in order to gain something for oneself, to achieve increased self-esteem or even to feel more superior through putting someone else down. Despite different reasoning, competition is often a self-motivated type of tension. Competition in relationships often leads to increased tension but

provides the opportunity to improve upon current situations and frustrations that may be causing interruptions in relational intimacy.

The everyday highs and lows of life contribute to the presence of competition and jealousy in relationships. “Competition in interpersonal interaction is inevitable” (Messman & Mikesell, 2000, p. 21). When two or more people are in conversation, competitive discussion may be evident. Speaking louder than someone else, having more to say and even nonverbally controlling the conversation all contribute to the desire for superiority. The presence of this relational competition is the ideal foundation for dialectical tensions. The internal push and pull to either compete or cooperate is a pressure-filled situation. Whenever two ideals are in contrast and pulling someone both ways, dialectics are present because the tension is more complex than just two emotions that are difficult to choose between. Dialectical tensions exist when a person seeks to fulfill two opposing needs simultaneously. These divisions are centered on the basis of communication differences and can be understood through various models.

Dialectical Tensions

Montgomery (1984) introduced the idea of the “dialectic ladder,” which seeks to better identify existing dialectics within relationships. The ladder has six contingency elements including individual, relationship and social typologies and intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup exchanges. The typologies reflect characteristics, associations and classifications of individuals. The latter exchanges include the processes, communication behaviors and flow of information found in dyadic pairs. “Information from any one [contingency element] impacts up and down the hierarchy. That is, the model assumes interdependence among the factors” (p. 324). Montgomery’s model discusses the idea that dialectics is similar to a ladder with these six elements creating the central area. Each piece of the tension builds upon the others and as people

climb higher in relationships, more differences and contrasting opinions occur. The previously noted tension between competition and cooperation is an example of how two concepts or actions can be similar yet have such different impacts on situations.

“Disagreements and disputes arise periodically in everyday life and assume a variety of forms and intensities across the social landscape” (Legge & Rawlins, 1992, p. 226). The tensions described in research studies occur in the everyday experiences of life. In a study of disputing pairs of friends, it was determined that “when disagreements arise between friends, however, their desires to preserve good feelings often coincide with minimal social sanctions to do so” (p. 227). The desire to maintain a stable and healthy relationship with friends is in opposition with the cultural idea that disagreements occur and are to be accepted as a fact of life. However, the dialectic tensions in relationships often occur because of differences in perceptions and views of the disputes. The idea of cooperation in friendships includes the goal to “learn as much as possible about the other’s views on them without affronting the friend or impugning personal judgments or values” (p. 244). When the pair works together to counteract existing relational tensions and competitive natures, threats to the friendship decrease. Understandably, when partners consider the other’s views and opinions on specific situations and conflicts and assume that the other has positive intentions in their discussions and comments, perspectives change and intimacy increases in the friendship.

However, interpersonal competition is inevitable (Messman & Mikesell, 2000). Females are likely to intensely compete with each other because of either an internal or culturally-constructed idea that they can work to be superior to other women or cooperate within relationships to sustain communication. Men are not the only objects of women’s affection; women more often compete and perfect themselves in order to be competitive with female

friends, acquaintances or even strangers. When a woman is striving to become the best, she often puts others down and makes them feel unworthy. For some women, the pressure they feel to compete in attractiveness is a burden that influences them to constantly push themselves to improve multiple aspects of life. Competitions are not unique to women but instead are often more important to them (Fife, 1999). The competitions exhibited between friends can be explained by the dialectical tensions identified by Rawlins (1992).

Rawlins' Dialectical Tensions

Rawlins (1992) is a pioneer in the dialectical tensions sphere of communication research. He identified multiple dialectical tensions, including the tension of judgment versus acceptance. “This dialectic articulates the interrelationship between these two interpersonal practices in shaping the communication of friends” (p. 20). The breadth and depth of interactions in a friendship dictate the intimacy and closeness between partners. Judgment and acceptance are simultaneously present in relationships and therefore have the ability to affect the development of one’s self-esteem and confidence. If one partner feels that a friend judges their every action and does not support who they have become in life, then the existing confidence in a relationship decreases. “Even the most accepting response from another person implies an appraisal of one’s self or one’s actions as worthy of support” (p. 20). For some people, this distinct appraisal can lead to competitive behavior.

The response that people exhibit toward interactions with a friend indicates the positivity or negativity experienced and expressed within the relationship. Acceptance, the contrasting characteristic to judgment, is an overall appreciation and approval of the qualities that a partner possesses. Positive or negative criticism is necessary in determining the level of acceptance found in a relationship. The different perspectives and experiences that individuals bring to a

relationship set the foundation for the standards that people have in close friendships. Each friendship has standards expected to be upheld by the partners. However, these may include unrealistic expectations that cause partners to not attain the desired levels of intimacy and success. If standards are held to such a high level of expectation that they are unattainable, the situation breeds criticism of various depths.

“Evaluation requires criteria. A friend invokes certain standards by communicating either judgmental or accepting messages to another...Comments may regard specific actions, ideas or feelings, the person’s comportment as a friend in private or public circumstances, and/or his or her overall worth as a person” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 21). The clarity of a specific partner’s criteria for judgment and acceptance is necessary so that when one partner is disappointed by the other, there is potential for reconciliation. When the ideal standards that people hold are not met, competitive feelings arise as a result of the lack of concern expressed. “Competition by its very nature damages relationships. Its nature, remember, is mutually exclusive goal attainment, which means that competitors’ interests are inherently opposed. I succeed if you fail, and vice versa...” (Kohn, 1986, p. 136). Within the dialectical tensions, individuals must choose whether their own interests are more important than those of another individual and if so, whether expressive or protective behavior is most applicable.

Rawlins (1992) also identifies the dialectic of expressiveness and protectiveness in friendships. Expressiveness demonstrates the willingness of a partner to divulge personal information in order to gain closeness with another person. Friendships gain depth through openness in communication because in order for people to feel a connection with someone, partners must find a topic or experience through which they can relate.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) identified the relational tension of separateness and connectedness, which discusses the relational connections between partners. “Self-identity, and thus conceptions of our “inner,” “private,” “unique,” or “separate” being, come about only through our social relationships” and must be understood in the context of each other (p. 88). Friendships certainly must maintain a specific amount of autonomy, but in order to deepen relationships, disclosure and expressiveness are necessary, regardless of if they lead to competition or cooperation.

The end of the expressiveness spectrum contradicts with the protectiveness side of attempting to guard oneself and not provide as much personal information about one’s life. People who lean closer to the protectiveness side of a friendship are less likely to be vulnerable and share personal experiences because they would prefer to have distance between themselves and other people; perhaps as a source of protection from intimate relationships. Rawlins asserts that “trust develops within friendships to the extent that the dialectic of expressiveness and protectiveness is appropriately managed” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 22). The key to relational success in this dialectic is balance—between one’s self-protection tactics and one’s desire for increased relational self-disclosure. This is a tension that continually requires attention because as friendships develop, the longing for more in-depth communication heightens and partners must adjust their behaviors and words in order to reflect any changes of expressiveness or protectiveness in a relationship.

The dialectic of instrumentality versus affection in relationships is based on the idea that while affection is associated with ‘true’ friendships, instrumentality is associated with ‘false’ ones (p. 18). The concept of instrumentality occurs when an individual uses a friend as a commodity for benefitting oneself. As a result, the bond between the two individuals is

stereotyped as not being a true friendship because of the non-mutual source for gaining benefits. However, affectionate actions can either be motivated by the desire for equity in relationships or can be seen through spontaneous behavior. The way in which actions are interpreted has an effect on a relationship. People do not desire to experience non-mutual generosity or caring, but often face such circumstances. Specifically for women, so much of their relational connections “revolves around supporting one another through difficult times. But, when a woman seems to be doing well, support may be less forthcoming and she may feel as though she is cast out of the company of women” (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987, p. 84). The lack of support can be identified as selfish feelings within the dyad.

The idea of selfishness arises in this dialectic because when someone is treated as a commodity in a relationship, their value is not acknowledged. “People may derive self-oriented pleasure from their affection for a friend or the opportunity to help him or her. In a sense, selfishness draws individuals toward friends and generosity attracts friends to persons” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 18). When partners feel valued, they are more likely to appreciate a specific friendship and strive to demonstrate their emotions through affectionate actions. If a relationship remains imbalanced for a significant period of time, it may result in the end of a friendship. The overarching idea of this dialectic falls back on the concept of one’s motivation for beginning or maintaining a friendship. If bonding with someone else because of appropriate and mutually beneficial reasons, more often than not, both partners are appeased and content with the circumstances. However, in the sense of affection versus instrumentality, a partner’s actions must be interpreted through one’s personal perspectives and values in order to determine the extent to which the relationship is beneficial or detrimental. The lack of determination leaves a blurred line between the foundation and perspectives of relational pairs.

Comparatively, some friendships are benefitted by the management of boundaries in friendships. “The continuous tensions of managing boundaries between private and public concerns and expressing affection and instrumentality may stimulate some friendships” (p. 23). Yet, this idea may not apply to both genders. As both males and females mature over their lifetime, friendships are vital to their personal growth and development. Because differences exist between the perceptions that men and women hold, each gender has expectations that develop into stereotypes, which further affect perspectives of dyads and relational contexts (Rawlins, 1992). The paradigm that men have with regard to the attitudes and emotions of women seem accurate from their perspective. However, when attempting to consider situations from the view of the other gender, there are differences which need to be acknowledged.

Women dwell in a disciplined environment with a “zone of being” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 106) where they are content to engross themselves in the responsibilities and events of the present time period. As such, women find their identity through the people around them and the influence that friends exert over them. “Women’s friendships appear charged by ongoing tensions between the interwoven demands of caring and utility” (p. 108). As a result, friendships between women are competitive in nature. “The unconscious equation that fulfilling oneself, succeeding in one’s career, or achieving a personally satisfying love relationship, is a betrayal of another woman is extremely common. We can imagine, or project onto one another, disapproval and in this way we hold each other back” (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987, p. 96). The imbalance between female partners can accelerate both feelings of envy and competition. Women strive to develop a unique identity for themselves, including victories and downfalls. As a result of friends who are not supportive in successfully notable times, women may harbor feelings of bitterness, motivating them to try harder and thus become more competitive in their current positions.

In contrast, men are more likely to focus on the future and potential occurrences. “While males do not criticize their friends much, neither do they communicate robust acceptance” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 109). This dialectic is observed through the ways that men interact with one another. Males are likely to communicate a close relationship through the amount of time spent together instead of the verbal affirmation and affection seen in female friendships. However, men are certainly still affected by dialectical tensions, whether in their own lives or in the relationships of the women who are present in their lives. Because of gender tendencies, “a man who decides against confronting such strain will eventually terminate the friendship without ever bringing up the troublesome issue” (Wright, 1982, p. 14). Instead of escalating unfortunate circumstances, men are likely to appease everyone involved and avoid conflict; much unlike females who tend to remain in friendships even when they are not the most satisfactory.

When affection and closeness are experienced in relationships, partners are more likely to adapt their behaviors to pacify the other member of the dyad and exhibit their felt emotions. Though friendships carry a competitive connotation, research does not suggest that there is a difference in the amount of competitive nature found in same-sex friendships between males and females, but instead asserts that the aggressive actions are exhibited in various ways. The tensions addressed by Rawlins (1992) are effective methods for explaining the competitive nature of female relationships. In addition, multiple communication models are helpful in explaining the distinct differences between the male and female friendships.

