

AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Marilyn J. Barlow-Pieterick for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Family Resource Management presented on October 4, 2002.

Title: In Their Own Words: Divorced and Widowed Women, Retirement, and Friendships

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Abstract approved\_\_

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Friends benefit both our psychological and our emotional well-being by increasing overall happiness, life satisfaction, and a positive sense of self among women. Often, however, friendships decrease in the later years. The purpose of this study is to learn more about divorced or widowed, retired women and their friendships, specifically, whether friendships changed from work to retirement.

Friendships have been clearly identified by women as a significant component of retirement life. The importance of friendship increases with age, and friends have been found to buffer single women in particular from becoming isolated in retirement.

The sample recruited for this study consisted of 20 single, career women who had been retired between five and ten years and who were not coresiding with another person. This study utilized in-depth, qualitative interviewing to enable participants to define themselves and their experiences.

Overall, it appeared as though these women were very satisfied with retirement and considered it to be a positive experience. Even though workplace friendships had gradually been lost since retirement, this loss was considered normal and

former coworkers were considered to be on different paths from the retirees. Workplace friends were often not whom the women felt closest to or socialized with preretirement; consequently this gradual drifting and loss of workplace friendships was not considered problematic. The women overall were making new friends.

Various types of discord among friends were also reported. Discord had negative affects but did not necessarily cause dissolution of the friendship. Betrayal was often an incentive to immediately end a friendship; however, betrayal was uncommon.

Friends played a major role in these women's lives. The emotional aspects of the women's friendships were reported to be most important. Friends helped these women feel valued and provided a substantial amount of support to one another. The findings of this study should assure those divorced or widowed women who may be nearing retirement that the adjustment to retirement need not be difficult, especially if one has supportive friends.

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In Their Own Words: Divorced and Widowed Women, Retirement, and  
Friendships

by  
Marilyn J. Barlow-Pieterick

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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to two very special people: my father, Lee I. Barlow, whose support was invaluable and my friend, Takashi Yamamoto, whose soul is soaring.

# In Their Own Words: Divorced and Widowed Women, Retirement, and Friendships

## INTRODUCTION

Friends benefit both our psychological and our emotional well-being by increasing overall happiness, life satisfaction, and a positive sense of self, among women in particular (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Crohan & Antonucci, 1989). Friends tend to be similar to one another in key social/demographic characteristics (e.g., age, class position, marital status, gender) (Allan & Adams, 1989). In general, the numbers of friendships decrease in the later years (Adams, 1986; Blieszner, 1989; De Vries, 1991), as do friendship contacts. The purpose of this study is to learn more about divorced or widowed retired women and their friendships. Specifically, I want to learn more about these friendship networks and whether they change from work to retirement. I want to know if any changes in these friendship networks are based on the retirees' actual decision to maintain specific friendships over others after retirement; and, if so, what criteria are used in the selection process.

Siegel (1993) found that the proportions of married younger adults increase sharply until reaching a peak at about age 35, plateau through about age 45, and then decline steadily. This decline in marriage in later life is due mainly to

widowhood, along with a growing prevalence in divorce, meaning that a large number of people, particularly women, grow older without a spouse. Pillemer and Glasgow (2000, p. 26) reported that, "Women's greater longevity, their tendency to marry men somewhat older than themselves, and men's higher remarriage rates after divorce or widowhood all contribute to the gender differences in marital status."

Sixty percent of women are in the workforce in their early 50s, whereas only about fourteen percent are still employed by their mid-to-late 60's (Hayward & Liu, 1992). Women obtain not only economic independence and security from their participation in the labor force; they also gain friendships (Birnbaum, 1975; Fischer & Oliner, 1983; Szinovacz, 1983; Waite & Harrison, 1992).

Prior to retirement, women's friendships in the workplace are a meaningful and very real aspect of their work situation (O'Connor, 1992). In her study of women who retired from careers as Housing Authority Assistant Managers in a major metropolitan city in the United States, Francis (1990, p. 410) found that women coworkers "...esteemed each other's abilities, problem solving skills and intellect; encouraged competence and maturity; dealt with parallel work situations"; and "...shared a common frame of reference about the workplace." For divorced and widowed women in particular, work friends were a source of practical and emotional support and help during times of unanticipated stress and crises.

Professional women are often reluctant to retire, and one of the reasons for this reluctance is the expected loss of friends and business peers (Prentis, 1980; Richardson & Kilty, 1992; Szinovacz, 1983). In studies by Allan and Adams (1989) and Hanson and Wapner (1994), retired women reported a loss of contact and, in some cases, the demise of friendships maintained principally in the work context. Fox (1977) also found that retired women had smaller social networks than did employed women.

Friendships have been clearly identified by women as a significant component of retirement life (Dorfman & Moffett, 1987; Price, 1998). In fact, Price (1998), found that the importance of friendship increased and that friends shielded women, in particular single women, from isolation after retirement. Would we not expect, as reported by Keith (1982), that widowed or divorced retired women, in particular, would place a high priority on establishing, and then maintaining, friendships that would carry over from the workplace into retirement?

Friendships do not simply exist; they must be maintained (Antonucci & Jackson, 1987; Dykstra, 1990; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). When a focus of activity, such as paid work is lost, the relationships supported within that activity often fall away if they are not strong enough to motivate the participants to deliberately maintain them (Feld & Carter, 1998). Socioemotional selectivity theory, developed by Laura Carstensen (1991, 1993) states that as people age, their social interactions

are increasingly motivated by emotion and decreasingly motivated by the need to obtain information or to spend time with social partners who are unknown or unlike them. Given this perspective, I would expect that retired women choose specific relationships to maintain that are more important to them emotionally, while choosing to let other relationships that are less important (e.g., information-based friendships) fall away.

Unfortunately, research, particularly qualitative research, concerning the importance of friendship to divorced or widowed women's success in retirement is extremely limited (Karp, 1989; Price, 1998). The contribution of this study will be to provide a better understanding of divorced and widowed retired women and their friends.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will utilize in-depth qualitative interviews to address the following research questions:

1. How do divorced or widowed women describe the changes in their friendships as they transition from work to retirement?
2. What are the factors leading to the drifting or end of friendships for divorced or widowed women after retirement?

3. How do divorced or widowed women describe the meaning of postretirement friendships? How do they maintain friendships after retirement?

#### DEFINITIONS

Retirement: the end of full-time employment from a career or occupation after at least ten years of unbroken employment.

Career women: women with continuous employment histories who are self-described as having a career or occupation.

Single women: women who are currently widowed or divorced and have been in this status for at least five years prior to retirement.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter begins with a discussion of socioemotional selectivity theory developed by Laura Carstensen (1991, 1993). This is followed by a review of literature on friendship patterns among women, workplace friendships and retirement, the maintenance of friendships among women after retirement, and friendship dissolution. Finally, I describe how the proposed research will contribute to the literature.

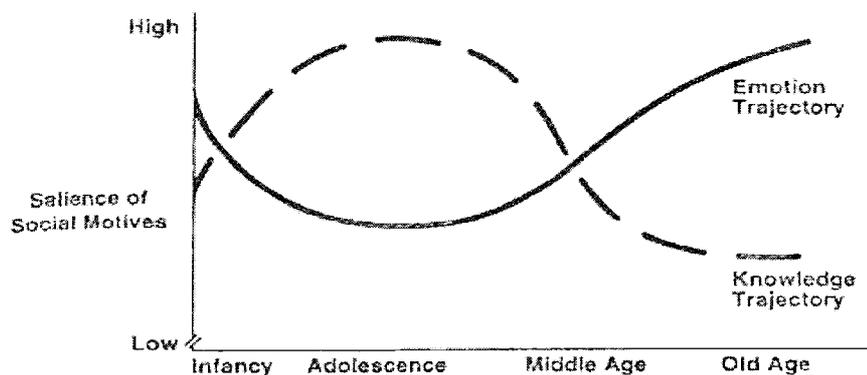
### SOCIOEMOTIONAL SELECTIVITY THEORY

Carstensen (1991, 1993), in her description of socioemotional selectivity theory, states that as people age their social interactions are increasingly motivated by emotion and decreasingly motivated by the need to obtain information or the need to spend time with social partners who are unknown or unlike themselves. Carstensen believes that social interaction is motivated throughout the life course by wide ranging goals (e.g., instrumental, the acquisition of information, the development and maintenance of self-concept, and the regulation of emotion). From these goals, two expansive categories of social motives follow dissimilar

developmental trajectories, specifically, a knowledge trajectory and an emotion trajectory (Carstensen, Gross, & Fung, 1997) (See Figure 1 next page).

The knowledge trajectory involves obtaining information about the self and the social world of the self. Knowledge goals are long-term and involve the search for information, social comparison, and achievement. Social contact during a period of increased knowledge seeking involves preparation for the future, with less emphasis on positive affect. The knowledge trajectory begins early in infancy, peaks in

Figure 1: Idealized model of socioemotional selectivity theory's conception of the salience of two classes of social motives across the life span



From "The Social Contest of Emotion," by L. L. Carstensen, J. Gross, & H. Fung, 1997, *Annual Review of Geriatrics and Gerontology*, 17, p. 331. Copyright 2002 by Springer Publishing Company, Inc., New York 10012. Used by permission.

adolescence, and then gradually declines over time, as people learn tactics for gaining information for themselves (e.g., learning to read) and as their knowledge amasses (Carstensen, 1993). With age our personal stores of information increase and we become different from one another (Dannefer & Perlmutter, 1990) to the point that fewer social partners can serve as resources for new information. The changes in information acquisition over time are not inevitable or caused by age, but they do commonly co-occur with aging. When the future is seen as largely open-ended, knowledge-related goals are foremost because they prepare individuals to gain resources for an undetermined future (Fung, Carstensen, & Lutz, 1999).

The emotion trajectory, on the other hand, is made up of motives to feel good, to draw emotional meaning from life, to institute intimacy, and to confirm the self (Carstensen et al., 1997). Although important throughout life, these goals are most important during infancy and early childhood and then again in later life. When the future is perceived as limited, as in later life, emotion-related goals again become a priority in relation to knowledge-related goals because contentment is prioritized over accruing knowledge for an uncertain future (Fung et al., 1999). The central tenet of socioemotional selectivity theory is that goal selections, be it knowledge or emotion, are driven by the temporal framework.

When knowledge-related goals are the priority, unknown and larger numbers of social partners are desired due to their potential for new information. When emotional goals are the priority, familiar social partners are preferred because they are more likely to provide expected emotional experiences and feelings of social embeddedness than strangers or those less familiar (Carstensen et al., 1997). Given that most people with whom we interact are acquaintances versus intimate social partners, a goal shift toward emotional goals will tend to include fewer social contacts with older adults most often choosing social partners who are known to them (Carstensen, 1995). Carstensen (1993) views this goal shift as adaptive and believes that actually, a decrease in social interaction begins early in life.

Carstensen (1993) interviewed 28 women and 22 men to assess change in social contact and emotional closeness in adulthood. Data from the interviews were coded for each of six categories of social relationships: acquaintances, siblings, parents, close friends, children, and spouses on (a) frequency of interaction, (b) emotional closeness in relationships, and (c) satisfaction. Carstensen's first hypothesis was that social contact with acquaintances would be highest in early adulthood and then decline slowly throughout middle adulthood, with later life showing the greatest decline of all six social relationship categories. Carstensen predicted that this decrease in social contact would be due to selective processes. Her second hypothesis was that emotional closeness would remain stable or increase within

significant relationships throughout adulthood even if rates of interaction declined. Results revealed that reductions in social contact occurred in early adulthood and only within acquaintance-type relationships, often only sources of information. Social contact was maintained or increased within more intimate relationships. Frequency of contact did not assure emotional closeness and older adults began reducing the size of their social networks long before they reached old age.

