AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Title: Questioning Relationship Development Theory.

Abstract Approved
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Judith K. Bowker

The goal of this research was (1) to identify the patterns or pattern pieces of development for heterosexual, dyadic, romantic relationships that emerge from mixed-sex, friendship groups and (2) to compare and contrast those patterns or pattern pieces to patterns in existing stage theories. To address these goals, data were collected from students at a mid-sized, northwestern, land-grant university. Grounded theory was selected to analyze the data to allow the potential emergence of new perspectives and patterns.

Two conclusions about relationship development emerged from the collected data. First, some participants did not identify the friendship and the romance as two distinct relationships. On the other hand, a second set of participants indicated the friendship and romance were, in fact, two distinctly different relationships. Differences in conclusions drawn by these two groups generated six possible revisions to existing relationship development stage theories.
Questioning Relationship Development Theory

by
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Angela J. Cordova, Author
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I would like to express sincere appreciation to my mentor and source of intellectual support, Dr. Judith Bowker. As I struggled to work through this process she consistently offered praise and encouragement, she was always patient and understanding, but most of all she was supportive of my decisions and choices. Thank you.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A History of Courtship and Dating</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration of the Dominant Relational Development Models</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altman and Taylor's Social Penetration Theory</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knapp's Relational Stages Framework</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phillips and Wood's Model of Relationship Development</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Procedure</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Instrument</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Instrument</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis: Application of Grounded Theory</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants' Perceptions of the Development of Romance from Friendship Groups</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants’ Perceptions of Indicators of the Shift from Friendship</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Romance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanticipated Descriptions of the Friendship Group from Which the Romance</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship and Romance Not Distinguishable</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship and Romance: Two Different Relationships</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanticipated Descriptions of the Friendship Group from Which the Romance</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Areas of Research</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Survey</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Informed Consent for Survey Participants</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Short Form for Interview Volunteers</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Interview Protocol</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Informed Consent for Interview Participants</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Speculative Model</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to Brandi Cordova. It is because of her that I am here. It is her quest for knowledge and understanding and her insight that made me believe I could do this. Thank you, mom, for your undying devotion, love, and support.

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Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my nephew, Devin. It is a difficult thing to set your mind to a task and then complete that task when all of the odds seem to be against you. But it is possible. It is up to you to decide to achieve your dreams.
Introduction

Many of us have wondered how relationships develop; as researchers we attempt to find patterns that explain the process of the development. The purpose of this study is to discover whether relationship development patterns emerging during the last decade continue to follow the theoretical patterns established earlier. Those patterns in relationship development theory traditionally have been described in terms of stages of development that occur between only two people. For example, Altman and Taylor (1973) described four stages of relationship development; Mark Knapp (1978) developed a ten-stage, pyramid model of relationship development; and Phillips and Wood (1983) revising Knapp's model, proposed a twelve-stage relational development model. These models described relationships in a linear fashion with a focus on the stages and on dyads. In my experience teaching basic interpersonal communication classes, these models—unlike other theoretical material—are well received and seem to resonate at least in part with students' experiences.

Each of the theorists asserted that their theoretical model applied to various types of relationships; I will argue that some of the descriptions in particular stages of their models limit the application to heterosexual, romantic relationships. In this study I will examine these established models of relationship development, position the models in an historical context of heterosexual dating and courtship, and use
interviews with students to explore tentative indications that patterns in relationship development may be shifting. This exploration critiques current relationship development research to confirm, reject, or support modifications.

Relationship development studies have focused on expanding or—in limited ways—revising existing stage models, on the application of these models’ current or revised states, or on the fundamental steps researchers have taken to study relationship development. As a result of these foci, few researchers have identified new and potentially different patterns of relationship development. One such pattern that seems to have emerged in the 1990s—or perhaps seems to have been given more attention by the media and by individuals engaging in this pattern—is the evolution of heterosexual, romantic partnerships from mixed-sex, friendship groups.

Historically in the United States culture, the goal of the pairing between two individuals was to test the possibility for romance. That pairing often is theoretically conceptualized as isolated and dyadic. In the 1990s both the media and personal accounts highlighted a pattern of relationship development that involved more than two participants because the relationship began in friendship groups and only later evolved into dyadic romantic relationships. For example, in the popular situation comedy, *Friends*, which began in 1994 and continues to be a top-rated program today, three women and three men develop a committed, close, friendship group. Over time individuals in that group eventually were paired off to pursue romantic relationships. These characters struggle to maintain the status quo.
in the complex friendship group while simultaneously developing a romantic relationship. The pattern of their struggle toward romantic relationship development may be consistent with these patterns presented in the theoretical models, may constitute a revision of those models, or may require a new and potentially different model of explanation.