Applicable Models

The concept of dialectical tensions is not isolated from communication models and theories. Instead, the research on sex roles and relational tensions is supported by models such as Levinger’s Intersection Model and theories such as the social penetration theory and the role

conflict theory. The existence of these theories is important in the research related to competition and friendships. Though the models do not entirely overlap with dialectical tensions, there are specific pieces of information which are valuable.

Levinger's Intersection Model

Levinger's (1977) model of intersection is a cyclical model identifying and describing the level of connectedness between individuals, which is similar to the foundational reasoning of one of Rawlins' tensions (Stern, 1997). The intersection model addresses the interdependence between relational partners, specifically including discussion of the mutual and unilateral interpersonal investment. Various relationships are discussed and the intersection that results between individuals is important to note (Levinger, 1980). Levinger based his judgments on three qualities—moments of intense affection, broad areas of behavioral interdependence and long-term enduringness (p. 512) and then theorized that relationships develop over time by moving through increasingly higher levels of relatedness. Relatedness is defined as “the amount of contact that exists between any two individuals” (Barth & Kinder, 1988, p. 350) while closeness is defined as a mutual dependence between two people. Individuals become better acquainted and more related over time as they develop similar habits and ideals, which occurs as a result of spending increased amounts of time together.

These relational concepts are addressed in the relatedness continuum proposed by Levinger, which contains levels of closeness to classify friendships. Level one is the most simplistic because communication is one-sided and often based on observation or impressions. Pairs who reciprocate interaction in casual ways that are usually defined by culturally-created roles exist in level two of the scale. The relationships classified to be in level three are marked by intimate behaviors and mutual communication that is much deeper than that of any other level

(Levinger, 1980, p. 513). The proposed levels introduce the basis for descriptions of relationships, such that communication and interest increase, the involvement between individuals likewise increases. “Friendship is defined as a relationship characterized by voluntary interdependence....and involves the partners’ mutual willingness to commit free or otherwise uncommitted time to one another, as well as their positive reactions to one another as unique and important individuals” (Wright, 1982, p. 5). The levels proposed in Levinger’s model are not as applicable without the context of a friendship.

Levinger’s ABCDE Model

Pair involvement rises and falls over time and the interdependence of partners is difficult to sustain. Because the ebb and flow of relationships is significant in the personal and interpersonal development process, Levinger identifies interdependence as a multidimensional concept and therefore, additionally created the five-step ABCDE Model that describes the stages present in the dyadic nature of relationships (Levinger, 1980). The stages are as follows: attraction, building up, a period of continuation, decline or deterioration of the relationship and the ending or breakup (p. 521). Attraction must occur in a relationship in order to progress toward the building of the relationship, followed by a time of continuation—or the deepening the relationship. Between the period of continuation and the final decline are semi-stages of high interdependence all the way down through mutual tolerance, which are then followed by the relationship breakup. The amount of change seen between these levels is especially visible in female relationships and may perpetuate changes in some instances more quickly than others. The relational change identified in this model is affected by the internal and external circumstances of a particular time period. For each relational stage, the proposed model can be used to describe behaviors. The existence of interwoven spaces between stages provides

opportunities for either woman to move faster through the stages or to compare their personal life stages to those of a female counterpart.

Each stage of the ABCDE Model pinpoints the expected behaviors and outcomes of the relational pair. When individuals are first introduced, their relationship grows as they increase the amount of time and resources spent on one another. The intimacy in a relationship develops through the disclosure of personal information and leads to the further continuation of sharing to create an increased presence of intimacy within the dyad. The relationship has the potential to decline, either suddenly or over a longer period of time. As a result of decreasing intimacy for any number of reasons, the relationship reaches its ending and the model finishes before beginning again with a different pair of individuals or the same pair at a different time.

The relevance of this model to competition existing between female-female friendships is found in the transitional developments between Levinger's proposed alphabetical stages. Between A and B is the assumed decision of initiating a relationship, while between B and C alludes to an increasing commitment to a deeper relationship. In the gap between stages C and D lies the tension of choosing whether to allow a relationship to head downhill or employing more energy and resources to maintain it as such. Finally, the transition between D and E is the concluding choice to terminate a relationship (p. 523).

In female friendships, women use various strategies to transition from one stage of the model to the next. When females are introduced to one another and are becoming friends, they work to find common ground with their partner. As such, they discuss their lives and disclose to one another any facts that may increase their chance of developing intimacy in the relationship. Females feed off of their interactions with other females because acceptance from the women in their lives is vital to creating and maintaining their self-concept. When women feel confirmed as

individuals, they progress forward in their friendships and have a stable basis from which a deeper relationship launches.

A hypothetical example to help illustrate Levinger's model involves two female friends, Allie and Chelsea, who met in a dining hall during the dinner hour the first week of their freshman year of college. According to Levinger's ABCDE Model, the young ladies begin to acquaint themselves by asking various questions about their dormitory life and class schedules, along with inquiries about their hometowns and favorite clothing stores. After the girls talk for a bit of time, they acknowledge an innate desire to become closer friends. Their decision to progress forward is the transition period before they build up the intimacy in their friendship through spending time together on the weekends and eating meals together during the week. Deep lunchtime conversations about past dating relationships create a stronger bond between the girls and as Christmas break approaches, Allie decides to travel home with Chelsea for a week in order to meet her family and friends.

Their friendship continues to grow over the next four years when they move into an apartment together and spend the majority of their time together at school and back at home with their families. Needless to say, the girls' friendship has become increasingly intimate and the relatedness between them has reached an all-time high. When graduation approaches six months later, the girls are distraught because they will soon be parting ways as Allie stays on the east coast for graduate school and Chelsea heads to California for a job offer. Three years pass and the friendship has progressed through Levinger's deterioration stage and soon after, reaches the last stage of dissolution when the girls marry men on their respective coastlines and no longer remain in contact.

While the application of Levinger's model appears to be straight-forward and concise, the model allows for additional information. As the girls were developing their friendship, the unpleasant emotions of jealousy and a competitive spirit arose between them. When Chelsea tried out and made the club swimming team at school, Allie was upset at the division in their friendship and time spend together. She rebounded from her emotions by joining a sorority on campus and decreasing the amount of time she was available to spend with her friend. A trio of attractive male students moved into the apartment across the hall from the girls and when Allie caught the attention of the guy that Chelsea had been romantically interested in for months, their friendship took a downward turn, right around the time that graduation was approaching. The all-too-familiar collegiate stage of life is accompanied by a competitive nature of comparison. The presence of a competitive spirit is contagious in friendships. If one member of the dyad has a pessimistic outlook on life or is unable to correct the negative emotions they feel, the other individual is unable to realign the balance of the friendship and the interactions take a nosedive, as outlined in Levinger's Intersection and ABCDE models.

Social Penetration Theory

A complimentary theory to Levinger's is social penetration theory created by Altman and Taylor (1973). Social penetration theory focuses on relationship development through stages of interaction that accompany and follow relationship formation. "Social penetration processes proceed in a gradual and orderly fashion from superficial to intimate levels of exchanges as a function of both immediate and forecast outcomes" (Taylor & Altman, 1987, p. 259). The proposed model operates through four main stages of self-disclosure interaction that occur in public or private areas. The first stage mentioned is *orientation*—a time of initial interactions and small talk to begin the development of a relationship. Next in line is the *exploratory affective*

exchange of more friendly and relaxed friendships where communication is visible in more public areas as the relationship develops. The *affective exchange* stage is identifiable through close friendships and romantic relationships—circumstances where individuals now know significant amounts of deep information about one another. A *stable exchange* stage rounds out the model's four stages. This level involves consistent communication and deepening relationships through both the public and private spheres. At this point in time, partners know each other well (p. 259). "Concomitant with this penetration is the idea that the range of topics grows ever wider with increasing involvement and the depth of topic consideration by the pair becomes more exhaustive" (Hensley, 1992, p. 12-13).

The majority of relational developments in this model occur as a result of disclosure, crises and growth. Altman and Taylor (1987) identified that in times of relational growth, circumstances are not consistently positive and conflict does take place. Conflicts draw the attention of dyad members to the rewards and the costs involved in this model because when competition or jealousies show up in relationships, the conflicting behaviors affect the outcomes of the relationship. Mutually intimate interactions are the most important when developing intimacy between male and female friends. In order for the disclosure of information and the resources to be effective in deepening relationships, time is necessary.

"Relationships do not involve instantaneously. In order to develop, they must be given time" (Barth & Kinder, 1988, p. 352). When female friends spend time together, they are quick to penetrate through layers of buried emotions and past experiences. Women bond over similarities in life circumstances and as such, develop greater intimacy. However, the opposite of this phenomenon can also be true. If female friends do not invest the time to develop deep friendships, competition rears its ugly head. Disclosure of personal information can either bring

individuals closer or drive them farther apart and when females do not have a similar situation to connect over, their differences have the potential to force their friendship in opposite directions. Competition has a widespread breeding ground when females tend to allow competition to send their relationship in a downward spiral to dissolution instead of through increasing stages of intimacy. “Competition and cooperation are both driven by self-interest. Under competition, the role of self-interest is obvious because the goal is to win (Fisher & Gregoire, 2006, p 317).

Characteristics of Female Friendships

The intriguing dynamics in a female dyadic friendship are usually the result of the foundational characteristics and beliefs held by the partners. Research about female dyads reported that “females tended to seek friends to whom they could relate in many different areas, while males tended to develop different relationships to meet different needs” (Barth & Kinder, 1988, p. 349). The assumption in interpersonal realms is that females tend to remain friends with one another longer than males do because the females connect and feel relationally devoted to another person. However, men are likely to make friends based on circumstances and, therefore, have the ability to pick up and leave friendships for longer periods of time without attempting to maintain or increase interactions. The involvement level in female friendships is assumed to be deeper than that of male interactions. “Women’s friendships are more person-oriented while men’s friendships are more activity-oriented” (Wright, 1982, p. 15). As a result, women become friends with other women and seem to feel the need to continue the relationship as long as possible, but men tend to have conditional friends who are around for specific sports, work or religious reasons.

Researchers discovered that “females generally tend to maintain same-sex friendships for a longer period of time than did the male...the sex differences in same-sex friendships in this and

previous studies may be due to the longer duration of female friendships” (Barth & Kinder, 1988, p. 361). Additionally, the competitive nature of female friends affects the duration and the involvement of female dyads. Competition with each other has the ability to convince females of their worth and bring confidence into a friendship; a problem arises when the confidence turns into overzealous behaviors.

Competition has the ability to deeper confidence and intimacy in relationships. The best relation between competition and cooperation would be if competition was a form of cooperation where people were simultaneously inspired by one another to become better than their current state (Nelson, 1998). The concept of a mutually benefitting relationship is a humble concept and may not exist in all relationships. Researchers view the idea of competition from different perspectives because competitive activities and words can push females to invest even more of themselves to grow more intimate with another person, but for the women who are turned off by competitive behaviors, they perceive women in competitive situations to be unnecessary. “From the perspective of a critic of competition, though, it is necessary to demonstrate that we do not *have* to be competitive before showing why we *ought* not to be” (Kohn, 1986, p. 11). The differing perspectives on the presence of competition are often the grounds for competition in and of itself.

Envy

“Among the most painful feelings women experience today are those of envy towards other women. They occur once and cause discomfort. They occur a second time and the woman tries to avoid or suppress them. They occur a third time and the woman feels persecuted by these unbearable feelings” (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987, p. 79). The most ignored and unacknowledged fact about women and competition is that envy is a main contributor to a

majority of internal and external struggles. Envy is an ugly feeling that is often present in relationships when one partner possesses resources or relationships desired by the other. Internally, women struggle to control these negative feelings and as a result, may externally struggle with relationship development when experiencing difficult feelings. Envy is one of the basic emotions of hostility and because of the widespread occurrence and impact on relationships, envy is a dangerous emotion to handle (Horney, 1937, p. 111).