A study conducted by Lang and Carstensen (1994) of 156 community dwelling and institutionalized older adults between the ages of 70 and 104 was designed to compare social network composition, social support, and feelings of social embeddedness among people with and without nuclear families (e.g., spouse, child, grandchild). Using a modified version of the convoy of social support questionnaire, developed by Kahn and Antonucci (1980), Lang and Carstensen discovered that those with nuclear families had smaller numbers of other kin, friends, and acquaintances or neighbors in their networks. Those without nuclear families had larger numbers of all types of relationships in their convoys, other than nuclear family relationships, and they tended to have more non-nuclear kin in their inner circles. And, if subjects had approximately three very close social partners within their convoy, they reported feeling socially embedded at the same rate as those with living nuclear family members. The oldest old had fewer acquaintances in their social networks but the same number of emotionally close social partners as

their younger counterparts, revealing that their emotional ties were maintained but became more exclusive over time (Carstensen et al., 1997). The size of the social networks of the oldest old were decreased due to fewer acquaintances but not fewer confidants, resulting in dense, emotionally close social networks in old age.

Carstensen and Fredrickson (1998) tested socioemotional selectivity theory with young gay men of similar age but dissimilar health status (HIV negative; HIV positive, asymptomatic; HIV positive, symptomatic). This study was conducted to determine whether younger people would choose to spend time with emotionally close (similar to older adults who conceive social opportunities as limited) versus novel social partners (similar to younger adults who conceive social opportunities as open-ended in terms of time) when time was considered to be limited. The HIV negative subsample chose their social partners based on future contact, information seeking and affective potential, common choices among people who see their social opportunities as open-ended. Conversely, both HIV positive subsamples (asymptomatic and symptomatic) chose social partners based on affective potential. This is similar to choices made by older adults who see their social opportunities as limited. Carstensen and Fredrickson maintained that regardless of age, emotional and informational goals are dependent on perceived social, psychological, and cognitive conditions.

According to socioemotional selectivity theory, (Carstensen, 1991, 1993, 1995), the perception of approaching temporal endings, not chronological age, deepens the emotional need to spend time with significant others. By limiting time spent with peripheral social network members, individuals have more time available to optimize their emotional experiences with people who are most important to them (Fung et al., 1999). Fung et al. also compared samples in the United States and Hong Kong. The authors found that older people, in contrast to younger people, preferred familiar social partners. When older people were asked to imagine that the future for them was time-expanded the previous desire for familiar social partners disappeared. When asked to imagine a future that was time constrained, younger people indicated a desire for familiar social partners, showing that social goals are changeable as reflected by the social partner preferences described. These authors reported that social preferences in Hong Kong differed both before and after the 1997 transfer of Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China. They found that one year prior to the transfer, older people retained preferences for familiar social partners, whereas younger people did not. Two months before the transfer, both age groups showed preferences for familiar social partners, whereas one year after the transfer, younger people exhibited another goal shift back to novel social partners and older Hong Kong people maintained their preference for familiar social partners.

Several studies provide additional support for Carstensen's theory. The Duke Longitudinal Study, for example, reported a slow decline in social interaction beginning in middle age and accelerating in very old age (Palmore, 1981). Harvey and Singleton (1989), Lawton, Moss, and Fulcomer (1987), and Lee and Markides (1990) also reported this decline in social interaction in later life. After an analysis of interviews gathered over a 14-year period as part of the Berkeley Intergenerational Studies, Field and Minkler (1988) reported that there was strong evidence that older adults experienced continuity in terms of social contact and commitment to relationships over time.

The central tenet of socioemotional selectivity theory is that the ranking and execution of behaviors toward meeting specific goals is based on the time that is perceived as available to accomplish those goals. This assessment of time aids people in balancing long- and short-term goals, as they attempt to adapt effectively to their particular situations (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999).

The regulation of emotion becomes the main social goal as older adults, in particular, begin to sense that their social opportunities are limited and their focus shifts to present, immediate needs rather than long-term goals (Carstensen, 1995; Carstensen & Fredrickson, 1992). Long-term friends and loved ones typically will be chosen for social interaction because they tend to provide positive emotional experiences. Narrowing the range of social partners allows people with limited time

to invest in selected social relationships. Researchers have found that the friendship networks of retirees decrease in size from pre- to post-retirement (Depner & Ingersoll, 1982; Fox, 1977; Price, 1998). This study attempted to determine whether the change in network size for retired single women was due to selection, as would be argued by Carstensen, or if there is another undetermined process guiding the change in friendship network size.

#### WOMEN AND FRIENDSHIP

Friendships play a significant role, both personally and socially, in the lives of most women (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Chiriboga, Coho, Stein, & Roberts, 1979). Friends provide numerous resources to one another that are both helpful (e.g., sharing information) and emotionally supportive (e.g., providing affection) (Shea, Thompson, & Blieszner, 1988). Friendships have been reported to be more important than kin relationships to older adults (Thompson & Spanier, 1983). Among older women, close relationships are more satisfying than casual relationships and oldest friendships appear to be the closest emotionally (Adams, 1997).

Friendship networks of older women exhibit moderate to high levels of homogeneity. For example, friends are often of the same approximate age,

socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic background, and geographic location (Adams, 1986, 1997; Adams & Blieszner, 1989; Cantor, 1979; Chown, 1981; Dkystra, 1990).

Armstrong and Goldsteen (1990) found that the average network size for older women was 21 people; 11 of whom were friends. Younger women (under age 75) had both a higher average number of network members and a higher average number of friends than older women had. In contrast, Shea et al. (1988) found that women's friendship networks were just as likely to expand in later life as they were to contract. One factor often responsible for changes in friendship network size among older women is marital status. Studies have shown that, due to divorce or widowhood, women lose not only their partner relationship, but potentially some of their married couple friendships as well (Allan & Adams, 1989; Dykstra, 1993). Due to the fact that women tend not to remarry after divorce or widowhood, friends can and often do provide needed social support (Bell, 1981). Additionally, there is strength gained between friends who have shared important feelings, thoughts, and experiences.

## WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIPS AND RETIREMENT

Andrew and Montague (1998) found that workplace friendships provided support, encouragement, and stimulation for women and the companionship shared was not just confined to work-based activities. This is particularly important given that employment substantially decreases the time that women have available for friendships outside of the workforce (Pogrebin, 1987; Waite & Harrison, 1992).

Francis (1990) interviewed five women, all professional, college-educated, Housing Authority Managers, who began uninterrupted careers in the late 1930s and then retired in the mid-1970s. Francis found that these women coworkers valued each other's abilities, problem-solving skills, and intellect, and they also encouraged competence and maturity within each other. As workplace friends, these women allayed each other's concerns about leaving young children with caregivers and shared experiences about the double shift of work in both the labor force and the home. The women's friendships were initially based on their common occupational status, experience, and values but grew in significance and intimacy due to shared personal feelings and help during stressful times and crises.

Ward (1979) reported that for single women, in particular, the work place was an important source of friendships. Bell (1981) found that women coworkers developed interests in each other's activities, both in- and outside of the workplace,

and were available to help each other whenever needed. Single women also were found to receive more of their social validity from work than did their married coworkers (Veroff, Douvan, & Kulka, 1981).

Babchuk and Anderson (1989) investigated contexts in which older women were likely to develop friendships. Their findings emphasized the importance of proximity for friendship development. In order of reported importance, respondents developed friendships in their neighborhoods, at work, at church, and through volunteer work. Feld (1981) has referred to these contexts, in which friendships are formed, as *foci of activity*. The focus of activity (Feld, p. 1016) is described as the “social, psychological, legal or physical entity around which joint activities are organized.” Feld and Carter (1998) maintain that if the focus of activity is lost, the relationships supported within that activity often fall away unless they are strong enough to motivate the participants to deliberately maintain them. Consequently, friendships that have been supported by interactions in the workplace may be at risk after retirement.

Professional women are often less interested in retirement than men, due in part to their expected loss of friends and business peers and the subsequent need to establish new support networks after retirement (Allan & Adams, 1989; Karp, 1989; Levy, 1980; Prentis, 1980; Szinovacz, 1983). In a study of 234 African-

American professional women, Richardson and Kilty (1992) found that workers who relied on coworkers for social interaction continued working longer.

Antonucci (1985) found that there seemed to be continuity in workplace friendships both pre- and postretirement, however, additional research on women and retirement has indicated that women's friendship networks decrease postretirement. Depner and Ingersoll (1982), Fox (1977), and Price (1998), all found that although women had an extensive range of supportive relationships prior to retirement, the network of business friends and colleagues shrank after retirement. Prentis (1980) found that retired women viewed their loss of work friendship negatively. Allan and Adams (1989) reported that the loss of work friendships with retirement was sometimes adequately compensated for by other friends and sometimes was not. Retired women who attempted to replace interactions lost due to retirement with increased family interactions were not particularly successful (Szinovacz, 1983). This was due to the fact that social contacts made in the work place were typically same-sex friends and/or confidants who filled unique social needs.

In contrast, women interviewed by Francis (1990) stated that their long-term, work-based friendships provided a bridge linking the old self with the new. For them, the retirement transition led to a reaffirmation of work-based friendships versus discontinuity. The women felt that new friendships, made after retirement,

could not replace their work friendships of almost fifty years. They also believed that their experiences of sharing a major work role were unique and could not easily be understood by people from different occupational backgrounds or by women who had never worked.

Friendship has been found to be significant for women in their successful adjustment to retirement (Depner & Ingersoll, 1982; Jacobs, 1990; Price, 1998; Szinovacz, 1992; Wingrove & Slevin, 1991). The friendships of retired women often mediate stresses experienced during retirement and consequently, for many women, increase in importance (Price, 1998). Contact with friends was more important for retirement satisfaction in women than was contact with family (Dorfman & Moffett, 1987).

Many women spend their retirement years alone, due either to divorce or widowhood. In addition, families tend to be smaller in size and today's children often live mobile lives, frequently at great distances from their parents. This leaves the kinship support systems of retired women small, nonexistent, or not readily available, and increases the need for informal support systems based on nonkin relationships (Carp, 1997).

## MAINTENANCE OF FRIENDSHIPS AMONG WOMEN AFTER RETIREMENT

Being a friend requires not only purposeful development efforts on both sides but also maintenance activities (Blieszner, 1989), dependent on the expenditure of time, effort, and other resources (Lynch, 1989). Friendships are temporal and change in characteristics and importance as other aspects of life unfold (Lopata, 1994). One of the challenges of retirement, reported by Lopata, was the difficulty of maintaining workplace friendships after the friendship settings vanished, even though some retired women found that they had more time for socializing than was possible while they were employed (Allan & Adams, 1989; Richardson & Kilty, 1991).

Matthews (1986) found that individuals maintained some of their postretirement friendships because of personal commitment and others because of favorable social circumstances. Those who maintained friendships through maintenance strategies such as letter writing, telephoning, and visiting did so because of high levels of satisfaction with their relationships. Adams (1986), Matthews (1986), and Shea et al. (1988) also found that friendships endured in spite of infrequent contact and geographic distance.