Though there is no specific trigger for this emotion in situations between female friends, but envy is one of the most difficult responses to address because women have no outlet for these emotions. If females admitted to their friends that they felt envious toward them, some women may respond to this confession with pride and a boastful spirit while others would sympathetically understand and reassure their friend that her assets are no better or no worse than her partner's. "Having a negative response to a woman friend is so threatening that we feel safer in the pain of our own self-hatred...they eat us up inside, making us feel we are lacking" (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987, p. 79-80). The unpleasant emotions of envying a close friend or other female acquaintance are unfortunate but realistic. Women compare themselves to one another and when they see someone who dresses better or acts sweeter than they do, their self-confidence plummets and the doubts surface because of no specific trigger. When these differences are observed, females often have a difficult time accepting their lacking abilities.

"Even when we are not directly challenged to defend our behavior, the prospect that our actions or attitudes may be inevitable is attractive" (Kohn, 1986, p. 15). Because the emotions that women experience are intense and can often be destructive to friendships, it is a comfort to know that there are explanations for the negative emotions. The concept of self-esteem is extremely important because if a woman has a moderately high self-esteem level, her

foundational values are not shaken as much by the pain that comes with criticism, losses and changes in plans. “Our behaviors sometimes turn our true motivations inside out” (p. 98) and when females feel as if the friendships and intimate level of trust they have worked incredibly hard to develop are no longer as important, they have hurt another woman’s feelings and in turn, caused their own self-esteem to decrease, as well as that of the female they sidelined with their words.

“Not only do we get carried away with competitive activities, but we turn almost everything *into* a contest. Our collective creativity seems to be tied up in devising new ways to produce winners and losers” (p. 2). The innate desire to turn everything into a competition dates back decades to the first sporting events and competitions of various types before carrying over into relationships. Females misplace their envy and frustrations into competitive emotions, which is the worst possible arrangement for relationships (Kohn, 1986). In addition, “the competitive spirit not only influences existing relations between men and women, but even affects the choice of a partner” (Horney, 1937, p. 204). For some individuals, even choosing a friend or relational partner can become a competition about who has the best partner and the most relational success. When relationships are developing, trust and intimacy increase and, therefore, competition has the ability to tear down the encouraging and mutually beneficial partnership that has been created. Competition is more destructive to relationships than it is beneficial—perhaps even more so for women than for men.

Hypercompetitiveness

Competition in and of itself can be advantageous in certain situations. For athletes and politicians, success depends on a competitive spirit. Unfortunately, the same winning mentality necessary for campaigns and sporting events causes problems when transferred over to

relationships. For many people, life is viewed as a contest—a way of getting to the top, receiving the greatest promotions and being viewed as the best. People often have a one-track mind and are glued into a specific paradigm that blinds them to the needs and emotions of those around them. When this happens, feelings are hurt and relationships take a plunge, but this situation is even more difficult when it involves people who are hypercompetitive.

Hypercompetitiveness is synonymous with Horney's (1937) description of neurotic competitiveness and will be used interchangeably. Individuals who fall into this category most often have tendencies that go above and beyond the usual recognizable characteristics of competition. Instead of engaging in friendly activities, hypercompetitive individuals feel the need to 'one-up' the people around them and instead of being a team player, must *be* the team. "Although striving to surpass others is essential in all competitive situations, the neurotic measures himself against persons who are in no way potential competitors and who have no goal in common with him" (p. 189). The hypercompetitive individual is concerned with consistently being ahead of the crowd in all situations. He or she is likely to do anything that it takes to avoid losing because the worth they see in themselves is affected by the way that others view them. "Apparently, to bolster their self-esteem they must engage in a ceaseless round of social activities...Such activities seem designed to elicit the recognition and admiration that they believe they deserve from others" (Ryckman, 1994, p. 91-92). Additionally, Ryckman suggests that affirmation from these specific people grows old quickly and, therefore, is the explanation for continual changes in the social activities of hypercompetitive people.

"The hypercompetitive person may stand out in a crowd because of the urgency of his need to be the best, but the psychological forces at work are no different from those operative in people whose level of competitiveness is judged acceptable. He is just more extreme" (Kohn,

1986, p. 104). Hypercompetitive people are difficult to be in a relationship with because they are mostly concerned with protecting themselves and avoiding any conflicts that have the potential to affect their positions in life. In female friendships especially, if one friend is more hypercompetitive than the other, there is a large imbalance. In order for both parties to have a consistently satisfying relationship, sacrifice and selflessness need to be a primary focus. “However, it appears that praise from the same people may quickly grow stale, perhaps accounting for the continual need they have for variety in their social experiences” (Ryckman, 1994, p. 92). When in a relationship with a hypercompetitive individual, the other partner potentially suffers as a result because he or she is not consistently satisfying his/her friend, regardless of their actions and the affirmation provided. The ambition of the neurotic competitor is not singularly based on success above what others have accomplished, but instead must also be unique and exceptional by their personal standards (Horney, 1937, p. 189).

As a result, “it seems reasonable to expect [hypercompetitive] individuals to have a self-focused view of conflict, caring less about resolving issues or aiding the other and being more concerned with “winning” in a conflict situation” (Fife & Nelson, 2007, p. 8). For females who are adept at comparing themselves to the achievements of other women in their sphere of influence, it is also reasonable to expect that having a hypercompetitive friend is a challenging situation. A central struggle in relationships with neurotic competitors is the implicit hostility expressed when they desire to exhibit superiority over other people. Not only does the hypercompetitive partner long to see himself or herself succeed, “more precisely, the neurotic-ambitious person acts *as if* it were more important for him to defeat others than to succeed” (Horney, 1937, p. 193). The only way that this dyad member feels completely successful is when he or she can notice others around them being torn down while they succeed even more.

These relational issues exist in the friendships of women on college campuses. Oppositional personality traits and opinions on competition affect friendships. The presence of competition communicates personal insecurity with a facet of ourselves (Kohn, 1986). The weaknesses that are felt internally result in the overcompensating behaviors that are seen externally. Because females feel that they do not measure up to their counterparts in appearance, accomplishments, relationships and financial status, competitive attitudes are the outcome. “Hypercompetitive individuals are self-focused. It is reasonable to believe that individuals who tend to see life in highly competitive terms, and want to win conflicts, would view their conflicts as competitive situations—and thus want to ‘win’ them as a form of self-achievement” (Fife & Nelson, 2007, p. 11-12). The self-esteem of hypercompetitive people is directly correlated with the competitions they can win. The difference between these individuals and acceptably competitive people is that those who can handle intense situations sparingly are more likely to enjoy competing and are more concerned about the journey than the destination.

A primary factor in understanding why people act certain ways is the concept of self-esteem. Having high self-esteem is usually identified as a positive trait; people who are confident are more likely to have healthy relationships because there is not an overwhelming amount of dependency present. The ways that individuals act can sometimes reveal their actual feelings without intending to, which creates a situation where we are no longer able to hide our inner desires. This is detrimental in some cases because a partner then realizes that the characteristics they appreciated about the other member of their dyad do not actually exist but are instead invented ways to cover up their weaknesses. People who have high self-esteem are able to voice their emotions and values more proficiently because they are confident in their ability to communicate. “...It can be argued that the truly important communications that take place

between humans...occur when the communicator is experiencing emotion” (Berscheid, 1987, p. 79). As previously discussed, competition and other negative emotions have the tendency to increase the emotional state of dyad members and as a result, the people who have higher self-esteem are better able to communicate how they feel.

Competition Specific to Female Friendships

Competition for some people is an innate desire to rival someone else. In the context of female friendships, “She who never plays the game never wins. We need to compete. But competition does not have to be cruel or destructive or hateful. Games don’t have to be battles...Winning doesn’t have to be the only thing. We need to figure out *how* to compete without losing our dignity and integrity and sense of humor” (Nelson, 1998, p. 4). Nelson addresses the issue of inappropriate ways that women identify and handle their envious and competitive emotions. When emotions become involved in many situations, women may have the tendency to neglect competing with dignity. As a result, the ability to maintain friendships after experiencing competitive behavior is a learned skill. One restriction for women is comparisons— instances when they mentally analyze themselves against other females in their lives.

Competitive Desires

The comparative desires between female friends often lead to negative feelings. “Many women feel keenly aware of the emergence of feelings of competition, of envy, of anger, of abandonment in relation to their women friends. Feelings which serve to distance women, not bring them together. Feelings which seem too ugly, too unacceptable to talk about” (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987, p. 10). The struggle to compare oneself to another woman is not a topic that is widely discussed; it is not overly evident because women feel as if their negative emotions

targeted toward other females are inappropriate and as a result, choose to harbor these emotions inside themselves. “But the more it is repressed the more it may be projected on others, resulting in a sometimes almost paranoid fear that others begrudge [her] everything” (Horney, 1937, p. 226). The anxiety an individual feels over the envy occurring within their hearts can be so intense that it may cause partners to not attempt success in any area as a result (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987). These debilitating emotions have a destructive impact because of their ability to tear apart these friendships. These negative feelings are intensely experienced and can be damaging. Their existence can destroy the trust and openness that took time to develop.

Contrary to popular opinion, the negative feelings described by women would be shocking to many people. Because “a woman is more likely to be concerned about the overall affective quality of her friendships” (Wright, 1982, p. 19), frustrations arise when women feel as if their friendships are not overly affectionate and caring. The envy created by viewing a woman with closer relationships, a bigger house or more stable financial status, and desiring that as one’s own, is introduced by competitive situations but then has limited outlets for release. Women compete about both being the best and the worst at things; they can still feel like they have achieved in a specific area if they can genuinely say that they possess the worst in a situation. However, negative comparisons are not beneficial for relationships.

Most women do not want to negatively respond to their friends and instead desire to form closer bonds and increase disclosure for relational intimacy. However, when envy and anger are internally contained, it is difficult for women to share personal information about themselves for fear of not being perceived as good enough, pretty enough or smart enough. “When these upsetting emotions rebound upon us forcefully and insistently, we may wish to deflect them. We may be so unused to experiencing them directly that we become nervous and anxious. We are

more inclined to cover them up or turn them into something else. They eat us up inside, making us feel we are lacking. They cause us tremendous emotional discomfort and pain” (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987, p. 79-80). The negative effect that competition has on female friendships can sometimes be too tremendous of a roadblock to overcome and as a result, natural relational changes occur.

Relational Changes

In the midst of friendships where one woman feels inferior to the superior personality and qualities of another, the woman with the assumed greater self-image struggles in a different way from the woman who feels unworthy. Often, women who become successful in a specific area of life notice a lack of support from females around them, which is a hazard of accomplishment. While the woman who notices her victory celebrates it as such, women around her may not be as supportive as she would appreciate, which may in turn decrease the excitement she experienced because of her accomplishment. The people who berated her success could fall into the category of women who suffer from low self-esteem. These women may have to separate themselves from successful women in order to not berate themselves for believing that they are on a perceived lower level than the other woman in their life.

Unfortunately, the negative emotions experienced from previous situations may affect the ways women relate in the future. “Women themselves embody these restrictions and constraints. And, as women try to free themselves from the internal and external restraints, they find themselves acutely aware of the successes and achievements of other women” (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987, p. 10). Females are sometimes tied down because of past experiences, emotions or relationships that have a tendency to carry over into their next attempts. When experiencing negative feelings on top of poor past experiences, women must bear an intense load of

burdensome interpersonal experiences. As a result, they may desire to overcome their past memories and situations and in the wake of such efforts, the selfish desires of wanting to overcompensate and become the best is their new objective. These tendencies have the ability to potentially drive large wedges between female friends and create a standstill for any current developments.

“For many women, competition seems to represent an elaborate web of relationships and contingencies and potential wounds. Acquainted with exclusion and defeat, women want to win but are unwilling to risk more loss. They want to win, but worry that their opponents might be devastated” (Nelson, 1998, p. 116). The fragility of female emotions plays a part in this scenario because innately, women are concerned about hurting the feelings of their friends. As relational beings, the connections that exist between females are exclusively important for survival and for a heightened sense of individual accomplishments and identity among other women.

Beneficial Competition

However, competition can be a positive attribute to friendships where females use rivalry tactics as a way to spur one another on toward greatness. Nelson (1998) introduced four characteristics of competition as positive. First, competition exists in a relationship. In order to compete against someone—a friend or a rival—there must be an existing relationship that takes precedence. The foundational definition of competition comes from a word of Latin origin—*competere*—which means “to seek together” (Nelson, 1998). In the journey for greatness and improvement in life, women have the encouraging and affirming abilities to work together to help one another succeed.

Secondly, “competition is a process. It takes time. Winning and losing are part of the process, and they matter, but how we compete matters the most. It matters because it affects

other people, and it matters because it affects how we feel about ourselves: our self-esteem, our integrity, our dignity” (p. 9). Attitude is a major piece in the puzzle of life. No matter what happens, an individual’s entire day can turn around with a slight change in attitude. Similarly, the way that a situation is approached has a tremendous effect on the results of the tasks at hand. If someone is a sore winner or a sore loser, his or her attitude in the competition process is more detrimental than beneficial in the scheme of things. Self-esteem, integrity and dignity are entirely wrapped up in the package of competition and the resulting perspectives and actions are important. When the self-esteem and self-concepts of partners are not acknowledged and individuals feel as if they are not an integral part of some else’s life, their negativity impacts relationships.

Third, competition is an opportunity. This provides a chance for people to push themselves beyond what they think they are capable of achieving, whether in relationships or careers. “Opponents can be annoying. They can feel like obstacles or obstructions. Or they can be welcomed as opportunities” (p. 9). The female who welcomes competition as a chance to improve herself has an advantage over one who looks at a challenging situation and sees immediate failure. The same way females approach opportunities for development and learning is perhaps the same perspective that carries over to their interactions with other female friends. Welcoming a challenging friendship or a specific female acquaintance provides females with the ability to improve themselves instead of letting competition drag them down a self-destructive path. When people seek competition as a sense of accomplishment, the foundational desire they are exhibiting is that of yearning for approval from others. The appeal of competition is essentially that an individual feels substantial and has an opportunity to prove to others that he or she is worth entering into relationship with.

Finally, competition is essentially a risk. “To compete, you must acknowledge your desires, declare your intentions, and trust that you can handle the outcome, as well as the process, with some degree of grace. It’s scary. It takes courage” (p. 9). Female friendships are not often coupled with the idea of courage but Nelson’s introduction to this idea is a mentality change. Because females are continually placed in situations where they must choose to believe in themselves and appreciate who they are and have become in life or fall prey to envious desires for what their friends possess or have achieved, it truly does require courage to place themselves on the correct pathway. “A woman is more likely to be concerned about the overall affective quality of her friendships” (Wright, 1982, p. 19) and having the audacity to strive for valuable relationships is an essential aspect of effective relational development.

“Nevertheless, women do not like to lose...to feel like losers, to finish second, to be second-class citizens, the second sex....women are tired of being subordinate but don’t want to subordinate anyone else. To be female is to know what it’s like to be one down, but to be female is to be compassionate for others. So we won’t compete. Won’t play that game.” (Nelson, 1998, p. 116).

The dichotomy between these two circumstances is a difficult balance. Women are sometimes caught in a vicious cycle of choosing whether to be compassionate towards their fellow females or to knowingly subordinate them to feeling undermined and unimportant.

The existing literature about competition, dialectical tensions and female friendships is interconnected in such a way that each interpersonal category must be fully understood. The emotions and responses exhibited by women within the context of same-sex friendships is intriguing because the various actions present in the cycle of conflicting emotions and actions creates an ideal circumstance for competition and dialectical tensions, which leads to the first

research question in this study. In order to further analyze the connection between the topics of competition and dialectical tensions, it must be understood that within the context of a relationship, tensions and competition occur.

RQ1: How are dialectical tensions enacted in the competitive aspects of female friendships?

Additionally, conflicting desires and opportunities are apparent in various friendships and romantic relationships. When partners express their personal opinions and feelings, competitive emotions may arise, which raises awareness concerning the idea of which tensions are observed in female friendships, the second research question addressed in this study. The answer to this question is important to determine because if dialectical tensions are the basis for competition, the specific aspects must be defined. The presence of competition in relationships yields positive and negative aspects, which are necessary to determine.

RQ2: What are the positive and negative aspects of competition in female friendships?

Method

In order to successfully bring three sets of literature topics together in one research study, a qualitative study was the best choice because of the attention given to exploring issues. A qualitative study was conducted in order to experience the competition and dialectical behaviors experienced in female relationships on a college campus through personal interviews and interactions. A scale would not have sufficed for the information gathered because of the broad spectrum of responses and the importance of each response and experience shared by the interviewees. The combination of a face-to-face partner interview and a personal questionnaire allowed the participants an opportunity to freely express themselves while also allowing the researcher to collect sufficient information about the intersection of female friendships, dialectical tensions and competitive behaviors.

Participants

A total of 12 pairs of female friends from a mid-sized university in northwestern Virginia were interviewed for this research study. Participation was optional and, therefore, participants were asked to nominate themselves for participation. Any female students who volunteered were required to bring a close female friend with them to the interview sessions. The women had to be close friends who had known each other for one year or longer in order to be considered for participation. This research study was advertised through classes in the School of Communication Studies. A consent form and full explanation of the study were available for student viewing before agreement of participation. The majority of the females who volunteered to participate were in their third year of college and a handful were seniors. The females who participated were of the Caucasian ethnicity.

Procedure

Students who chose to participate were informed of the purpose of this study. They were instructed to read the description of the two parts to this study that were used to gather data through narratives and observations about competition and dialectics in female friendships. Both partners in the female dyads signed a consent form and were first reassured that everything they said would remain confidential. Participants were informed that any information used by the researcher in the final write-up would be reported with different names so the participants' identities would remain confidential.

In one study, Barth and Kinder (1988) chose to use a questionnaire and through this tool, had interviewees identify friends of varying closeness levels. "For each friend listed, subjects were asked to indicate how long they have known the friend, how much time they spend with the friend, and three topics commonly discussed in conversations with the friend" (p. 355). I chose to use an extended version of this method and asked the participating dyads to come to the interview with their friend, instead of listing their initials as Barth and Kinder chose to do. In addition, I asked the pair the length of their friendship and the activities that they do in the time they spend together, as well as offer personal descriptions for the depth of the friendship they were discussing.

The first segment of the study was an interview with both members of the female pairs. One pair of friends entered the interview room at a time and the researcher asked ten open-ended questions that were created with the intent to encourage discussion and create an open environment for the women to describe their experiences, as well as provide examples and stories. Following a data collection procedure used by Legge and Rawlins (1992) in a study on friends in disputes, I interviewed all 12 pairs of friends together and then asked each person to

independently reflect on their joint interview. When dyads were interviewed, I audio and video recorded the interviews in order to better observe first-hand the nonverbal cues and verbal content of interaction between the friends.

The ten questions asked of these women inquired about their opinions on competitive nature, preferences in spending time with competitive friends and any instances where they identified that competition had been a problem or a benefit in their friendships. The questions were devised in such a way that the female friends answered simultaneously and were able to collaborate when responding to provide the researcher with insight into female-female interactions. The generated questions are attached in the form of the *Competition and Dialectic Competition Questionnaire* (see Appendix A).

The second part of the interview was a follow-up questionnaire that the women answered individually about their specific friendship. This provided participants the opportunity to add any additional information to their discussion without offending or insulting their friend. In a study by Aries and Johnson (1983), the researchers used self-reports from females to determine the differences and depth of topic discussion between males and females (p. 1183).

This research study adopted a similar self-reporting opportunity for participants. The purpose of this follow-up questionnaire was to provide students who prefer to respond in written form with an equal opportunity to express their opinions in a way in which they would feel more comfortable. The expectation was that the additional questions would jog the females' memory and provide more detailed information for researchers to process. The participants were asked to answer the questions to the best of their ability and were given the opportunity to refrain from responding at any time at their discretion, but were encouraged to participate in both segments of the study for increased depth of study results. The answers provided for the second part of this

study were also kept confidential and the resulting information from one woman was not shared with the other. The questions created for this part of the interview are attached in the form of an open-ended questionnaire entitled *Secondary Questionnaire to Competition and Dialectic Tensions Interview* (see Appendix B). All interviews took less than an hour, with most lasting approximately thirty minutes.

Analysis of Data

Data analysis began during the interview process as I interacted with the participants. After completing the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings into word-for-word written accounts of the interviews. Similar to the method used by Fife (2007), “systematic data analysis began with the transcription process. Through that process, I was able to revisit each individual and dyadic interview, thinking carefully about the nature of the particular friendship” (p. 49-50). In my study, only a dyadic interview needed to be transcribed, but I also re-read and analyzed the written questionnaires that were completed by the interviewees. After the transcription process, I read through the transcriptions multiple times to discover common themes and connections between the insights the participants shared and the research that was presented in the earlier literature review. The approach I took during this step of the data analysis was modeled after Fife’s (2007) method of continually outlining trends and making notes about the similarities and dissimilarities of each interviewee with the themes identified from the previous interviews.

During the interview process, I took notes about each interview and the dyad sitting in front of me and then color-coded quotations and information found in the interviews that related to each dialectical tension described earlier in this study in order to draw parallels between the scholarly research and the field research. The color-coding process was effective to visually

compile the pieces that aligned with each theme in the research. The themes uncovered in the transcription and analysis processes will be discussed further in the next section.

An in-depth interview process that involves multiple pairs of individuals, such as in this study, requires an ample amount of time to thoroughly understand and analyze the results of the verbal discussions and written information. The next section provides examples of insight shared during the dyadic interviews and relates the experiences to the dialectical tensions and aspects of competition previously discussed prior in this research study. “As relationships negotiated within networks of involvements, friendships are ongoing communicative achievements often pursued in the face of incompatible requirements” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 2-3). This unique connection will be explored through the verbal exchanges from interviews, coupled with Rawlins’ dialectics and Baxter and Montgomery’s tensions that are recounted in the next section.

Results

The female friend pairs interviewed for this study explained their personal definitions of competition, which shed light on the later scenarios and personal experiences they shared. The most comprehensive definition obtained during the interview process was provided by Lacey, who positively described competition to be “Something that pushes you because you noticed a good quality in a friend and it makes you think, ‘I want to emulate that.’ It’s recognition within yourself to add something based off of what the other person has.” Lacey’s explanation of competition contained a positive connotation of competitive behavior, causing friends to strive to become better in a specific area, while Kohn’s (1986) definition detailed at the beginning of the literature review discussed more of the negative effects of competition and the ways in which relationships are damaged or terminated. However, Renee, Lacey’s friend, provided a definition of competition which paralleled Kohn’s (1986) more negative perspective. Renee said, “sometimes it [competition] can go as far as to terminate the relationship if it really becomes an issue, but if it can get resolved, I think it’s just a hiccup along the way of your friendship and sometimes it makes you stronger.”