Shea et al. (1988) surveyed 27 residents (24 women, 3 men) of a new retirement community to learn about friendship formation. They found that the respondents

used different strategies for old versus new friendships. Conveying status or esteem was essential to both new and old friendships. Expressions of love or affection were assumed in old friendships, whereas new friendships required displays of affection to promote their development and maintenance (Blieszner, 1989; Shea et al., 1988). Respondents valued advice from old friends, but information provided by new friends was based on current events and impersonal topics. Old friends exchanged help as needed, but assistance exchange was not significant for relationship maintenance between new friends. For those new friends who did provide assistance to one another, a concern about reciprocity was evident that was not visible between old friends (Blieszner, 1989; Shea et al., 1988).

Although friendships and activities often change with retirement, overall social engagement typically does not (Atchley, 1971, 1987; Multran & Reitzes, 1981). Many retirees reported that they compensated for the reduced interaction with coworkers by strengthening existing relations with other friends or establishing new friendships with other retirees.

Jewson (1982) found that long-term workplace friendships were maintained after retirement. Women stayed in touch with workplace friends through social events for a minimum of six years after retirement began. Contacts with workplace friends ranged from lunch dates and visiting to more organized, regular gatherings. Several retired women continued to attend office parties after retirement, especially

subsequent retirement and holiday events. Professional women, in particular, kept in touch with friends by letter writing.

## FRIENDSHIP DISSOLUTION

Johnson's study (as cited in Blieszner, 1989) found that if individuals became dissatisfied with a friendship, no longer identified themselves as strongly attached to the friend, and did not feel obligated to maintain the interaction, personal commitments to the friendship declined and the dissolution process became evident. Interestingly, older adults rarely report actively ending a friendship (Blieszner, 1989); rather, they tend to attribute the loss of the friendship to external causes. Matthews (1986) noted that respondents surveyed about their dissolved friendships reported the friendships just "faded away" and it was believed that this fading away resulted from changing life-styles and pathways. Because these relationships had not ended based on some sort of disharmony, respondents felt they could revitalize the relationships if opportunities arose.

## SUMMARY

Friends are very important to women, both emotionally and socially. Women share intimate information and participate in instrumental and social activities with their friends. Additionally, women and their friends are often similar to one another; for example, they tend to be of the same age, gender, socioeconomic status, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. This allows women the advantage of appropriate support when most needed over the life-span.

Women who are ever-single, separated, divorced, or widowed are employed at higher rates than married women (McPherson, 1990). There are twice the numbers of divorced women over the age of 65 in the workforce as there are married women of the same age (U.S. Department of Labor, 1993). There is much to learn about these unmarried women in relation to the friendships they maintain or lose at the time of retirement. Unmarried women often find the workplace to be an important source of friendships. Workplace friends provide encouragement, understanding, and support as unmarried women juggle both work and family responsibilities. Older unmarried women may or may not have family responsibilities, but for some, family responsibilities can be very intense. For example, those who are grandmothers may provide help to their children with child care and/or parenting of grandchildren, guidance, assistance in emergencies, emotional support, financial

assistance, and the maintenance of family rituals and traditions (Troll, 1983).

Women, as nurturers, maintain strong links to both younger and older generations and it is not unusual for women to have responsibility for their parents, their children, and their grandchildren (Riekse & Holstege, 1996). Additionally, women provide seventy-five percent of all long-term care in America (Brody, 1990).

Often women find that their friendship networks shrink after retirement. For divorced or widowed women, who probably lost friends with their change in marital status, an additional loss of workplace friends may be very difficult. Some women report that they make new friends after retirement, but this is not the case for everyone. This study will help us to know more about the importance of workplace friendships to divorced or widowed retired women, and the extent to which they are maintained.

The current literature on women, friendship and retirement is sketchy on what influences the change in, or perseverance of, women's postretirement friendship networks. Part of the challenge to maintaining friendships after retirement for single women may be that workplace friends are not always the same age. For example, younger working women may have young children at home and may find it harder to maintain these friendships outside of the workplace. Retired women may find that they prefer to socialize during the day versus after work and this may challenge the maintenance of the friendship. Additionally, some workplace friends may not

have been close enough friends to maintain the relationships after retirement. The lost focus of activity may leave both parties involved without the impetus to maintain the friendship over time. I seek to learn which friendships women choose to maintain and why. I also seek to learn which friendships they choose not to maintain and why.

Socioemotional selectivity theory describes the selection process people enact as they see their lives being limited in terms of time. People are goal directed and depending on whether the goal is instrumental, informational, or emotional, they make decisions to interact with whomever can assist in making the needed goal a reality. By the time a person is of retirement age, the foremost goal is emotional fulfillment because informational and instrumental goals have generally been met. Carstensen and Fredrickson (1998) maintain that older adults' emotional need to spend time with others intensifies when they perceive their social opportunities to be limited. By restricting time spent with peripheral friendship network members, they have more time available to optimize their emotional experiences with people who are most important to them, often those long-time friends who are most similar to themselves. This study should help determine whether retired women consciously *decide* which friendships to maintain, as Carstensen suggests, or whether there are other factors instigating the loss of friendships from work to retirement.

In spite of the increase in numbers of retired women, the effect of retirement on women's friendship networks remains essentially unknown (Depner & Ingersoll, 1982; Francis, 1990; Karp, 1989; Price, 1998). There is still a lack of research on women's retirement and generalizations from studies of men are not justified (Carp, 1997). This study will help to fill that void.

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to learn more about divorced or widowed retired women and their friendships. In-depth, qualitative interviewing was utilized to enable participants to define their friendships in regard to their experiences.

The goal of qualitative research is to bring to light particular types of meaning or experience (personal, setting-based, sociocultural) through conversation regarding experiences as well as the interviewee's interpretation of events and social occurrences (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). However, subjectivity or individuality is not the only goal. Qualitative research can focus on the macro level via insights into the cultural construction of life experiences. Cultural beliefs and values not only instill and shape experiences, ideals, and motivation, they also shape how individuals make sense of and respond to events in their lives.

Osmond and Thorne (1993) have documented the need to investigate and report on the voices and experiences of women. By listening to women, existing voids in our knowledge of women's diversity will be reduced (Price, 1998).

## SAMPLE

### Sample criteria

This sample consisted of 20 divorced or widowed, career women who had been retired between two and ten years and who were not coresiding with another person. The criteria of at least two years postretirement was chosen in regard to findings by Atchley (1976) who maintained that recent retirees could potentially bias research data due to possible adjustment problems or the *honeymoon period* that frequently follows the actual retirement date. Although the retirement transition is usually predictable and planned, individuals who have different retirement contexts can create disparities in how this transition unfolds (Floyd et al., 1992). A limitation of ten years postretirement was selected to assure that any potential friendship changes from work to retirement had not been forgotten.

Because of the potentially different social support networks among women who are married, I targeted women who were currently widowed or divorced. Keith (1989) wrote that retirement diminished a major source of friendships, especially for the unmarried, who relied on the workplace for socializing opportunities. Additionally, coresidence with relatives had been found to serve as an outlet for socializing and confiding, thus reducing retirees' need to expand their social

networks after retirement (Szinovacz, 1992). My concern was that coresidence might either constrain retirees' time for social activities or satisfy their need for social contacts. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, only women who were living alone were interviewed.

### Sample recruitment

This project grew out of an early study on women and possible status and friendship changes after retirement. Originally, my research partner and I sampled women who had been retired two to 10 years, were single (including never married, divorced, and widowed women), and who identified themselves as being career women prior to retirement. We interviewed ten women in the original study. When I designed this study, I decided to interview only women who had been retired two to ten years, who were widowed or divorced, and who were living alone. These changes were chosen in order to remove potential confounding issues from the data to be collected.

I began my sample recruitment by reviewing a list of ten women who had been interviewed previously regarding this topic to see if any of them fit the new sampling criteria. Seven of the women from the previous study did not fit, either because they were now retired more than ten years or they were currently co-

residing with a relative. Three women, however, did fit the current sample criteria. These three women were then invited to participate in a second interview because new interview questions had been added to the original interview questions. All three eligible women from the original study agreed to be interviewed for this study. From those three women, names of additional women who fit the sampling criteria were requested and subsequently provided. Other retired women known to me but who did not fit the sampling criteria were also contacted to see if they knew of and would be comfortable providing the names of women who might fit the sampling criteria and who might be interested in participating in the study. If names were given, I asked the women providing the names to contact these potential study participants to inform them that I had been given their names and would be calling them in a few days to provide more information about the study. At that time, I would also answer any questions they might have and inquire as to whether they would be interested in participating in this study. I would also verify that they fit the sampling criteria at the time of that call (Patton, 1990) and, if interested, set up a time and place for the interview to take place. This sampling technique is known as snowball sampling (McCall & Simmons, 1969, as cited by Rubin & Babbie, 2001).

The snowball sampling technique is most useful when members of a particular population are needed for a study but are difficult to locate. The snowball sampling technique begins with the researcher collecting data on a few members of the target

population, whom the researcher has been able to identify. The sample then expands as the previously identified individuals provide referrals of other members of the population who are known to them (McCall & Simmons, 1969, as cited by Rubin & Babbie, 2001). This not only helps the researcher gather a sample, but also, because the original contact *introduces* the researcher to the population, the researcher gains not only entry to the population but also future cooperation (Berg, 1995). This type of sampling strategy is a nonprobability, or nonrandom, technique in that members of the target population are not chosen randomly for the study, making the results of the study difficult, if not impossible, to generalize to the population. The snowball sampling technique can also result in data that are biased because of the potential similarity of the respondents, so snowball sampling is most appropriate for exploratory purposes (Rubin & Babbie, 2001).

Five of the interviews were conducted in Nevada, facilitated by a woman who had been interviewed in the original study. This original woman identified one other woman and contacted this woman herself to set up the interview. Another woman, who did not fit the sampling criteria but who had several friends who did, was contacted by this same original interviewee. Three additional interviews were set up and conducted. The remaining fifteen interviews were done locally. Two interviews were conducted after contacting two women who had originally been interviewed for an earlier study on this topic. Seven interviews were done with

women who were identified using a snowball sampling strategy, by three separate women who did not fit the sampling criteria but had friends who did. Six additional women saw an advertisement for the study left at either a health club location frequented by older adults or local senior center and contacted me to indicate that they were interested in being interviewed.

There are no precise rules for determining sample size in qualitative research (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995; Patton, 1990; Price, 1998; Rubinstein, 1994). The size of the sample depends on “what the researcher wants to know, why the researcher is asking, and what will be done with the results of the study” (Price, 1998, p. 33). Data are gathered until *saturation* or *redundancy* is accomplished and the researcher determines that additional data will no longer contribute to information gained (Price, 1998). One strategy is to specify the probable number of subjects who will be needed for the study (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995). In practice, from 12 to 26 people in each study cell are common. For this study, 20 women were interviewed.

#### Sample description

The twenty women making up the sample for this study ranged in age from 63-75 years old. The average age of the respondents was 69 years. Regarding marital

status, six of the women had been divorced; seven had been widowed; two had been divorced, remarried, then widowed; three had been widowed, remarried, then divorced; one had been separated since 1971; and one had been divorced and then had lost a long-time partner to death. Of the twenty women, thirteen had been employed in professional positions (e.g. management analyst, teacher, child custody evaluator, dietician, librarian) and seven had been employed in clerical/staff positions (e.g., head secretary, court clerk, inventory control clerk, payroll clerk).

#### PREINTERVIEW CONTACTS

When I initially contacted each woman by telephone, I identified myself and explained briefly why the study was being conducted, what the study encompassed, and why their input would be beneficial. I also assured each woman that all information provided by her would be kept confidential, that with her approval each interview would be tape recorded and then transcribed verbatim, and that they would remain anonymous, as would any identifying information they provided.