The identification of competition and its presence in female friendships is the first step to understanding the dialectical tensions that women face. Many interview participants suggested that jealousy is a major cause for competition because of the progression from jealous behavior to competitive actions. In addition, for women, the discussion of appearances, relationships with males and clothing were the materialistic causes mentioned by interviewees. Multiple females described differing opinions, personality traits and perspectives to be a basis for competition because of the lack of understanding between two parties. Consequently, grades, social involvement and politics were other topics mentioned to cause competition between women in

various situations. Selfishness, a lack of open communication and bottled up feelings were said to also be reasons why females felt competitive vibes from another woman in their life. Many of the women emphasized that although they do not want to compete with friends and other acquaintances, it can be difficult to reign in the negative emotions that arise.

Competitive Behaviors

For many of the young women interviewed in this study, the opportunity to sit down with their close friend and discuss competitive actions, behaviors and opinions afforded them the chance to realize and reaffirm the qualities of their friend that they truly appreciated. In quite a few of the interviews conducted, the women would help one another answer interview questions about themselves. In one particular instance, Michelle and Alicia were reflecting on their years together as roommates at their university and the university they attended while studying abroad in Europe. The women were both very vocal in discussing their experience with competition and the effect that it had on the intimacy within their own friendship but more so with the relationships they maintained with other women in their lives. Though the women generally explained that they believed competition and jealousy were simultaneous occurrences, the later discussion during the interview provided more insight into their individual views of competition. Their exchange proceeded as follows:

A: I like to say I'm competitive because I think of it in a way of being driven and it could be a good thing or it could be a really bad personality flaw.

M: I don't think of myself as competitive in general. Even when I was younger in games and classes and...I just didn't care. I did have one competitive friendship with a girl—

Lindsey in high school—and we're not friends anymore but that's the only thing I can think of when I had such obvious jealous feelings toward her and her to me that we had to talk about it.

A: I can honestly say that you are the least competitive woman I've ever met and that's another reason why I really like spending time with you because I don't know how you do it sometimes but I learn from you. I would get jealous over stupid things but you never cared about anything and I was like, 'Why should I care?' That's another reason—people feel threatened by you because you really don't care.

M: For her [A], I would say I wouldn't even call her competitive either but I would say in a driven sense...like you say, 'I'm going to Thailand' and you go two weeks later, so we believe you're going to do these things. Competitive in that sense, but again, not competitive with the way you would think.

The two women mentioned competition in the sense of jealousy, a driven personality and personal determination. While Michelle was explaining the way that she perceived herself in the realm of competitive behavior, Alicia jumped in to affirm that after knowing Michelle for three years and rooming with her for the majority of that time, she was well-acquainted with Michelle's personality and the way that she operates in relationships. The admiration seen on Alicia's face during the interview between she and Michelle was enough to identify the strong bond between the two women. The depth of their friendship was evident by the ways that their relationship had been strengthened through periods of challenging situations, such as when they studied abroad for a semester and felt as if the other students on the trip did not like them or understand their personalities.

Negotiating Tensions

The unpleasant situations that occurred for the women while they were traveling abroad parallel with the existence of dialectics in female friendships. “Contradictions and dialectical tensions are central features of a dialectical analysis. These antagonistic yet interdependent aspects of communication between friends form the pulse of routine as well as volatile and transitional moments of such dyads” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 7). In order to analyze communication and relationships dialectically, the interactional dialectics that Rawlins identifies must be addressed. These tensions have been explained and identified during interviews with 24 college-aged females. “Accordingly, communicating within friendship involves a constant interaction between interpretive and behavioral practices to maintain a mutual definition of the relationship as friendship” (p. 15), which is why the interactional dialectics will be primarily discussed. This category includes the tensions between affection and instrumentality, judgment and acceptance and expressiveness and protectiveness.

In the situation with Michelle and Alicia during their study abroad trip in Europe, the two women recounted a time when the trip felt segregated between their group of friends, who enjoyed spending time at the clubs and out around the town, and the other half of the group who preferred to stay home and have Bible study. Michelle explained, “What happened with that was that it was the tension caused...it was partially ignorance of thinking we were crazy and drinking too much, but it was also partially jealousy of us having so much fun. Those are the two things I think, but when we found out they were talking bad about us, we ignored that and tried to be friends with them.” In regard to this European experience, the two women explained that they view ignorance and lack of acceptance as a main cause for tension. The judgmental attitudes that females had toward other females caused tension between the parties because the women were

not willing to change their perspective and look at life through the lenses of the other party in order to gain a better understanding of how their friend is feeling.

Judgment versus Acceptance

The scenario that occurred in Europe is an example of the judgment versus acceptance dialectical tension identified by Rawlins (1992). In this dialectic, “acceptance remains a vital aspect of communication between friends. But it functions in a dialectical relationship with the friends’ judgments. People value a friend’s acceptance, especially when they know the other takes their ideas, thoughts, and actions seriously” (p. 21). In the interview portion of this study, many of the female dyads reported that politics is one of the main sources of contention in their friendships. Because some people hold tightly to their political stances, the tension caused when people try to convince their friends of a differing opinion has the potential to lead to acceptance or judgment on behalf of both partners.

Melissa explained, “We do talk about politics a lot and Emily is more left-winged where I’m more conservative. These matters are really the most controversial—like when we talk about abortion, gay marriage; that sort of thing.” In a different interview, Morgan said: “We have completely different views, beliefs and reasons in why we support our side. We’ve talked about our opinions many times, but luckily when the tension starts building, we have enough respect for each other to just end the conversation in a positive light.” Many of the females interviewed mentioned ways in which they handled the disagreements, which included altogether avoiding the topic instead of working through the conflict to find a mutual understanding, which enabled the friends to avoid judgment, but also hindered them from finding acceptance. However, this action of suppressing intimate discussions is contradictory to the research presented by Eichenbaum and Orbach (1987). “Often competition is about the desire for recognition of one

kind or another, because outside recognition grants a person visibility. If one feels passed over, unseen or squashed, feelings of competition may erupt that represent a fight for selfhood. A woman wants her achievements to be noticed, for *her self* to be seen” (p. 108).

In addition, personality differences were also attributed as situations where judgment often comes into play. For Molly, “Becca’s opinionated-ness can sometimes get in the way. I am extremely open to new ideas and Becca has a set of beliefs about certain topics that can sometimes get in the way of further discussion.” On the contrary, Emily shared that “Melissa sometimes gets a little crazy—i.e. unannounced parties—and sometimes our morals don’t match up, but it’s okay because I feel that we can discuss these things openly, without feeling judged.” One pair of friends was able to discuss their differences and move forward while others were unable to accept the personality and lifestyle differences.

Expressiveness versus Protectiveness

Another dialectical tension evident during the interview process was that of expressiveness and protectiveness in the context of friendships. “Developing and maintaining a friendship conversationally involves revealing personal thoughts and feelings and commenting on the messages and actions of one’s friend, in short, expressiveness” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 22). In Melissa and Emily’s friendship there are a few topics that are not disclosed often because of the hard feelings that are attached. “I don’t think Melissa likes my boyfriend too much because they are very competitive/argumentative people. He’s not a topic I discuss with her too much,” said Emily. This information was provided through the written portion of the interview and not surprisingly, Melissa also wrote on her questionnaire that Emily’s boyfriend was a point of tension.

When discussing him, the women feel negative emotions and in order to preserve their friendship, choose to not discuss him often. However, this is a challenging situation for them in terms of expressiveness and protectiveness. There is no correct answer as to who is in the wrong—whether Emily’s boyfriend should be discussed to increase expressiveness or whether interactions with him should fall into more of a protectiveness aspect where Emily chooses to be less vulnerable about him because of the consequences. Additionally, Lacey and Renee also cited Renee’s boyfriend as a situation in their friendship which included disclosure. “Renee has started dating someone and it is new for her. I know she sometimes feels comfortable telling me about it and her concerns and I know we are very different in relationships sexually and how open we are. I don’t feel a sense of disagreement, even though we have different views,” said Lacey. For these women, the topic of one friend’s relationship with her boyfriend is one which the women are comfortable discussing and something that has led to them becoming more expressive with one another and potentially growing closer through the experience. The presence of boyfriends and other external relationships was cited by many dyads as a point of conflict because in many cases, only one of the friends had a boyfriend, which caused the other female to be separated from her friend in a very specific way.

For Morgan and Caroline, the lack of communication and disclosure was reported as an issue in their friendship. Morgan shared, “Caroline and I are very close, but I think sometimes we hide our feelings about some beliefs or actions with the other person because we truly respect each other.” This comment raises the question of whether avoiding the discussion of controversial topics is beneficial or detrimental to the development of closer relationships. “A healthy relationship is not one in which the interplay of opposites has been extinguished or resolved, because these opposing features are inherent in the very fabric of relating. Instead, a

healthy relationship is one in which the parties manage to satisfy both oppositional demands” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 6). The lack of discussion in this relationship parallels an idea Baxter and Montgomery suggested that individuals in relationships desire to have open communication, but also desire to withhold some information. Some interviewees suggested that bottled up feelings and the withholding of information are causes for competition because when people do not communicate, they are more likely to misunderstand a situation and feel competition, whether it is accurate or not. The potential for misunderstandings and room for jealousy to develop are results of lacking communication.

Instrumentality versus Affection

A third dialectic tension of Rawlins encountered in the interviews is instrumentality and affection. Many comments that participants shared during the interview process implied that the balance between the dialectical tensions is difficult for young adult females to identify and manage. “This principle formulates the interpenetrated nature of caring for a friend as an end-in-itself and/or as a means-to-an-end. Various communicative quandaries revolve around qualifying one’s expressions of need for a friend within the tensions produced by this dialectic” (Rawlins, 1992, p. 17). In this tension, friends are often treated as a commodity meant to benefit the other individual instead of as a partner in a mutually beneficial relationship. The perspectives and selfish behaviors of partners also fall into this dialectic. “It is about using the example of someone else’s achievement, in whatever direction that might be, to try and fulfill one’s own personal ambition” (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1987, p. 114) and to use the partner in such a way that he or she does not feel cared for or necessary in the friendship.

Bethany recalled a time when she was in the wrong and needed her friend Karissa to help get her back on track. “I was being really, really stubborn about an issue in our apartment. I

thought I was right and I had my ground. I wouldn't budge and it caused issues. Finally, Karissa helped me realize I was wrong and she helped me change for the better. Afterward, I couldn't believe how she reacted. It was hard to see things in a different light." For Bethany, she did not realize that in the apartment situation, her selfishness and stubbornness was not showing that she felt the need to care for her friend and exhibit affection because she felt as if she was correct in her opinions. Fortunately in this situation, Karissa was able to help her understand the tension a bit better and the women worked out their issues.

In relation to perspectives in life, Krystal mentioned a circumstance that showcases differences between she and her friend Hope. Krystal was discussing the most controversial topic in her friendship with Hope and identified it to be, "Probably our outlook on relationships, specifically marriage and information regarding how we feel the other person should act in relationships." Because the women hold different ideas about the role of individuals in a deep, intimate relational setting such as marriage, each partner is likely to not feel mutual affection and beneficial appreciation for their life views. Affection is important in relationships, but a balance must also exist where the amount of affection should not be taken to such an excessive level that the other partner does not feel as if they are able to reciprocate the emotions and actions in a mutual way.

Baxter & Montgomery's Tensions

According to Baxter and Montgomery, "...social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a *ceaseless interplay* between contrary or opposing tendencies" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 3). The contradictions they describe are the basis for tensions that will be addressed in this section. Individuals must maintain a certain amount of autonomy when in friendships in order to contribute their unique and important personality characteristics to the dynamics of their dyad.