Prior to the interview, the women were asked to mentally reproduce two friendship networks: one for friendships preretirement and one for friendships postretirement. Each network could contain up to 15 friends and consist of any combination of the following: (a) the woman's very closest friends; (b) friends who

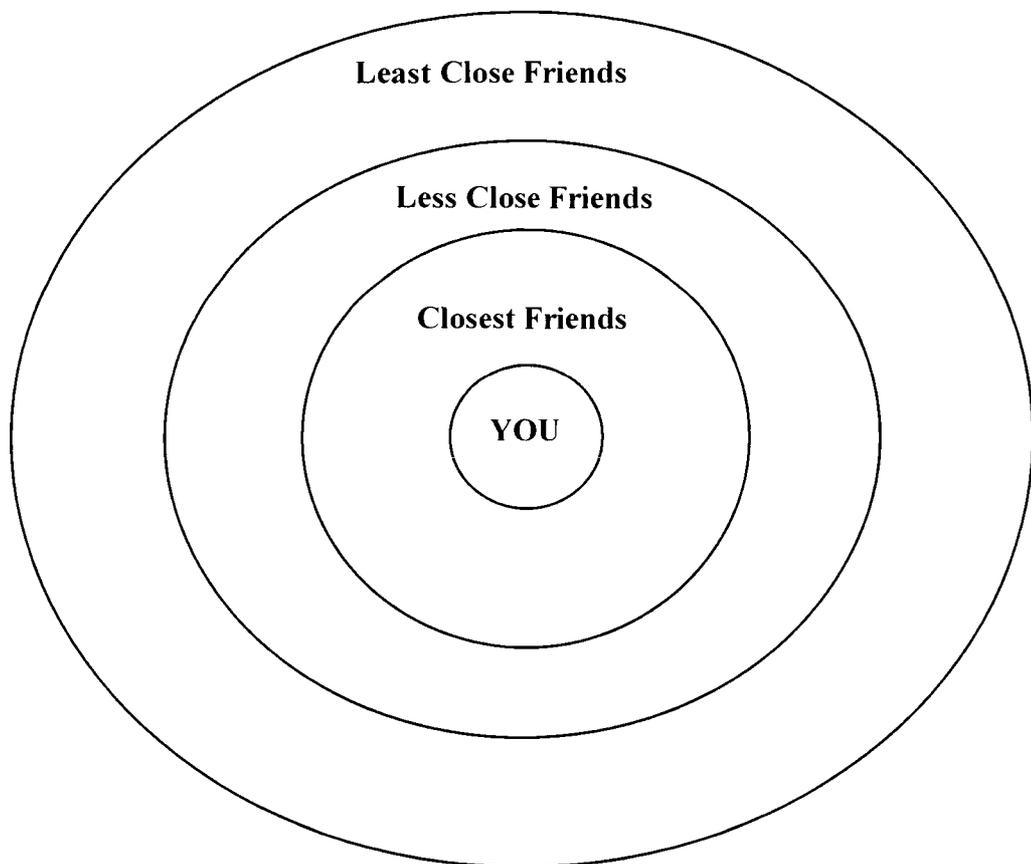
were considered close, but not closest to the woman; and (c) friends who were considered less close than the friends listed in categories (a) and (b), but who were still considered to be in the woman's friendship network. I also explained that the same friends might be in both pre- and postretirement categories and that the preretirement friendship network might contain people who had not been coworkers. I stressed that there were no right or wrong answers, rather I was interested in learning more about women and their friends, and that if at any time the woman was uncomfortable with a question, she could request that we move to a subsequent question.

This framework for considering people within a social network was originally developed by Kahn and Antonucci (1980). The convoy model of social relations stresses the importance of people's social relationships, both friend and family; how these relationships are often longitudinal in character; and how relationships can be variable, in regard to both individuals and the types of relationship involved (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). Within the convoy model, people are described as living their lives surrounded by people who are important to them, to whom they give or receive social support, and who have an influence on their lives. This influence can be either or both simultaneously positive or negative. The convoy model is dynamic in that the social network making up the convoy may change over time as personal

(e.g., age, health) and situational changes (e.g., retirement, geographical relocation) interact to influence the makeup of the convoy (Crohan & Antonucci, 1989).

The modified schematic of the convoy model (Figure 2 below) shows a series of concentric circles with the innermost circle designated for the focal person or respondent. Around the inner circle are three larger circles representing the woman's friendship convoy. People differ in terms of their network size and the level of closeness they feel to network members (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980).

Figure 2: Modified schematic of the convoy of social relations model.



A woman's friendship convoy will include friends who are important to her, but will not necessarily include all the people known to her.

#### MODIFIED CONVOY SCHEMATIC FOR FRIENDSHIP

For the purposes of this study, membership in the first concentric circle, or the circle closest to the woman, is limited to those people who are the woman's closest friends. Membership within this circle of the convoy is typically stable over time, with death of a member or major betrayal being the only change catalysts (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980; Lang, Staudinger, & Carstensen, 1998).

The middle concentric circle is made up of important, but less intimate friends (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). The woman is less dependent on the support provided by these people and if either member loses or changes the role that initially brought the two in contact, the relationship between the two may not be sustained. These relationships are less stable than the relationships in the first concentric circle and substitutions in may be made in this circle when new people fill the roles vacated by others.

The third or outermost concentric circle is composed of people who are least close to the woman, but who have nonetheless been identified as support providers for the woman. Membership in this circle often includes people whose have

achieved a level of importance beyond basic role requirement to the woman.

Membership in this circle is often not stable and is most often role dependent, so if the role of one of the two members changes, the membership in the friendship convoy ends. According to Kahn and Antonucci (1980), the boundaries between any of these circles are permeable and members can move between circles as well as into and out of the convoy over time. However as noted above, movement of friends into, out of, and between circles tends to be limited to the outer circle in particular and the middle circle occasionally, but seldom involves the inner circle of friends.

After providing a thorough explanation of this framework that the women would use to sort and categorize their friendships both pre- and post-retirement, we then discussed and agreed upon a location in which to conduct the interview, as well as a date and time that was convenient for the woman. Permission was also requested from each woman to audiotape the interview and before concluding the telephone conversation, I made sure that any questions the woman may have had were addressed. I then left my telephone number so I could be contacted prior to the interview if needed.

## THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Prior to the interviews, a conceptual framework was established to guide the study, including the development of the interview guide. However it was necessary, and expected, to expand the interview questions due to each woman's individual experiences (Price, 1998).

Interviews were semistructured. The interview contained a number of predetermined questions that were asked in a systematic and consistent order, but I did explore for answers that went beyond the prepared questions. This was done carefully, so as not to influence the responses of the women. In qualitative research, the central research instrument is the investigator consequently the subjectivity and biases of the investigator are of primary importance (Patton, 1990).

The interview guide contained essential questions that related to the central focus of the study. In addition, there were a few questions used to gather demographic information as well as verify that each woman fit the sampling criteria, and questions used to develop rapport with the subject and put her at ease. Interview questions were worded such that they were understandable at an eighth grade level and were pilot tested for clarity of understanding by three retired women

not eligible to be interviewed. Appendix A contains a copy of the interview protocol.

I also completed practice interviews prior to the actual interviews. This ensured my familiarity with the interview guide, allowing me to focus more of my attention on the subject being interviewed. The interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes, during which time the respondents were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences with friends and friendship.

## INTERVIEW PROCEDURES

Upon arriving at the designated location for the interview, and prior to beginning the interview itself, the first several minutes were used to establish a level of comfort for the women, most of whom had never participated in a study such as this. Additionally, to establish rapport between the woman and myself, I used a strategy developed by Davis (1960, as cited by Patton, 1990). The following information was shared in order to establish rapport: (a) personal information about my background, training, and interests; (b) the purpose and nature of the study; (c) methods of assuring confidentiality in any written reports or presentations; (d) the importance of the respondent's opinions and personal experiences to the goals of the study.

When I felt that the woman was ready to begin the interview I asked her to read the informed consent document. Each woman then signed the document, a copy of which can be found in Appendix B. In accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, I also informed each woman that participation in this study was voluntary and that she could withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences (Berg, 1995). Each woman was instructed that she was free to interrupt the interview, ask for clarification, query a line of questioning, and/or refuse to answer any question with which she was uncomfortable. I asked each woman for permission to audiotape her interview and explained the reason for wanting the audio recording. Audio recording allowed for obtaining the interview verbatim. It also allowed me to maintain full attention on the respondent's responses and to seek further information if needed.

I began each interview by collecting demographic information so I had a written record showing that each woman in the study fit the sampling criteria. Then, using the modification of the convoy model (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980), I asked each woman to describe her friendship network prior to retirement, her current friendship network, and any changes in that network during either time frame. Kin relationships were excluded from this study.

I chose this particular model because I wanted each woman to be able to easily differentiate between her levels of friendship, knowing that friendship can

described in many different ways. This modified model allowed each woman to hierarchically map each friend's position within her friendship network.

Again, each woman was asked to identify the important friendships in her life first before she retired and then currently. This order of listing preretirement friends followed by current friends was the preference of the researcher only. Each woman was asked to envision herself in the center of a circle with three rings of friends encircling her. The friends to whom the woman felt most close, "so close that it is hard to imagine life without them," were to be envisioned in the circle nearest the center. Friends who were still important, but relatively less close than those in the prior circle, were to be envisioned in the third circle from the center, and those who were least close were to be envisioned in the outermost circle. This process would then be replicated with the woman envisioning up to 15 friends who were important in her life currently. The placement of these friends in each woman's convoys and the circumstances around any movement in, out, or within the woman's convoys would be the basis for much of each woman's interview.

Each woman was also asked to describe her strategies for maintaining her friendships, if and how she had made new friends since retirement, and the meaning of friendship to her personally. Notes and impressions from the interview process were also completed after each interview. These notes were used to provide additional information about each interview.

After the interview, each woman was given a small gift and handwritten thank you note in appreciation of her participation in the study. Additionally, I plan to provide an executive copy of this dissertation to each woman who has indicated a desire to have one.

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data were gathered from audiotaped cassettes made during the interviews. Each interview was then transcribed verbatim, minus sounds and words that the women used as pauses when they were processing information (e.g., ums, ahs). Rapport building was also left out of the transcripts. A professional transcriptionist was hired to transcribe the interviews.

Following the interview and transcription process, each transcript was reviewed three or four times prior to establishing an analysis framework for the data. The transcripts were then coded using open coding to separate the data and identify various categories and their properties (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The coding frame used for this data can be found in Appendix C. The coded and separated data were then organized by themes with main points and patterns identified (Berg, 1995; Luborsky, 1994). At this point, I began my interpretation of the patterns based on relevant theoretical perspectives as well as the coded data and field notes from the

interviews. I also considered past research on these topics when analyzing these data.

Throughout the analysis, a stance of “empathetic neutrality” (Patton, 2002, p. 53) was required, meaning that as the investigator, it was important to maintain a nonjudgmental position throughout the research process, while communicating to each interviewee that I understood, was interested in and cared about them. Leslie Richards, my major professor, as well as an experienced qualitative researcher, monitored my subjectivity as the interviews were analyzed.

Methodological triangulation occurred via the use of in-depth semistructured interview questions and field notes used to gather data. Analyst triangulation occurred with the analysis process being periodically reviewed by my major professor.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It was essential that all of the women voluntarily consented to participate in this study. I gained this consent using two methods. The first method required that each woman provide verbal agreement that she was interested in proceeding further with the study before an interview would even be scheduled. This was done during my initial contact with the woman, after I was certain that all the woman’s questions

about the study had been answered. The second method required that each woman would read and then voluntarily sign an informed consent form prior to the start of the scheduled interview.