Simultaneously, relationships require a certain amount of intimacy in order to deepen and move through various levels of friendship development. “Thus, “separateness” can only be understood in the context of “connectedness”; the two concepts cannot be understood in conceptual isolation of one another” (p. 88).

Karissa and Bethany have been friends for three years and met in their dorm freshman year. The friends spend the majority of their time together relaxing and going out to eat during the weekends. As laid-back as their times together tend to be, the pair also had experienced situations that led to competition between them; the most recent of which was when both girls applied to work for the orientation office at their university and though neither partner earned the position, they achieved different levels in the application process. The women recounted the story of what happened:

K: When we applied to [work with Orientation] and I didn't get it but you got to the next round, I was disappointed; it was kind of like, 'Why did she get it and I didn't?'

B: Oh yeahhhh.

K: It was also like, 'Well now I can't be with her if she gets the position and I don't. It would've been fun if we could both do it instead of just one.'

B: I felt bad also because I didn't know how I got it. She probably put a lot more effort into it than I did and I sort of didn't want to do it after that because the main reason I did it was because she did it. It was a bit of a hard situation, but we got over it, especially after I failed and we got over it.

K: I was jealous she got to the next round and I didn't.

B: I think I would've been jealous at that moment too if it had happened the other way around. I think jealousy is like an evil monster; it really is. It causes you to be

competitive; you sort of get that envy feeling—Is she better than me or not? It sort of happens on its own and you can't control it, so it brings up that competitive nature.

The jealous feelings that Bethany and Karissa identified were discussed in more depth later in the interview when Karissa was the first person of all the participating interviewees to introduce the idea that jealousy is a main catalyst for competition. Karissa said, “It builds on top of each other and once people start to get jealous, they might talk behind each other's backs and then they lose trust, so I feel like it's a series of events.” The action of talking behind the back of a friend, as Karissa mentioned, is enough to move from connectedness to separation. “Self-identity, and thus conceptions of out ‘inner,’ ‘private,’ ‘unique,’ or ‘separate’ being, come about only through our social relationships” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 88), so separateness and connectedness are both present in relationships. In order to be a unique individual in a relationship, each member of the dyad must maintain their personalities and characteristics in order to contribute to the friendship. Karissa and Bethany claimed that their friendship was one with a close connection where they felt equally important, but competition still existed.

Bethany and Karissa were the first in a series of interviewees to discuss jealousy as a cause for competition which led to non-beneficial emotions and actions as byproducts of the situation. Another pair of friends who discussed this idea was Elise and Sarah, two women who bonded over their love for adventure, sports and the outdoors. The friends are both on club sports teams at their university and while they compete within the athletic environment, they explained that they do not desire to compete emotionally and within friendships. Elise and Sarah also mentioned in their interview that jealousy, along with selfishness, are main causes for competition. Both of these characteristics are catalysts for increasing separateness in relationships because when these qualities are present, partners are much less likely to have an

enjoyable and beneficial friendship experience. When specifically discussing whether competition was a positive or negative attribute in the friendship realm, Elise explained, “I think [competition] can tear people apart and it gets in the way of them seeing why they’re friends in the first place and it turns into them being together and always battling each other and nobody wants to be friends with someone like that.”

Sarah agreed with Elise’s claim and the two continued to discuss that acceptance and acknowledgement of differences is a positive aspect of relationships. In many of the interviews in this research study, participants explained instances that they viewed as hindrances to the opportunity to develop intimacy. Krystal explained that a lack of communication was a hindrance to a deeper friendship for her: “I think one of the biggest factors is that since Hope and I do not compete that often, we do not have any opportunity to truly share detailed opinions on certain things.” When the opportunity to discuss and disclose deep opinions, morals and values with a friend is not afforded, the dyad lacks chances to grow closer. Competition allows individuals to gain insight into themselves and their relationships with others through conversations sparked by competitive situations. The opportunity to discuss tough, controversial issues may not arise very often in some friendships, so the pathway to discussion provided by difficult conversations can be beneficial. “The contradiction inherent in these two freedoms, of course, is that one party’s freedom of dependence constrains the other party’s freedom of independence” (p. 91). Individuals must be conscious of not stunting the capabilities of their partner in relational situations.

In the interview with Lacey and Renee, both women mentioned that alcohol consumption was not a topic that they agreed on. “The same goes for drinking—but again, it isn’t controversial because we keep those parts separate and do together things we both enjoy,” said

Lacey. The majority of the female dyads interviewed mentioned areas of life in which they did not agree or did not communicate with their friend and as a result, were aware of the complicated balance between having a separate and connected friendship. The women strived to maintain their separate selves with their own perspectives and opinions while also coming together as a joint unit when there were situations and topics through which they could readily agree and deepen their intimacy.

Discussion

The dialectical tension models proposed by Rawlins and Baxter and Montgomery provide an illustrative way to categorize the competition and tensions faced by pairs of female friends. The expectations of the current culture for female and male friends have presented a rough foundation for women to develop healthy and non-competitive female friendships. The diverse reasons for issues between females have been the basis for competitive behavior that has led to the termination of many friendships, as well as only becoming a speed bump in relationships that have deepened in intimacy. The tensions discussed by the interviewees to be difficult circumstances in relationships have been described in a different way by Baxter and Montgomery. “From a dialectical perspective, the term ‘contradiction’ is liberated from any negative connotations whatsoever. Contradictions are inherent in social life and not evidence of failure or inadequacy in a person or in a social system. In fact, contradictions are the basic ‘drivers’ of change, according to a dialectical perspective” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 7). Therefore, the change and developments that occur as a result of dialectical tensions and contradictions are an important aspect of relationships.

The interview process for this study strategically asked about the competitive behaviors and tensions that have been described as dialectic because of two conflicting interests found in many friendships. “Friendship is defined as a relationship characterized by voluntary interdependence, in which the individuals involved respond to one another personalistically...” (Wright, 1982, p. 5). Because research about intimate relationships requires firsthand communication, the immediate interview and face-to-face communication of research studies provides researchers with insight into the inner workings of friendships.

The insight gathered from the dyadic interviews with 12 pairs of female friends reflected with the tensions described earlier in this research study. Aries and Johnson (1983) determined that women tend to speak often about their daily schedules and similar interests with a friend. In the interviews conducted, it was evident that the women were used to openly communicating about their daily activities and plans, as well as discussing topics that were important to both females. The women confidently shared stories and anecdotes from their daily lives and interactions with their friend through the specific organization or location through which their friendship originated. However, it generally required a longer amount of time for the women to identify times from their past when competitive behaviors took place. Because of the prevalence and high likelihood for women discussing their shared interests, finding topics and instances of contradiction appeared to be more difficult, perhaps because if the contradictions were too great, the friendship would dissolve.

For many pairs of female friends, the balance between judgment and acceptance, expressiveness and protectiveness, instrumentality and affection and separateness and connectedness presents a challenge for females who are striving to manage the difference between healthy and unhealthy boundaries. Based on information gathered during the interviews, it was clear that the dialectical tensions effectively described the competitive situations that females are faced with on a daily basis. Athletics, social organizations, academic settings and relational situations are the opportune circumstances for competitive interactions to occur. Burton Nelson claims that competition embodies many purposes: a relationship, a process, an opportunity and a risk. Because of the overwhelming importance of these aspects, “those who fail to enter competitive arenas invariably fail to win” (Nelson, 1998, p. 6). Nelson asserts that

competition is important for the self-esteem and opportunities that the competition provides for women.

During the interviews, nearly every participant expressed that competition occurs as a result of jealousy between friends, but many also added selfishness, groups of three females together, lack of communication or acceptance and the desired affection from males as additional reasons why competition occurs. However, the same participants claimed that competition can be beneficial in some situations while also being hazardous in others. In contrast to Kohn's perspective of detrimental competition, Nelson (1998) views competition in a different light. "Competition can enhance confidence and intimacy. Competition and cooperation are not opposites. I see competition as (ideally) a form of cooperation, a framework for doing one's best in concert with other people who are simultaneously doing their best, thus inspiring you to do even better" (p. 5). Based on life experiences, individuals tend to hold different opinions and perspectives about the presence and role of competition in relationships. In this study, multiple definitions and perspectives were addressed as a result of the primary and secondary research pointing to the same idea—that competition exists for a variety of reasons and across a diverse platform of situations.

In each interview, a discussion ensued as to whether males or females are the more competitive gender and the general consensus between the 24 participants was that males and females tend to compete in different ways. While women are more likely to be underhanded and catty with their remarks while competing for materialistic and physical approval, males were described as focusing more on the athletic side of competition. Based on previous research completed by Wright (1982), women's friendships tend to be more person-oriented and more holistic than male friendships, which is comparable to the opinions that the interviewees

provided. The interviewees for this study were biased in their view of interactions between males and females because the women were more knowledgeable about the interactions and activities between females friends; they did not have first-hand experience about the life of males. Nelson explained in her research that women do not like being the second sex or feeling as if they are walking a step behind someone else, namely men in their lives (Nelson, 1998). The participants in this study were perhaps not aware of this perspective, but were aware that there are notable differences between the way that individuals of different genders act and respond.

The model of dialectical tensions provided the researcher with the means necessary to understand the reasons behind the competitive and comparative behaviors of so many college-aged female friendships. Friendships that display more competitive behaviors are often a result of the lack of understanding that partners have about the internal emotions and external reactions of other people. In the interpersonal context, friendships where each person is aware of the causes of negative outcomes and chooses to stay away from situations that would breed negative emotions tend to be less likely to head toward relational termination.

Limitations

While this research study specifically focused on the population of college-aged females, there are many other demographics of people who also experience dialectical tensions in their relationships. I chose to analyze this population because of the applicability to my experiences and the knowledge that I have of communication and competition between female friends of college-age. In the research process for this study, there was certainly not enough time to efficiently scour all current research studies, journal articles and publications about the topics of dialectical tensions and competition found in female friendships. Because of this, some areas of research may have been highlighted in more depth than other areas and as a result, there may be holes found in the research I presented where I could have discovered more sources for a better-rounded presentation of the current available literature on these topics.

Additionally, there were multiple groups of people who were not considered when I gathered my participants. I chose to focus on females and because I had assistance in recruiting females within the School of Communication Studies, there was a limited segment of women who were informed about the study. The only women who were offered a chance to participate in this research experience were those in selected classroom setting. A little over half of the women I interviewed are enrolled in the Communication Studies major or minor and, therefore, may be more willing to discuss personal information face-to-face because of the nature of their courses and the degree that they are working to achieve. Many of the women who volunteered brought with them friends who were not students in the School of Communication Studies, but many of them from other disciplines shared a comparable amount of information as compared to their friends in the Communication field.

Based on time and physical location restraints, the interviews were conducted during one week of time and because of this, some potential participants were unable to contribute their experiences and knowledge. The lack of diversity from students across the campus perhaps places a bias on the information shared by the participants in this study. In addition, some of the women interviewed were in romantic relationships with a male and when the questions arose about the differences between the interpersonal and competitive interactions between men and women, the perspective of the women in dating relationships could be skewed because of their close connection with a male.

Directions for Future Research

In the event that this research project continues and future researchers desire to discover information about the same topic, there are various changes that can be made to the methods and procedures for this study. The choice to use a face-to-face interview was made because of the depth of the information being inquired about. Choosing to use a survey so that participants could share an uninhibited amount of information was strategic because of the qualitative and quantitative nature of this topic. The qualitative interview was the primary source of information but was followed by the quantitative method of asking the women to complete a written questionnaire for more opportunity to share personal information. In the future, a third segment to this interview could be beneficial. After the women have the chance to converse back and forth with their partner and then silently complete the questionnaire, a third opportunity for full quantitative analysis would be effective. Providing the interviewees with an additional survey to rank the length of time and depth of their relationship with their friend, as well as other multiple choice items to be placed on a scoring scale would assist a future researcher in statistically analyzing the closeness of the interviewee relationships. When completing the interviews for this study, it was often difficult to ascertain the depth of the friendships other than from the stories and examples that were shared by the interviewees. Having a measurable rating for the closeness of the friendship would be beneficial for future research on this topic.