I granted confidentiality to each participant by changing each woman's name to a pseudonym during data analysis and also assured participants confidentiality in any published material. Interview settings as well as the names and identities of the women's friends were also disguised. Data, including audiotapes, notes, and transcripts, have been and will continue to be kept in a locked file until this project is complete, at which time all information will be destroyed.

#### ASSURING QUALITY OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

Credibility, or the degree to which the various realities of research subjects are accurately represented, is typically approached by examination of the investigator's subjectivity throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Price, 1998). To decrease investigator bias, all research methods and results were discussed with and reviewed by my major professor (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995; Price, 1998).

Detailed descriptions were provided of methodology, analyses, and interpretation of findings to allow for replication of this study (Price, 1998). Other strategies used to increase the scientific value of this study included reviews of the

research process by my doctoral committee, as well as the use of methodological triangulation (Krefting, 1991).

## RESULTS

The topic for this study was chosen out of concern about the social well-being of divorced or widowed women after retirement. Interviews with these women focused on potential changes in their friendship networks from work through the transition into retirement, factors that lead to the end of friendships after retirement, and the meaning of postretirement friendships.

To understand the meaning to these women of potential changes in friendship networks because of retirement, I first describe the friendship experiences reported by women before they retired. This information is followed by descriptions of how these relationships changed postretirement.

### FRIENDSHIPS IN THE WORKPLACE

Prior to interviewing the women in this study, I believed that because of the potential shake-up in their friendship networks at the time of their divorce or widowhood the women would report greater feelings of closeness to workplace friends than women who had not experienced divorce or widowhood prior to retirement. As reported by Prentis (1980), Richardson and Kilty, (1992) and Szinovacz (1983), some professional women felt reluctance to retire because of

their concern about leaving and potentially losing workplace friends, and I believed this would be the case with this group as well. Babchuk and Anderson (1989) found that proximity or focus of activity was important for friendship development. They maintained that if this focus of activity was lost, any relationship supported within that activity would also be lost unless the relationship was strong enough to motivate the participants to deliberately maintain it. As it turned out, many of the women reported that occasionally they and their coworkers did become friends, but generally their coworkers were not the people with whom they made the closest friendships or chose to socialize with outside the workplace.

Seventy-five percent of the women interviewed stated that while they were working they spent little, if any, time with coworkers outside of the workplace. Norma explained, "We did lunches together and things you do with office people, but not a lot outside of that." Much of the reason for this lack of socialization was explained by the fact that many of the women had very busy jobs that kept them too busy to socialize while working. Additionally, they also reported that they were busy maintaining friendships that were outside of the workplace. For Jen, a court appointed family social worker, the large number of court cases she and each of her coworkers had to handle challenged friendship development:

You just didn't have as much time for a relationship. Relationships take time and thought and care. And even though you like them

[coworkers] and might even have wanted to know more about them, there just wasn't the time.

Several other themes emerged from the interview data that helped to explain the challenges to friendship development between coworkers, including dissimilar marital status, dissimilar world-views, or the lack of common interests between coworkers. Friendship development was also challenged by the need to commute to and from work as well as the potential for jealousy over workplace friendships.

Alice felt it was harder to become close to coworkers who were married because married people tended to "associate with other couples," during their free-time, and "singles are more willing to do things like maybe take you out of town for the day, and that kind of thing. And ones that are married aren't so free to do that."

Another major factor frequently reported as being part of the reason that coworkers were not often considered for social relationships outside of the workplace was the friction of dissimilar world-views between coworkers. Several of the women emphasized that having a similar world-view was more important than age, gender, race, marital status, income, or similar interests in terms of friendship development. Isabel described the difference between a coworker who became her good friend and other coworkers who did not:

I think one of the things I found when I came to Oregon and started working at the office, why Lisa became my friend and not a number

of others, is because I disagreed with their, the outlook on life that these other people had. They were extremely judgmental. I mean they would be talking about gays, they'd be talking about Black people, and I don't have time to deal with people like that. ....  
But I think that's one of the things that make it so that somebody remains an acquaintance and not a friend.

Alice, a retired teacher, believed that the bond between people was often formed because of "common interests as well as personality. You have to be attracted to the personality to get the friendship started, but I think it builds a lot of times on common interest because that makes opportunities for you to get together to do things if you both like the same thing."

The need to commute to and from the workplace affected the lack of friendship development with some coworkers. Jean shared her thoughts on commuting and friendship development:

We were about 5 miles out of town. We did an awful lot of commuting in cars, and I think that's one of the things that kind of mitigates against close friendships. A lot of the time you could spend with a friend, having tea with them or doing whatever, or walking with them, you spend in commuting. Especially in a place where you are out, when you're in a suburb I think it mitigates against friendships really.

Jealousy in the workplace was also addressed as a reason for not getting too close to coworkers, especially with those coworkers who might hold more power in the organization than others. Helen said:

Well there's a certain amount of pressure, or distance, that's maintained because of the work relationships I think. There's danger

of being considered a pet if you're too friendly to a person that's a supervisor of you. A danger of being, you know, jealousy shows up. I think you have to be pretty much in an equal position to develop a close friendship that way.

## FRIENDSHIP CHANGES AFTER RETIREMENT TRANSITION

Retirement was often a time of change for these women, in terms of workplace friends. Typically workplace friendships drifted away after retirement, but were not considered to be gone forever. The women also reported making new friends, as well as renewing contacts with old friends after retirement.

### Loss of workplace friends

Consistent with previous research (Depner & Ingersoll, 1982; Fox, 1977; Price, 1998), all of the women interviewed lost contact with some or all workplace friends after retirement. In many cases the women believed that this gradual loss of contact was because of the fact that it was uncomfortable for retirees to ask former coworkers, most of whom were still working, to use free time to meet them. Fran, a retired teacher, talked about the reluctance that she and other retired teachers had about asking nonretired teachers to meet them monthly for dinner:

Our avenues don't cross so much. And one way we do it [get together] is by having these monthly dinners. And that's good. But it doesn't include everybody of course, and it doesn't include the people who are still working. That's just, that's a real disadvantage. It's hard to get together with most people, because they really are very busy. It's a job that is pretty all consuming. You get there early in the morning and you stay until the days' work is done. And then you get ready for the next day. And I really would be reluctant to infringe on their time. 'Cause I know how it is.

In some cases, the closest workplace friends were also retired, leaving fewer friends in the workplace. Another reason given for the loss of contact was a gradual disinterest on the part of the retiree in the *work* of the workplace or a sense that nonretired coworkers were leading different lives than the retirees were now leading. Betty described her increasing disinterest in hearing about workplace news:

Well, I heard other people say this too; when they retired they fully expect to remain friends with the working friends. And, but it usually doesn't happen that way unless you've just been really, really tight with somebody. And I wasn't with any of the ones that I was still working with. All the ones that I had really been friends with had retired already. I was about the last of my sort of section, or age group, or whatever it is to retire. And so for a while you go down, you have lunch and, but they're still into this work thing and that's what their conversation is about. And after a year or two, I really don't care about work. And so that's a big difference. ....I still think good thoughts about them, but we're just in different places now. Our lives have [changed], and when they retire then they'll find out too. It's okay: it's kind of the way it goes. Everybody says stay in touch and you do, but you know it's different.

There were three women, however, who said that they did remain in contact with workplace friends and considered these former coworkers to be very close

friends. The remainder of the women did miss seeing some of their former coworkers on a regular basis. They reported that they saw these people occasionally and although they wished it were more often, they understood that the former coworkers were now on a *different path* than they were on and that was acceptable. The women I interviewed did not, for the most part, feel displaced or forgotten by coworkers, as reported by Price (1998), nor did they indicate that a loss of workplace friendships was seen as a negative experience, as found by Prentis (1980). My sense was that the women generally felt that retirement was a time of change, any changes in contact with coworkers were normal, and they (the retirees) were moving on with their lives and making new friends. Their workplace friends had often been less close to them while working and their closest friends were still their closest friends and were unaffected by their retirement. The general consensus was that retirement was great and these women were not lonely. This was supportive of work by Carstensen (1991, 1993, 1995) and Fung, Carstensen, and Lutz (1999) who found that individuals have more time available with which to optimize their emotional experiences with people who are most important to them by limiting the time spent with peripheral social network members.

## Making new friends

All of the women interviewed had sought out different types of activities (e.g., volunteering, church, clubs, travel, and senior centers) in which to become involved after retirement. They were also spending more time in leisure activities that they had enjoyed prior to retirement. Overall, these women had made many new friends through their activities. Sue liked people who were “outgoing, probably ‘cause I’m not” and people who were “curious about what’s going on in the world today.” Jean looked for friends who were “nonjudgmental” and who would “empathize and sympathize” with her when she needed to talk. “Intellect and character” attracted Isabel to other people. She also liked her friends to have a “zest for life” and to be doing “interesting things.” Jo felt it was good to “have younger friends who still want to get you moving.” Similar to findings reported by Shea, Thompson, and Blieszner (1988), however, their new friendships were seldom considered *close* although one or two women talked about the possibility of the friendships becoming “closer over time”.

Three of the women told me that they really were not interested in putting the energy into making new friends after retirement. This was explained as being the result of having *enough* friends or not “feeling the need for any more close friends”

or "no need when you're my age to do that." Rose spoke of being comfortable having an *acquaintance* to visit with during day trips sponsored by the senior center, but felt no need to pursue an actual friendship with the person after the trip was over:

Well I don't know. For instance, I have taken several trips with [others], out of the senior center. And I go by myself if I don't find anybody to go with me simply because I'm interested in going where they're going or doing what they're going to be doing. And I go. It doesn't bother me. So sure we meet somebody on the bus; they're talking and that's my acquaintance for the day. But I don't have time to go look and pursue this because I've got enough other things to do.

#### Renewing contacts with old friends

Fifty-five percent of the women described renewing contacts after retirement with friends whom they had not seen in years. In all cases, the friendships seemed to resume as if the friends had never been apart. Jo talked of resurrecting friendships with people she had known in high school, but had not seen for many years:

We just meet once a month for lunch. I started this lunch group because I would ask them [old high school friends] every time I'd see them, 'how's so and so'? And they'd say, 'I don't know I haven't seen her.' I'd say, 'well you ought to meet once a month for lunch.' So I started essentially the Once a Month Lunch Group down there, which they continued on. And new people come to it if they hear

about it and they all have, not too many of them are still working. So they can meet when they have the time.

After retirement, Betty became close once again to a person she became a friend with when she began her first job, but had not seen in many years:

I wouldn't place him in my closest friend group; he might be in the second group. But he's someone I've known for, well I met him when I first started working in, whenever that was, way back in '72. And he retired several years before I did, and we hadn't really seen each other for a while. And then after I retired then he started coming over and visiting and we just sit and talk.

This is compatible with the work of Carstensen, Gross, and Fung (1997) who found that when emotional goals versus knowledge-related goals were of high priority, familiar social partners were preferred because they provided predictable emotional experiences as well as feelings of social embeddedness.

#### FACTORS LEADING TO POSTRETIREMENT LOSS OF FRIENDSHIPS

As discussed above, the women in this study reported that they had typically lost workplace friends during their transitions from work to retirement, but most of their closest friends, and those unaffected by their retirement, were long-term friends and people whom they had become friends with outside of the workplace or after retirement. What might cause changes in those friendships?