Additionally, further research into the depth of information about the physiological correlates of competition would be an interesting way to expand this research. The interpersonal and social causes for competition were discussed multiple times, but insight into the physical and scientific processes of what occurs when the brain senses and experiences competition and negative emotions would be a unique twist for this topic. Scientists discuss the flight or fight

responses that people experience during aggressive and intense situations, so the opportunity to physically analyze participants during a competitive situation would provide new information that many researchers have not previously delved into, other than in the context of conflict situations.

The dialectical tensions sphere involves a circular combination of various aspects of research and existence within the relational topic. Rawlins (1992) and Baxter and Montgomery (1996) have effectively identified dialectical tensions that individuals can experience, and through such explanations, discover the circumstances they face in a relationship. Because there are many overlapping areas where one dialectical tension also possesses aspects of another, there is certainly room to detail additional tensions and identify the foundational information behind such creations. The main dialectical tensions discussed in this study—affection and instrumentality, judgment and acceptance and expressiveness and protectiveness—leave an opportunity to further identify dialectical tensions present in interpersonal relationships (Rawlins, 1992).

In the final chapters of Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) book, they presented excerpted fragments of their conversation for the pleasure of the reader. Montgomery explained,

“We've taken a number of concepts that are prevalent in the study of communication and tried to make them truly social...we've tried to create an appreciation of the disorder, the spontaneity, the messiness, along with the order, of communication in personal relationships and research about that communication process” (p. 232-233).

This explanation encompasses the goal for this research study—to incorporate and identify the interpersonal relational concepts of dialectical tensions and competition in female friendship in such a way that it has been understood socially and in the context of female friendships.

Personal Reflection

The process of researching, writing and conducting an original research study is complex and lengthy, but my personal interest in the topic was the reason that I was able to push through the long hours, late nights and months of effort. The reason that I chose to spend my time focusing on the dialectic and competitive tendencies of female friendships is because, first of all, I am a female and I can relate to the research that I gathered and secondly, I interact with multiple females on a daily basis and can identify instances when they have acted and reacted in a similar way to what I discovered during my research and interviewing processes.

During my junior and senior years of college, I lived in a house with ten other girls and the competitive tendencies of females were evident on an almost daily basis. Whether competing for the prime showering time or reign of the oven during the dinner cooking rush or even the best parking space in the parking lot behind our house, I became increasingly familiar with the underlying competitive tendencies among my housemates.

The most intriguing aspect of living with so many females was the opportunity to observe how people interacted, but also the depth of varying relationships within the house. Certainly in a group of eleven girls, not everyone will become the closest of friends and have deep relationships, but closer-knit groups within the house were evident. However, depending on the context of activities or decisions that needed to be made, the 'cliques' within our house would potentially separate in order to represent their opinion well.

Yet, another interesting occurrence I recognized over the two years in the house was the usually quick turnaround when a situation arose. For most of my roommates, if there arose an issue with someone else in the house, it was either dealt with soon after the problem occurred or things would blow over by the next day. When living with so many people, it is difficult to maintain such close contact without being willing to apologize and be humble about your

mistakes. The cooperation aspect of house relationships was most often seen when group-sanctioned 'house activities' were planned. House photo shoots, dinner downtown or events around the holidays were times when most people were able to push aside any little issues that may have been bothering them in order to cooperate and participate in events as a house. Amazingly, when this occurred, all eleven members of the house appeared to be getting along, despite our dramatic differences of opinions and personalities.

Over the past year and a half of working on this study, I have been making mental connections from the research and interviews to situations in my life as I have observed myself and my friends acting subconsciously competitive with one another. The comparison factor I addressed in the study is often one of the most significant issues because females desire to be special, to look good and to have close relationships. When they lack the opportunity and see that someone else has acquired those desired things, emotions rise and hurtful words may begin to fly. I have been intrigued by the research used in this study because I now understand that for many of my housemates and friends, they are not aware of the dialectical tensions that exist in female friendships and therefore lack a way to explain the situations they are facing and the emotions they are feeling.

Aside from the personal research aspect of this project, I certainly was challenged by the requirements and time constraints placed on this assignment. I learned how to research a topic in-depth through not only researching information about the competition and dialectical tensions, but also seeking information about peripheral topics that branched off of the main ideas. The first semester of this project was spent researching, reading articles and taking notes on each one. The next semester proved to be a more significant time commitment because it was the main semester when I would be responsible for writing my thesis. For me, this was approximately 50

pages discussing the research that I found while pulling everything together to into a cohesive description. With this semester of writing taking place my senior year, I was challenged by finding significant chunks of time to set aside for writing purposes while tackling a full course load and participating in extracurricular activities. However, this semester produced a successful literature review and I was able to leave for the winter break with a clear conscience about the current status of the project.

Returning for the spring semester, I knew that I had to set aside my thoughts of graduation, finding a job and planning a wedding so that I could successfully arrange and conduct interviews and then analyze each one before I could begin to wrap up my project with the discussion and results sections. Each stage of the project required additional research and meeting with my committee members as I learned more about qualitative research, interactions between friends and the ways in which to write a complete original research study. I often joke with my friends that I hope the time spent on this project pays off in the future when seeking employment opportunities, but as I reflect, it is clear that I have already been impacted by the accomplishment of producing a full thesis born of my interests, thoughts and planning. I am positive that the research, planning, time management and inquiry skills that I have developed over the past year and half during the time of working on this project will have an impact on my future endeavors, and for that, I am grateful.

Primary Competition and Dialectic Tensions Questionnaire, Dyad Interview

I: Before interview:

1. How long have you and X been friends?
2. When and where did you meet?
3. How would you compare the depth of this friendship with others in your life?
4. What do you and X usually do when you are together? What activities do you have in common?

II. During interview:

1. What does the word “competition” mean to you?
2. When people call you “competitive,” how do you respond? How does it make you feel?
3. Do you compare yourself to your close friends (clothing, appearance, money, status)?
4. Have you experienced a situation where a friend has competed with you for something? What reaction did you have? What emotions did you feel?
5. Do you think competition ever occurs as a result of jealousy between friends?
6. Do you think males or females are more competitive? Where have you seen evidence of this?
7. What do you believe causes tension in your friendships or the friendships that you have observed between other people?
8. What effect do you believe competition has on the relationship between female friends?
9. What situations or experiences do you think lead to competition in female friendships?
10. Would you rather spend your time with a highly competitive or less competitive friend? What is the basis for your reasoning?

Secondary Questionnaire to Competition and Dialectic Tensions Interview

I: Personal Competitiveness

1. Do you consider yourself to be competitive? Please provide an explanation.
2. Do you consider yourself to be an introvert or an extrovert? In what ways does this affect how you act in friendships?
3. Can you recall a time when you competed with someone for something?

II: Competition within specific friendship:

1. Can you recall any specific instances when you felt rivaled by X?
2. Who do you feel is the more dominant personality in your friendship? How is this seen?
3. When conflict arises, who is the first person to apologize?
4. Do you ever feel as if your friend says or does things to feel more superior to you? Please explain your response.
5. What effect does competition have on your friendship with X?
6. Who is more competitive between the two of you?
7. What is the biggest hindrance to closeness in your friendship with X?
8. Do you ever feel overshadowed by this particular friend? What other negative emotions arise when you spend time with X?
9. What is the most controversial topic in your friendship that causes the most disagreement?

Transcript: Interview with Emily & Melissa

I: How long have you guys been friends?

M: Since day one, freshman year; roommates.

E: We were randomly assigned.

M: So I guess on Facebook even before we were friends. We're still roommates—three years. We're old.

I: When and where did you meet? You said Orientation week, basically?

M: Yeah, unless you consider Facebook before that, going back and forth.

I: So did you talk before you came?

M: Yeah just like when you find out who your roommate is, you Facebook stalk and then add.

E: You ask who's gonna bring the fridge and the TV...and stuff like that. We were both pretty open though; you were like "I might cry."

M: Yeah, we were both pretty open; to the extent that I said "I might bawl the first week of school" and she's like "Me too?"

E: I think I was talking about my boyfriend too...who I'm not with.

I: So very open from the beginning?

M: Yeah, we're super open.

I: So, that leads into: how would you compare the depth of your friendship to others you have in your life?

M: To the point where I feel like she knows literally everything about me; the gross things, the weird things, the normal things; everything.

E: We talk about everything.

M: It's not...nothing is weird. Freshman year, she had a book called the Naked Roommate just because she was afraid and she assumed I would be that for some reason.

E: I just had to prepare myself!

M: So, that book itself...we had to talk about it; we can talk about anything.

I: So, you're together a lot it seems. When you're usually together, what activities do you have in common? What do you do?

E: Just random stuff, like do you want to go to D.C. one weekend or hiking...

M: Eating.

E: Grocery shopping.

M: Like everything.

E: But we both have different things going on too.

M: We're completely different; like completely different, if that makes sense.

E: She's in a sorority and I'm not.

M: But we can do anything else together.

I: Good balance.

M: Yeah, it's pretty nice.

E: And we're supportive.

M: I encourage her to go to class...I'm just kidding.

E: I don't skip class; I usually just say I don't feel like it; should I go?

M: And then I say, "You're fine; don't go. It's okay." But it's all sarcasm, Mom and Dad.

E: But I go.

M: I'm just like, "Don't go; honestly, what are you here for? What is college? I don't think it's that important."

I: Reverse psychology a little bit?

M: Yes; I should've been a Psych major.

I: What is your major?

M: Business Marketing

I: And you're Communications?

E: Yes.

I: What year are y'all?

M&E: Juniors.

I: That's who I had earlier—they were juniors also. I wish I was still a junior.

M: I wish I was still a freshman; freshman year, you think your skin is bulletproof and you're out on the town like nothing matters.

I: And then sophomore year it begins to hit.

E: Like now, I come home from work and it's like 10:30 and I'm ready for bed; I can't start drinking now.

M: And now I'm like, we should probably be careful; maybe we shouldn't do this.

I: You've got the conscience coming on now?

M: Yeah, it's weird. Like maybe it's growing up; I'm not really sure.

I: It's scary.

I: So, what does the word 'competition' mean to you? This is migrating a little bit from general to more specific.

E: Competition is like; to me, trying to win-out out of everyone.

M: I consider myself very competitive so I guess to me, it's like being the best in every facet possible; like always competing. I feel like I'm always competing. It's frowned upon in some states...

E: I have three brothers and it's interesting, especially when you use the word competitiveness and my two oldest brothers are so competitive and they'll argue with anyone, but to me, he's like "You're the least competitive person I know" and I'm just like "Okay, that's how you are and I'm not gonna argue with you."

M: My brother and I are super competitive; it's ridiculous and now he's in law school so he argues for a living and is totally into it. I enjoy it though.

I: You kind of answered this, but when people call you competitive, how do you respond and how does it make you feel?

M: I'm used to it. I'm just like, yeah I think so too; whether it's sports or winning something—anything at all—an award or sports anything at all; I'm like yeah, I am competitive and I feel okay about it.

E: I don't think I've ever been called competitive. I feel like internally, I'm competitive but not with other people. You know, like, I'm okay if someone says, this team is better than that, that's fine.

I: Do you push yourself internally?

E: Yeah, I feel like because I was never on a sports team and grew up dancing, it's like perfection in yourself whereas I don't really care what other people are doing, ya know? Like, on sports team you're driven to beat the other team. But at the same time, I'm competitive to an extent and then it stops.