In some cases it was simply that the women or their friends did not put their energy into maintaining those friendships. Helen described some friends who had been very good friends of hers, but with whom she had lost touch over the years:

In those old pictures there were Christmas pictures for several years from friends that we had been very good friends with at the time we were first married and so forth. [We] kept up with their children. I have no idea where these people live now, what they're doing, if they're alive or dead, what their kids are doing. Somewhere along the line it petered out. The Christmas letters just sort of stopped and we didn't have any other contact for a few years before that. But I don't know why. With some people you remain much closer. Some of these people that have disappeared from my life, the last few years that we would get a Christmas greeting it might include a picture of their children because a lot of people do that for a long time. But in addition to that was their signature. And you didn't learn anything about them anymore. And after a few years of, or even just a card with their name on it, well why bother? And then as soon as we didn't send one again, we didn't get one back. So in a sense they cut it off.

It is important to note that friendships after retirement occur in a context of aging, such that many of the changes within friendships are related more to age-related circumstances than they are to aging in general (Atchley, 1994). Women in this study experienced life course changes such as health declines, marital status changes, changes in familial responsibility, and or changes in geographic location. Friendships can be affected as a result of these changes. Friendships were also affected by betrayal or perpetual discord.

## Life course changes

Denise told me, "Life is dynamic, it always changes." Although only one woman reported that she had intentionally ended a friendship, there were several women (45%) who mentioned "friendships fading away" or "drifting." This was similar to findings by Matthews (1986) who reported that friendships could drift because of changing life-styles and pathways. Jen gave me her insights into why she thought some of her friendships had drifted:

In general our lives have taken different directions. There's no particular reason to stay in touch, even though I remember them very well. We send Christmas cards to one another and everything, but we're not as close as we were at one time. One time we were very close.

## Health changes

Although most of the women and their friends were still quite healthy overall, four women reported having health challenges. For example, Fran was no longer able to drive and that affected her ability to "easily get together with friends" for activities away from her house. Fifty percent of the women also reported having friends who were older and beginning to be less healthy and less active. Sue talked

about a friend who “hasn’t been in good health, so we haven’t been able to be in contact, physically, as much.”

#### Change in marital status

Four of the women reported having friends who had remarried. A friend’s change in marital status would often affect the two women’s friendship because newly married persons would subsequently spend more time with their spouse. Betty talked about a friend of hers who remarried and said since the marriage, the friend’s life “has just gone in a totally different direction.” Betty added, “So, I see her maybe. I run into her somewhere once in a while.” And Sue also recounted that she had friends whose “circumstances changed,” and she was not seeing them as much. “They’re remarried; one was a widow and one was divorced, and so their interests are a little different than mine right now.”

#### Change in familial responsibility

For the most part, the women described providing occasional care to grandchildren and this did not affect their friendships overall. Lynn, however,

described a friend's personal circumstances regarding her husband's health and the effect that had on Lynn and her friend's relationship:

One [friend] has a husband that had a problem, had a drug problem, over medication, medical, I mean a doctor's drugs situation. And [he] just kind of went off the deep end, and so she's just withdrawn. I mean totally withdrawn. Lives up on the hill and that's it and I mean, he's still alive. You know, it was, it was really a close situation. But I haven't seen her in several years. And I have sent her cards and I have no response.....I don't know what she's doing.

#### Geographic mobility

Helen felt that friendships "definitely come and go by geographical closeness." She also said that for her, if friends moved away, she "sort of forget[s] about those folks fairly fast." Helen herself had moved frequently during her life and described her friendship network:

Pretty much losses, partly because of my moving physically. Yes, partly because I've moved around to various places and so have some of my friends. Some people I know, they have a good friend and they live across the country from each other now, but they still call each other at least every week and talk for an hour. But I haven't done that.

Alice agreed, "Moves are the things that really get in the way." Joan's personal circumstances of having to move continually meant that she also had a hard time forming friendships that might become close with time:

I see some of the women at the church [who have] lived in this area almost from the time they were married, if not before also. They've more than likely lived in the same house. And so they've raised their kids together, they've gone through all the trials and tribulations of young married, young children, old married, and older children. And so they've got such a communication that they probably don't have to explain anything. It's already there. And I can never have that because all my life [I moved], well from the time till I married Danny, and we got married in '49, and we would stay in a place about two years. Then when we went to Astoria we were there about 15 years, so that was the longest time I'd ever stayed in any one place. And it's just different with me. I've always left; I've always been the one to go. And we just went all over. So I think some of my feelings about friendship may be because of constantly moving, constantly leaving. I didn't know anyone until after he [Danny] was dead. So my friendships really started more in this part of my life than the other part.

One positive note, however, was that moving did not necessarily change a friendship if the woman and her friend were letter writers or were willing to e-mail each other to stay in touch. Adams (1986), Matthews (1986), and Shea et al. (1988) all found that friendships could endure over time and distance. Surprisingly for this cohort, e-mail was mentioned by over 50% of the women as a method used to maintain their friendships with others.

#### Discord or betrayal

Johnson (as cited by Blieszner, 1989) reported that if individuals became dissatisfied with a friendship, no longer identified themselves as strongly attached

to the friend, and did not feel obligated to maintain interaction with that friend, personal commitment to the friendship declined and the friendship dissolution process was seen. I found in talking with the women that there were differing types of *discord* (e.g., disapproval of friend's behaviors, unequal involvement with the friendship, hurt feelings) that could negatively affect a friendship. Isabel mentioned a friend for whom she began to feel differently:

Well, usually when they fade away, I think, you usually find out there's been some discord, or a misunderstanding. I mean I can think of a couple of people that I considered really, really close friends who no longer fall into that category. And one, I don't know what happened. I just suddenly found that I thought she was extremely mercenary. I had introduced her to some friends who came from Nepal, and I really got angry that she was asking them to send her things. It just turned me off. But there must have been other things you know?

Sharon told me about a person who had been her friend for a number of years. He had at one time been considered a close friend, but his behavior over time led Sharon to decide that he was not that close to her after all:

If you ever lived by yourself you know that there are a lot of chores that need doing around the house. And so we [Sharon and her close friend] kind of had this trade off, and I would do him favors and he would come in and do favors for me. Only he was always complaining. He'd come to do them and complain and complain, until to the point where I really said I was uncomfortable asking him anymore. So he's kind of gone to the outer limits, which is too bad because he'd been a friend for a long, long time, and I just feel like the relationship is really strained now. And I think I'm too old to have strained relationships. If they're my friend, I'd like them to remain that way, but nonetheless, he was being a turkey.

Lynn had a friend who could not stay out of her adult children's business. This involvement by the friend was carrying over and affecting the friendship with Lynn:

I mean, these adult children have to settle their own. And I actually think that it's better, you know if they come to you for advice, that's fine. But to get involved without being asked I think is a mistake. And she is so terribly involved that, like I say, we don't talk to her about it because there's always an argument. I mean, I don't agree and so you start discussing. And then she's, she just doesn't have time to do things with us anymore because this child needs her. Well this child really doesn't need her. You know and I hope I'm not being callous, but I think that there's, you know you draw the line.

Betrayal was the most likely type of discord to cause an immediate end to the friendship. Betty described a friend's betrayal and how that betrayal had affected their friendship for years:

The one woman that moved here the same time I did from Ashland, we were friends since 1970 probably, no longer, before that. And she did something that really hurt my feelings, and I just didn't even want to see her after that. And it's taken me several years to even get so I call her on the phone, and I still really like her as a person. I think she's wonderful, but once that kind of thing happens, it might be sort of the same in a marriage, when one person breaks the confidence or something. It just, it hurt my feelings a lot, and so I just didn't ever call her. And I used to visit her mother who is kind of an invalid too, just once in a while for a few minutes or take her something I'd baked, and I quit doing that. And I quit going to her daughter for haircuts. And it all seems kind of childish of me, but I just didn't want any more contact.

## THE MEANING OF FRIENDSHIP

It is clear that friends play a major role in the happiness of older adults (Blieszner, 1989). Friends who have experienced role loss (e.g., retirement, widowhood, divorce) or other circumstances of late life can assist their friends in navigating similar events. Friends provide opportunities for socialization in later life just as they have at all other stages of life. Friends also provide resources to one another that are both useful (e.g., information, a small loan, transportation) and emotionally supportive (e.g., affection, esteem, inclusion) (Shea et al., 1988). There are many aspects of a friendship that can bolster emotional well-being in another person. For the women in this study, friends bolstered or enhanced their well-being by tolerating their shortcomings; being honest with them; remembering their birthdays; listening to them; and in some cases, greeting them with a hug.

### Emotional and social benefits

Although friends provided support in many ways, it was the emotional, intimate aspect of the friendship that seemed most important for these women. Carstensen (1991, 1993) also reported this in the development of socioemotional selectivity theory in which she stated that as people age, their social interactions are

increasingly motivated by emotion and decreasingly motivated by information acquisition. Norma described her relationships with her closest friends as “like sitting home in your robe all day, you relax.” Jen added, “As your children grow and life changes, you’re nurtured more by the closeness of friends. The emotional component I think is more important. It is to me as I’ve gotten older. I value that emotional component more.” Adams (1997) also reported that among older women, the oldest friendships appeared to be the closest friendships emotionally.

The women repeatedly told me how their friends made them feel valued when, once retired, it was often not as easy to feel this way. Alice felt that friends were very “reinforcing.” She went on to say, “One of the difficult things for people in life is that they feel that no one likes them or cares about them, so just the fact that we get together and have a good time with each other is reinforcing in itself.” Helen’s friends made her feel special by “saying nice things” about her, and Fran’s friends always introduced her to new people as “a high school teacher,” a position she had been very proud to hold. Jo also had a friend who made a list of Jo’s good qualities when Jo went through a difficult time:

I think everyone feels insecure at times and needs a little bolstering up. And this woman's very perceptive and she's a really good close friend. And I thought that was a very nice gesture. I had a little, three- or four-year relationship with a man who left and that was very hard, so she was very good to come to the fore and say, well you've got all these great qualities. And at the time you feel like, oh pretty deflated. So it was very nice of her. And I appreciated that.

Norma described a birthday dinner with several friends where one of her friends, Vivian, told each person in attendance what she valued most about each of them:

Vivian, just out of the blue, started telling each one of us what she valued about us. And it just kind of took us all by surprise because we didn't expect that. And I was wondering because there's one member of that group who is a newcomer, kind of. Lola hadn't been in the group through the years and the rest of us had. And she's always late, and she's always this, and she's always that. And Vivian got a little bit ticked, but never said anything to anybody but you could tell that it was bothering her. And so I thought, I wonder what she'll say about Lola. And what she said is, 'Lola, you have the most infectious laugh I've ever heard.' And so I thought that was really neat. And that was what she liked about Lola. It seems like you don't have to express those feelings, but it's really nice when somebody does.

For the most part, the women interviewed were pretty independent, but there were times when they just needed someone to listen to them. Friends provided an outlet for getting things off their minds. Norma commented on her friends' willingness to listen:

All of them have had trials and tribulations. And it really helps to talk to a friend. And they're not going to say, 'Oh you should have done this,' they just listen. I think what a real friend understands is they don't have to solve it, you just want them to listen.

Jean felt that if a person's friends were "good friends" then "they'll see you through bad times" and not "pass judgment." Jean added, "There are lots of bad times for sure. Friends have helped me." This was similar to Bell's (1981)

publication in which he reported that friends gained strength when they shared important feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Isabel told me she appreciated it when her friends would ask how her mother was doing, prior to her mother's death, as well as asking about her daughter.

#### Friendships and social embeddedness

Repeatedly I was told that friends helped these women to feel included and for that the women were very grateful. Rose said that her friends made her feel special and connected because "they ask you out. They invite you out for dinner or they do this or they do that, [provide] little gifts, or something else I guess. Or they tell you that they think you're a special person." The women also felt wonderful that their friends made time for them and were there if they [the women] needed them. Hanna agreed, "They [her friends] always call. They're there. I know, if I need them."

Friends provided a strong sense of connectedness to the area in which they lived for several of these women. Jen talked about being very close to her neighbors who "all keep track of one another. You take care of one another."

Rose told me:

I'm so hesitant to move away from here, to move where my children are. It kind of feels [as though] this is my history. It's right here. And the people who we call acquaintances are important. They make you

feel sort of connected. Even though they're not close friends. Like I go to a concert and you see all kinds of people that you've known for years. They are not close friends but they're important. They make you feel like you belong there, in this community.

June considered her friend to be "like family," they were so close. She said:

She knows my daughter and [she'd be] like a mother to her if I wasn't around. She knows to call her if something happens to me and she knows my sister in Lake City; she'd call her. And we're just very, very close, like family. [We're] very close.

Other ways the women felt connected to one other were through activities that helped sustain memories. When I arrived to interview Helen, she told me that she had been "looking through an old photo album" in the days prior to our interview. She was "looking to see if I had any photos that would be good for friends [who] were celebrating their golden wedding this year. To remind them of things we had done together way back."

#### Friends as a source of help and information

Friends provide most of their help in the areas of socialization and day-to-day companionship (Crohan & Antonucci, 1989). Although family members are expected to provide help in times of need, friends are not so counted upon and are, therefore, especially appreciated when help is given (Antonucci & Jackson, 1987). Adams (1986) found that friends provided help with transportation, shopping, or

errands as well as providing help during sickness and with nonsickness-related emergencies. In general, friends who were the closest emotionally tended to be the most likely to help, regardless of the physical distance between them. Goods and money were seldom exchanged between friends (Blieszner, 1989).

Norma talked about “doing a friend’s hair for her on a regular basis,” whereas Fran described how she “ran a red light and didn't even know it” and now her friends “cart me around a lot.” And Alice talked about Judy who lived near her house. Alice was going to be on vacation and was concerned that her hummingbird feeder would “go dry while I’m away.” Judy said, “Oh I'll come down and put food in the feeder if you want me to,” which made Alice feel cared about. Isabel commented, “If something happened in my life [my friends would] respond appropriately.”

Knowing that someone was there, not only provided a sense of social embeddedness as mentioned above, it also provided a sense of security for the women as well. As I mentioned earlier, many of these women were very independent and voiced somewhat the same sentiment as Sharon, who said that she would not like to “share personal stress with my friends,” however, it was also a comfort to know someone was nearby in case of an emergency.

Lynn described a “very, very good friend” with whom she traded help:

I have arthritis in my hip, but I'm not crippled or anything. But she [Lynn's friend] feels sorry for me. And so she does my ironing every week. She lost her husband three years ago and she's a little German gal and she doesn't drive. So I drive her a lot of places. I mean she has a son that's up in Portland that's not well. So we go up there. But she doesn't know how to do her banking, the bank account. And after her husband died, he did it, and so she didn't know. So I do her checkbook every month. So we just kind of trade off things like that.

Blieszner (1989) reported that individuals not only felt satisfaction from helping others, they also felt the bonds of friendship compelled them to provide help if possible. Helen told about providing help to one of her “closest women friends:”

She was about 20 years younger than me. As my children were young adults, hers were little, but we did many things together. We traveled together, did workshops together throughout the country. I used to go sit with her when she was dying; she died of cancer. Helped her on a trip with her self-administered chemotherapy, which was difficult to do herself. She really needed a friend to help. But she was a very close friend.

With regard to the exchange of information, respondents in a study by Blieszner (1989) reported that they engaged in reminiscence and self-disclosure with their old friends and valued advice provided by them. Information between new friends, however, focused more on day-to-day events and impersonal topics. Joan said of her older widowed friends, “They taught me how to prune trees and they just taught me so much! And it was just such fun.” Fran found that one of the topics her

friends like to talk about when they got together was her new apartment in a retirement housing facility. Fran said:

I'm the oldest of these friends, So my getting into here is a whole new chapter in my life. And it's something that they're interested in too, cause they know its coming up sometime. So there's that to talk about. Oh, there's all kinds of, you know, there's a lot of stuff that we care about. How things are going to be for each other.

It was apparent that all of the women saw their friendships as being beneficial to their lives and that they were very appreciative of the love and care they received from their friends. It was also apparent that the women reciprocated to their friends the same love and care given to them. Jen described her appreciation for friends in this way:

I think that wealth is expressed in friendships. As you get older you realize that more and more and more. I feel very sorry for people that don't have close friends. I think it's a terrible loss. They enrich our lives; they show us things that we wouldn't know otherwise. And I would really feel bereft if I were to lose my friends, my good friends.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to learn more about divorced or widowed retired women and their friendships. Twenty retired divorced or widowed women who were living alone were interviewed utilizing in-depth qualitative procedures to enable the women to describe their friendships in relation to their experiences.

Researchers had previously noted that women's friendship networks decreased postretirement (Depner & Ingersoll, 1982; Fox, 1977; & Price, 1998). Allan and Adams (1989) reported that the loss of work friendships with retirement was sometimes compensated for by other friends and sometimes was not. This was of concern given that: (a) women often experience a loss of friendships after a change in marital status, and (b) friendship has been found to be significant for women in their successful adjustment to retirement (Depner & Ingersoll, 1982; Jacobs, 1990; Price, 1998; Szinovacz, 1992; Wingrove & Steven, 1991). My study was designed to further clarify the relationship between retirement and women's friendship patterns.

## SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Overall, it appeared as though women in this study were very satisfied with retirement and considered it to be a positive experience. More time was now available to spend with friends, especially their closest friends, and one woman even joked that with retirement, she and her friends, “can now take longer lunch hours.” Even though workplace friendships had been lost over time since retirement, this loss was considered normal. Former coworkers were defined as being on different paths from those on which the women in the study considered themselves to be. It was also stressed that workplace friends were seldom or never the friends to whom the women felt closest; consequently this gradual drifting was not considered problematic. The women were making new friends if desired; however, not all women had the time or the interest in making more.

The women all talked about previously viable friendships that had been allowed to drift, mainly because of lack of maintenance or life course changes by one or both of the parties. These friendships were believed to be viable enough to be reinstated if desired. Eleven of the twenty women in the study reported that they had contacted and were reestablishing their friendships with old friends with whom they had not been in contact for some time.

Different types of discord among friends were also reported by the women. For example, disapproval of a friend's behavior was mentioned more than once, as were hurt feelings between friends. Discord did have a negative affect on friendships, but did not necessarily cause dissolution of the friendship. Betrayal was reported to be incentive to immediately end a friendship; however, this was uncommon.

Friends played a major role in these women's lives. The emotional, intimate, aspects of the women's friendships were reported to be the most important. Close friendships were compared to "sitting home in your robe all day" and referred to as "reinforcing." Friends helped these women feel valued, not always easy in retirement. Friends also provided feelings of social embeddedness by making time for each other, being there if needed, including each other in outings and other activities, and helping to sustain memories. Not surprising, close friends were often described by these women as being "like family."

Friends were also a source of help and information, although for the most part the help given was in the forms of socialization and day-to-day companionship. These women also reported that they provided help to and were helped by their very closest friends in times of need, regardless of the distance between the two of them. In fact, the knowledge that someone was there if needed provided an enormous sense of security. Information was also exchanged. This tended to be in the form of daily news and events, although a couple of older women in the study did report

that they were providing information to younger friends about topics that might become important to them in the near future (e.g., age-related housing and health changes).

### COMPARISON TO PRIOR RESEARCH

Price (1998) interviewed 14 professional women regarding their transitions from the workplace into retirement and found that half of the women in her study considered the loss of workplace friends to be a negative experience. The women in my study were not asked explicitly if they found the loss of workplace friends to be a negative experience, nevertheless about one-third of the women spontaneously reported that they missed their workplace friends after retirement. One difference between Price's study and mine might be that Price interviewed only women in careers designated professional, whereas the women in this study came from professional and nonprofessional careers. It is possible that the women from professional careers had more control over the choice of workplace and jobs they held, and subsequently had coworkers with whom they had more in common and developed closer relationships. Indeed, most of the women in my sample who talked about missing their workplace friends were professional women.

Francis (1990) interviewed five women, all professional, college-educated, Housing Authority Managers, who began uninterrupted careers in the late 1930s and then retired in the mid-1970s. Francis found that these women not only supported each other in the workplace, but remained very close friends and continued to support one another in retirement. These findings were not reported by most of the women in my study who commonly said that their closest friends were typically not friends from the workplace, but rather friends whom they had met years prior. The women in my study reported that they were often too busy to socialize at work or that the people with whom they worked were dissimilar in ways that were important for friendship development (e.g., worldview, marital status, interests). In contrast, Francis (1990) found that the women's friendships in her study were initially based on their common occupational status, experience, and values but grew in significance and intimacy over time. The women in Francis' study were hired to do jobs that had typically not been done by women, so these women probably had to bond together to survive. They were also working in the inner city, consequently their jobs as Housing Authority Managers may have been stressful and the women themselves may have had similar worldviews in order to be attracted to this particular type of profession-. Francis may have even referred to similar worldviews among the women in her sample when she referred to them as having "shared personal feelings." The difference between Francis's findings and

the findings of this study may be partially the result of a cohort effect. The women in Francis's study were breaking new ground; they were women who were hired at the same time for positions that had previously only been held by men. These management positions assumedly provided new opportunities for the women, but also new challenges; presumably the women bonded together to meet those challenges. Women in this study were not breaking new ground, so to speak. They held various professional positions while working, but none mentioned that this was exceptional or unusual for women within their profession.

Socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, 1991, 1993) worked well to describe the relationships of my unique population. In this study, 90% of the women reported that they had closest or close friends outside of the workplace and one of the best parts of retirement was that they could now spend more time with these people. Additionally, 55% of the women reported that they had contacted old friends since retirement.

The findings of this study were also supportive of Carstensen, Gross, and Fung (1997) who wrote that when emotional versus knowledge-related goals are of highest priority to individuals, familiar social partners are preferred because they are more likely than strangers to provide predictable emotional experiences and feelings of social embeddedness. It might be thought that the women in this population would be most likely to retain information-based friendships since these

women do not have partners, but that was not the case overall. One or two of the women specifically reported the sharing of information with friends, but most of the women related to their friendships in terms of the emotions involved.

Carstensen (1991, 1993, 1995) also maintains that it is the perception of approaching temporal endings, not chronological age, that intensifies the emotional need to spend time with significant others. In my study all of the women reported that they had met new people since retirement; however, of the 20 women interviewed, 3 reported that although they had met new people and considered them acquaintances, they had no plans to become closer in terms of friendship. They explained that this decision was based on their not having “time for the friends they have now,” or not “feeling the need for any more close friends,” or “no need when you’re my age to do that.” In considering the women who had made new friends, it is important to remember that these women were still healthy and involved in life. The friends they were making were often connected to activities the women were involved in, or their neighborhood, or their church, but if the focus of activity was lost, because of declining health for example, these friendships might end as well. If these same women were followed over time, we might see that many of these new friendships were not as viable as they were when these interviews were conducted.

This study also attempted to determine whether the change in network size for retired single women was due to selection, as would be argued by Carstensen

(1991, 1993, 1995), or if there is another undetermined process guiding the change in friendship network size. Although it seems apparent that some sort of selection process is occurring, it is not felt that enough information was gained to make a definitive analysis on this point.