I: Okay, that makes sense. So, shifting from competitiveness to comparison: do you compare yourself to your close friends and if so, what areas do you see that in?

M: I think I compare myself; not to all of my friends, to some of them. Some of my friends, I can just tell that we're always competing against each other. I don't know why; it's weird. Guys in some cases... who is he gonna talk to first... that sort of thing.

E: See that, I wouldn't care about...

M: And I'm like, I wonder if he'll talk to me first or Emily...

E: Yeah, it depends who the guy was.

M: Definitely sports—even intramural teams, I'm way too into it.

M: What do you think?

E: I think in terms of comparing myself to others... like with Caley, our other roommate, she's the most fit person ever and sometimes I'm really jealous of that—we both are—she runs twice the amount I can.

M: She's literally zero percent body fat. I walk up the stairs in Carrier and I'm out of breath and she's like, hey, what's up guys? Do you want to go on a run? And I'm like, Caley, I think I have asthma orrr I'm just not in shape. I think it's asthma. Exercise-induced asthma?

E: That's just what I tell myself!

E: I think... athleticism and grades.

M: Oh my gosh, grades! I'm always that annoying person who asks what you get.

E: Oh my gosh, we did that all the time in our Geology class last year. I was so pissed at her. She got the second highest and we would study together and be goofing off the entire time.

M: I wouldn't even be in the class and he's like, and Melissa got a 98...

E: She would skip class and I would be there.

M: And she would text me that he talked about my grade again and I'd be like, thanks for the A I guess? And now I can't tell you anything about Geology.

I: Does that come naturally to you?

M: I don't know; I wouldn't say I'm very smart. I definitely try hard but you can ask her—she's like, do you ever do homework?

E: Caley is always studying...

M: She's Bio and Pre-Med major and I just finished COB 300 so right now, two of my books may or may not still be packaged and not out of their binding.

M: Sorry, we go into tangents.

I: No, it's okay; it's helpful! So, have you experienced or been in a situation where a friend competed with you for something and if so, which most people have; what reactions did you have and what emotions did you feel?

M: I'm trying to think...

E: I always try to avoid competition if I can. If I know my best friend is trying out for something, I'll try out for something else because I really don't like that conflict; it's easier to avoid it. If I didn't know the person, I'm like, "Balls to the wall, I'm gonna get this because I don't know that bitch." Sorry—that's what I'm thinking in my head.

M: Can you write that down? Balls to the wall...and then bitch. Professionalism at its best.

E: You don't want to risk your friendship just because you want...

M: I'm thinking of one particular instance with this girl and I—with Rachel—we're completely different people but we're so competitive against each other but it's not surface level. We've never talked about it but we'll be talking about something and she's like, Oh he's really cute, and I'm like I told this person a week ago that he was. So then it's like Oh, who will he text first? Stupid things like that.

M: Then my friend Linda from high school, we do everything together—we're on the same intramural team—and in the gym we'll be planking and I have a scar (let me show it to you) just because I'll be there and she's still going and I'm like I'm staying up; I'm not falling and then I kill myself. It's like Oh, what were you doing? Just competing and winning.

E: I'd be like, alright, you win.

M: Emily would be like, my arm is starting to hurt, so I'm gonna go get some ice cream.

E: Get some ice cream?!

M: We're at the gym...smoothie bar?

I: Good examples. So, do you think competition ever occurs as a result of jealousy between friends?

M: Definitely. Absolutely. Caley example—I'd want to work out even harder because I'm jealous of how fit she is; that's really it. Like when we go to Purcell together, I run with her for about a minute and a half and then she's on her 5th mile and I'm running out my 1st.

E: That same thing happens to me. She runs like two laps while I'm on my first.

M: But I try and I push myself to do it but she's just naturally better.

E: But she doesn't ever talk herself up; that's just how it is.

I: Is she cocky about it or humble about it?

E: Sometimes it hurts her, like last semester she had issues...

M: Because she has to run; she has to...

E: I think she internalizes a lot—she just has to work out.

M: Caley had to try to break 100 pounds last semester; she'd be like, "For dessert, I think I'll eat grapes" and I'd pass her the cookies and say, "Here are the cookies; eat four or five. I'm trying to help you gain weight." Please take them from me...and take me to the gym when you get a chance.

I: Do you guys think males or females are more competitive? And once you choose a side, where have you seen evidence of this? What makes you think that basically?

M: I think girls are.

E: Males.

M: See, I think everybody would say guys are more competitive but I think with girls, we're so catty and we've got this underlying bitchiness to us that would make you want to compete with someone just to be better than them.

E: Yeah, I feel like girls take things a lot more personally and take competition really to heart but with guys... I've seen my brothers fight over Mario Kart and you'd think they hate each other and then they're best friends afterwards. We see that with Joe...

M: They fight over anything just to compete...

E: Just to say they're right.

I: So you think males and you think females?

M&E: Yeah.

E: Now that I say females take it more to heart, I can't really decide; I feel like it's so different between boys and girls.

M: Maybe it just depends on what the matter is... with sports, guys are more competitive.

E: What you said makes sense...

M: I think people don't see it as much with guys. I really think it's there but with girls it's more underlying and with guys, it's more outright, like first one to 20 wins. I sound evil.

I: So, what do you believe is the cause for tension in friendships? In your specific friendship or a friendship together or in friendships you've witnessed between other people? All encompassing, what causes tension in friendships?

M: We've never really had a big fight.

E: Like, last weekend I got mad at you because you wouldn't go out with me to Mandy's birthday party and I was pissed.

M: And then I went, so she's fine.

E: But it's funny because afterwards, I was in the shower and got a text: Don't leave without us and then I hear and they're both in the shower and then Melissa comes to my door and she knocks and I'm naked

and she's like, 'So am I' we're both in our towels and she's like, Are you gonna straighten your hair? And I said I don't know yet.

M: Alright, cool, well don't leave without me. We're mad at each other...

E: But then start laughing because it's so ridiculous.

M: Like, I still hate you, but thanks for going.

E: It's personality traits I feel like are the tension.

M: I'm loud.

E: And it's how willing you are to look around that and I feel like that's for every relationship in general.

M: I'd have to agree with that. I don't even know what would cause tension, to be honest; I think just being annoying.

E: Like, what about Tammy? I would say that was about her personality.

M: It was her personality of having to be the best or right at something, despite that I could say that on page 462, sentence 3, word 7 it says differently and she'll say that's not true.

E: She'll say, I heard from this person...

M: This is a dictionary and it's saying exactly it.

E: Well, the Dean told me...

M: That's not true at all... Alright, you win? You really don't, but we'll let you go.

E: She's not our roommate anymore.

M: She used to be our roommate for two years but she moved out without telling us.

E: She would be competitive to a T.

M: If she was sitting here, she'd say we were wrong; like opinions, but she still makes it competitive.

M: We can give you her info..she did block our phone numbers so we can't call her, but we can give you hers.

E: Oh my God, we can go on about her.

I: So, what effect do you think competition has on the relationship between female friends? So, not in all friendships but specifically with female friends.

M: I think it makes girls catty-er; if you know you're competing for something. In high school, I did theater (don't judge me for it) and if I knew I was competing with Emily for something, every time I'd see her, I'd be like, hey how are ya, trying to kill her with kindness because I knew I was competing with her. If not, I'd be like hey and then leave.

E: Amongst female friends? I'd be really jealous; I think it would make me really jealous of the person. My friend Mona...she's really smart without saying she's smart and she'd always get the best grades in all the sciences. And it's like, why? We're still good friends. I got lost in my train of thought there...

I: So, this is a specific: what situations—we talked about what effect competition has—but can you think of times in your life when competition led to an issue?

M: I have to think about it. It's hard.

E: You don't know until it happens.

M: I have one. Senior year of high school, I ran for Vice President of student government and I didn't really campaign or do anything just because like I had my group of friends and I'd already done a bunch of stuff; people knew my name so if they wanted to vote for me, they would, and if you didn't, I'll be honest—I don't really care. The girl who ran against me made cookies, went all out and everything. She had run against me in middle school for every little thing and I always beat her in middle school and then beat her in high school and ever since then, she hasn't talked to me and we've been frien-emies competing between each other. We haven't talked and I think she deleted me on Facebook and it's all because of one stupid competition.

E: I don't think that's ever happened to me; I can think of situations where competition may have happened with dance and being in actual competitions. I don't know; I've never run for anything..I don't know. I always try to avoid it because I don't want an enemy.

M: Right now, all I can think about with her is Black Swan, like I've never had to kill anybody to be the cool swan in the play.

E: It's never gotten that bad! I mean, if I knew a girl was trying to...

M: If I knew a girl was trying to steal your boyfriend...they can have him. Just kidding—I love Brad.

M: Why are you so red?

E: Because I have someone to kill now. Just kidding! It's all a joke.

E: If I get really passionate about something then I would be like, okay, this person needs to go down but it's only if I really really think it is. But if it's a stupid competition or collect this many points to pass go, then that's stupid. Okay, do it, that's fine. But if you're hurting my friend or my feelings, then I'll get really into it.

I: Do you think your personalities play a part in that? Where your personality is more, I'm going to get you and yours is more, No, it's okay. Just in general because you guys mentioned you thought tension could come from people's personalities. For you guys, do you think that fuels how you feel about competition?

M: I definitely do—I care so much about and I'm really into it where I'm a loud and outgoing person who wants to know everything that's going on where she's more introverted and she's competing with herself all the time; everything she does, it's perfect.

E: Yeah, it's like, I can do better; that sort of thing.

M: Just writing a letter on Facebook or something, it's so strongly written, she's like wow, let's re-write this part; it's like, are you kidding me? She is competing with herself and she doesn't realize it.

I: So this is the last question of this part. Would you rather spend your time with a highly competitive or a less competitive friend and why?

E: It depends. I like opposites; that's why I think that we're good friends because she'll go out there and get things done. Whereas if I was with someone who didn't care like me—sometimes I get frustrated by people who don't care; just pick a way. She would be like, let's do it this way and I appreciate that. I feel like my boyfriend is like that and people who I surround myself with in general. But then I have guy friends who aren't.

M: It really depends on the thing too. With Caley, if I'm working out or something, sometimes I'll want her to be with me just to make me push myself harder. For example, a 5k I ran, may or may not have been hung over—was I hung over?

E: No, you didn't even drink that night.

M: No I didn't drink the night before! ...I'm running with this girl in my sorority who is the fastest girl I've seen in my entire life, she's like running with her hair down, blowing in the wind, effortless and I'm like dying. I thought I was gonna walk the 5k and she pushed me so hard; literally after 3 miles, I get to the finish line and vomit afterwards. Literally 30 seconds afterwards, I vomit.

E: Someone in Festival was like oh, there's the girl who won...

M:...and the girl who puked, right behind her. I pushed myself too hard because I was with someone who was ultra-competitive like me and I wanted to be like them. In that case, I would have liked to be with someone who was less competitive and said we could walk, like who cares if we win or not and I would have preferred it because I went there thinking I was going to walk.

E: I would've been like, Yeah, let's walk.

M: Yeah, if you were there, I could've walked, whereas Kerry who I was running with, was like, keep going, keep going, you can do it; we're gonna win...and I'm dying.

I: Did you win?

M: No, of course not. Me and her? No. Caley, our roommate, won and finished in like 24 minutes. She won a shirt and socks and I took the socks. She wore the shirt today actually. I sent a picture to my mom: won a race! And she's like, No you didn't. Nah, these are Caley's socks, so technically I got the prize, right? I kind of won, right? I like to think so.

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