## LIMITATIONS

The snowball sampling technique was one method used in this study to enable swift access to women who might have otherwise been difficult to locate. This method has limitations, however, in that individuals who are recruited are often similar to one another, both in their worldviews and in their willingness to participate in this sort of research study (Rubin & Babbie, 2001). Additionally, most were healthy, were interested in staying active, and had many friends. Interestingly, even though the women were chosen using this methodology, they were chosen from two very different areas, Western Oregon and Western Nevada. Differences were not found between the women in these two locations. This argues for the possibility of generalizability of the results of this study even though none of the women in this study were chosen randomly.

I did not know, using this methodology, the women's motivations for wishing to participate in the study, a potential source of bias in the sample. Nonetheless,

meanings of friendships after retirement, gained from the women in this study, will be most useful in understanding divorced and widowed career women who are near or beginning retirement and who live alone. The women also knew that this study was about retirement and women's friendships; therefore it is probable that my sample consisted of satisfied retirees with many friends. This could explain why my results differ from previous studies.

A retrospective review format was utilized to collect information on each woman's perceptions of her friendship experience over time. Some may feel that the use of a retrospective strategy created a potential limitation for the findings of this study (Price, 1998). The goal of this qualitative research study was to document these women's personal experiences with friends and retirement and it was therefore immaterial whether each woman's responses were accurate. As Thomas states, "It is not important whether or not the interpretation is correct - if men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas & Swaine, 1928, p. 572, as cited by Berg, 1995). What was important was that I represent each woman's experiences reliably (Price, 1998) and I strove to do that.

## IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study should assure those divorced or widowed women who may be nearing retirement that the adjustment to retirement need not be difficult, especially if one has supportive friends either outside of or within the workplace. Workplace friendships may drift after retirement; however, close and closest friendships typically endure with maintenance efforts on the part of both members. Friends provide a substantial amount of support to one another and women in retirement report that this support is essentially enhanced by the extra time that retirement provides.

This study could be used within educational materials for retirement counselors or company newsletters and publications. It could be used by marketers to attract unmarried newly retired women to activities, such as volunteer opportunities or other social activities. It could also be used by therapists to encourage older single possibly isolated retired women to reconnect with old friends.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It would be useful to learn more about the concept of similar worldview between friends and its impact on the workplace and subsequently retirement. The

potential is there for the workplace to be an important source of friendships for women, provided that coworkers have similar worldviews. The women in this study reported that a similar worldview was more important to them, in terms of friendship, than gender, age, or other similar demographics. Considering that most workplaces are filled with people with an assortment of worldviews, I find it highly improbable that the average workplace would be an important source of friendships. Further research on women and workplaces with social goals or a company mission that would attract a certain type of employee might be a good place to continue from here. It would also be interesting to compare the friendships in this type of workplace with the friendships in a typical workplace where workforce worldviews may not be a major concern.

Many of the women in the study believed that they had allowed one or more friendships to be lost after retirement because they had not put energy into maintaining them. Carstensen (1993) might argue that this lack of maintenance could be because of the fact that older adults become more focused on emotional goals and less focused on knowledge-related goals over time and that this change in focus leads to the maintenance of or increase in time spent with more intimate relationships versus less close friends. In this study, 55% of the women interviewed reported that they had contacted old friends since retirement. It would be interesting to learn more about these friendships that have drifted and why some friendships

that had been considered vital, but been allowed to drift, have then at some point been revitalized, whereas others, also once categorized as vital, are not revitalized over time. What is it that brings certain old friends to mind rather than others? Does it matter to the revitalization of a friendship how close the friendship was originally? Expanding our knowledge about the drifting and revitalization of friendships in late life would be valuable for aiding people who are lonely as well as for older adults who are facing changes in their lives.

Interestingly, over 50% of the women interviewed for this project reported that e-mail was one of the methods they commonly used to maintain or reestablish their friendships with others. E-mail was occasionally referred to as being *less than satisfactory* because it was perceived to have less of a personal touch than letter writing or a telephone call, but it was also seen as a nonintrusive and affordable way to stay in touch with others. It would be interesting to find out more about computer usage by older women.

#### A FINAL THOUGHT

This study utilized in-depth qualitative interviews to learn more about divorced and widowed retired women and their friends. Consequently, it seems appropriate

to end this project with one of my favorite quotes. During our interview, Joan described a special luncheon she was planning for two friends and herself:

One friend of mine, she likes tomato soup and of course I have my own tomatoes ..... And the other one, she likes oysters. ....  
And so I had gotten some oysters here a while back when I was at the coast. And I think I'm just gonna have to call them and have a luncheon of tomato soup and oyster soup. And that's a crazy combination, but well, it's probably for me as much as for them, but probably more for me.

After retirement, in particular, life becomes especially satisfying if one enjoys the flavors that friends bring to the mix.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

There are no right or wrong answers for any of the following questions. I am interested in learning about your experiences as a divorced or widowed, retired woman. The information you provide will be used to better understand retired women and their friends. Remember, you may decline to answer any of the questions asked here today. Also, please feel free to clarify anything you do not understand. Let's begin.

### I. Demographic Questions:

1. What is your age?
2. What was the date of your retirement?
3. What was your job title when you were working?
4. How long have you been either divorced or widowed?
5. Do you currently live alone?
6. How long have you lived in your current community?
7. Do you have family members living in this community? If so, what is their relationship to you?

### II. Content Questions:

I am interested in studying women in retirement for many reasons. Through my research, I have found that little has been written specifically about divorced or

widowed career women and their friends, both before and after retirement. In fact, with the increase of women in the workforce and subsequently more women nearing retirement, I feel that retirement issues for women will be important to study. Along these lines, I am especially interested in your friendship networks both while you were still working, and now, given that you have been retired for a few years. I am very excited to hear what you have to share!

**Let's look at your friendship while you were still working.**

8. Please tell me about your closest friends during the time that you were working?
9. When did you meet?
10. Why were those particular people closest to you versus less or least close?
11. Please tell me about those friends who were considered less close?
12. Why were they considered less close versus closest or least close?
13. Please tell me about those friends who were considered least close?
14. Why were these people not considered to be closer?
15. Were any of your closest friends different from you in terms of age, gender, marital status, etc.? If so, what were the differences?

**Now I would like you to look at your current friendship network.**

16. Are there any changes from pre- to post-retirement among the people you listed as being your closest friends? If so, what are the changes and how would you explain them?

17. If there are friends who are now considered closest to you, but who were not on your pre-retirement list, please tell me about them.
18. Are there any changes from pre- to post-retirement among the people you listed as being your less close friends? If so, what are the changes and how would you explain them?
19. If there are friends who are now considered less close friends, but who were not on your pre-retirement list, please tell me about them.
20. Are there any changes from pre- to post-retirement among the people you listed as being your least close friends? Again, what are the changes, if any, and how would you explain them?
21. If there are friends who are now considered least close friends, but who were not on your pre-retirement list of friends, please tell me about them.
22. Did you lose any workplace friends after retirement? If so, why do you think that happened?
23. Were any of your workplace friends in the core of your friendship network? Why or why not?

**Friendships do not just happen, they require time and energy, or maintenance, in other words. I would like now to talk about how you maintain your friendships.**

24. How do you maintain your closest friendships? Your friendships with less close friends? Your friendships with least close friends?
25. Do you maintain friendships that you have had a long time differently than friendships that are newer? If so, how? Why do you think this is necessary?
26. How can you explain the fact that some friendships last for years and years and others fade away?
27. Given that everyone has a limited amount of time each day to spend with friends, how do you decide which friends to spend time with and why?
28. Do you have friends living close to you whom you no longer spend time with? Why?
29. Friends often make us feel loved by the things they do or say. How do your friends make you feel special?
30. How do your friends provide companionship?
31. How do your friends provide help to you in stressful times?

**Okay, now lets talk about making new friends.**

32. Have you made new friends since retirement?
33. When you consider new friends, what characteristics in a friend attract you?

34. Some people are outgoing and can easily make new friends and others are quiet or shy and may find it harder to make new friends. How would you describe yourself?
35. How do your new friends fit in with your current friendship network?
36. What do you enjoy most about these new friends?
37. Do you find that your new friendships take more energy in terms of maintenance than your old friendships?

**The next two questions are hypothetical questions:**

38. If you were twenty years old again and felt that you had unlimited time to spend with friends, who in your friendship network would you choose to spend time with and why?
39. If you had one year only to spend with friends, who in your friendship network would you choose to spend time with and why?

**I have two last questions for you today.**

40. As a single woman, how do you think your relationships with your friends might be different than those of a married woman?
41. Is there anything else you would like to share about your friends?

**Thank you for talking with us today.**

APPENDIX B:  
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

## INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**Project Title:** In Their Own Words: Divorced and Widowed Women, Retirement, and Friendships

**Investigators:** Marilyn Barlow-Pieterick, Leslie Richards, Assistant Professor (Principal)

**Purpose of the Project:** This project will examine the friendship process for divorced or widowed career women who have retired in the last 5-10 years. Because little has been documented on friendships of widowed or divorced women after retirement from the workplace, I understand that I will be asked questions regarding my personal experiences with friendship from work to retirement.

The results from this research will help others to understand better how the potential change in friendship process from work to retirement impacts women and what particular issues are critical for these women regarding the role of friends.

**Procedures:** As a participant in this study, I understand that I will be asked a series of questions during an interview that will last approximately one hour. With my permission, the interview will be audio-taped.

In addition, I understand:

- The information I give will be kept private and confidential. Only a number will link my answers to the questions. My name will not be used in any way.

**In Their Own Words: Informed Consent Document****Page 2**

- My responses, together with others, will be combined and used for summaries. Additionally, direct quotes may be used, but my name will not be used in connection with that quote.
- I do not have to participate in this project. If I decide that I do not want to answer some questions, that is okay. At any time, I may choose not to participate in this study.
- If I have questions about the research study, I can contact Marilyn Barlow-Pieterick, at (541) 753-7449. Any other questions that I have should be directed to the IRB Coordinator, OSU Research Office, (541) 737-8008.

My signature below indicates that I understand the In Their Own Words Research Project and agree to participate in this study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this form.

---

Participant's Signature

---

Name of Participant

---

Participant's Address  
Number

---

Participant's Telephone  
Number

APPENDIX C:  
CODING FRAME

## CODING FRAME

WP FRNDS – Pre-Retire = Workplace friends - pre retirement

WP FRNDS – Post-Retire = Workplace friends - post retirement

RELI COWKRS = Reliance on co-workers for social interaction

SING VS MAR = Single versus married friends

CHALLENG = Challenges to making friends

DEC WPF = Decrease in workplace friends

NEW FNDS-POST = New friends – post retirement

RENEW OLD POST = Renewing contacts – post retirement

BEST FRNDS = Best friends

COMMONAL = Commonalties among friends

LOCI = Loci of activity and friends

FEELINGS = Feelings of social embeddedness, intimacy, personal validation, and trust

PERS COMMIT = Personal commitment to relationship

CHANGE = Change and friendships

RECIPROC = Reciprocity

EMAIL = E-mail

BEST MAINT = Best friend maintenance

NEW MAINT = New friend maintenance

TIME = Time

HELP&INFO = Providing Help and Information

DELIB CHANGE = Deliberate change in friendship

BETRAY = Friendship betrayal

NOT WHO THOUGHT = "Not who you thought they were"

MISUND = Misunderstandings or discord

CHNG PERSON CIRCUM = Change in personal circumstances

ENOUGH FRNDS = "Enough closest and close friends"

FRND FADE = Friendships fade