I begin by asking the following question: Is the process by which university students shift to dyadic, heterosexual, romantic relationships from existing mixed-sex, friendship groups similar to or different from the process exhibited in existing stage theories that build from couples as isolated units? Answering this question could bring into focus another way relationships develop; the answer also may confirm that these processes are consistent with or a version of current theories. In either case, this information would add to our understanding of how relationships develop.

Comparing and contrasting historical dating and courtship patterns with current accounts of relationship formation may be useful in identifying indicators of new and different patterns of relationship development. These historical accounts highlight shifts in dominant developmental patterns that may or may not lend support to models presented for any particular era. A review of both historical courtship and dating behaviors and a review of relationship development theory provide contexts for addressing this research question.
Literature Review

To understand contexts for relationship development I will first explore the history of courtship and dating. Courtship and dating, which are dictated by societal needs and norms, complement and enlarge the foundation of relationship development. Historical accounts of courtship and dating patterns represent common patterns of the time, not necessarily the only patterns of the time. As will be revealed in the following section, understanding how predominate courtship and dating patterns have changed over time may provide insight into differences within the current relationship pattern if differences exist.

Certainly, the characterization of relationship developmental stages as systematic patterns of communication is well known and is the focus of the last section of this literature review. Understanding the phenomena of relationship development begins with the exploration of the dominant stage models proposed during the last thirty years. One of the earlier attempts to identify relationship development stages was by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor (1973). Using Altman and Taylor’s research, Mark Knapp (1978) developed a relational stages framework in which he outlined the stages of coming together and coming apart. Gerald Phillips and Julia Wood (1982) presented a stage model that differed slightly from Knapp’s model and will be discussed only briefly. These different frameworks were developed in an attempt to explain the role of communication in relationship development (Phillips & Wood, 1983).
A History of Courtship and Dating

While we must consider that most historical research available on courtship is limited to white, middle- and upper-class participants (Cate & Lloyd, 1992), understanding the historically predominate courtship and dating patterns is important in understanding the foundation of relationship development. This section briefly summarizes six major periods of courtship and dating in America.

From early colonial times to about 1830 mate selection occurred using reason. Romance and love were viewed as unimportant, unreliable, and immature (Cate & Lloyd, 1992). The labor of women and children was necessary for the continuation of the community so the community encouraged courtship and marriage; single men often were fined or banished. Three measurements of a suitable partner were used. The first was determined by the man’s ability to provide for his future wife and family. The second was determined by the couple’s similarity in social standing. Finally, family approval was necessary for the union to occur. In contrast, modern society encourages men and women to freely choose to develop relationships that are more romantic than logical.

According to Cate and Lloyd (1992), young men and women closely interacted with one another in mixed-sex groups from youth. During the courtship process, couples would separate from the group to engage in more intimate activities. Additionally, courtship occurred at the woman’s home. Intimacy and affection were commonplace during the courtship process; however, society dictated that love came after marriage. The formation of mixed-sex friendship
groups and the subsequent couplings appears to mirror the focus of this research; however, the absence of research for this time period limits confirmation of this possible similarity. If this similarity exists then it is possible that the dominant relationship formations may recycle over time. If such a recycling is confirmed, the relationship development patterns may only be appropriate to the dominant relationship formations they were based on.

During the period of 1830 to 1880 reason-based courtship shifted to romance-based courtship. Additionally, interactive mixed-sex groups shifted to a separation of the sexes once young men and women entered puberty minimizing the chances of a romantic relationship evolving from a mixed-sex friendship group. The courtship process became more formalized and new rituals, such as the exchange of engagement rings, were integrated (Cate & Lloyd, 1992). Romantic love emerged as the only acceptable reason to marry. The goal of romantic love was to reveal the “ideal self” through extensive self-disclosure and open communication (Cate & Lloyd, 1992). Courtship still occurred in the woman’s home.

During the period of 1880 to 1920 the importance of romantic love grew; it was thought that love should be effortless. More importance was placed on same-sex friendship groups, which rarely intersected at work or school. When together, men and women were supposed to keep their distance from one another and in the upper class the use of chaperones became common.
Due to a lack of space in the home and the urbanization of communities, the working class youth courted in public. This public courting translated into dating and was later adopted by the wealthy (Cate & Lloyd, 1992). Dating meant “going somewhere” whereas courting traditionally took place in the woman’s home. Dating was less private and allowed for less emotional openness. Although circumstances surrounding dating during this time are unclear, it is possible that different dating scenarios may have existed whereby the couple may have participated in group activities; however, whether the couple formed as a result of participation in these group activities is unknown.

During the period of 1920 to 1945 dating and courtship became two separate tiers. The first tier was dating. On one level, dating “involved informal, unchaperoned, male-female interaction with no specific commitment” (Cate & Lloyd, 1992, p. 22) while on another level dating served to increase popularity without emotional commitment. Additionally, the peer group, not the community, defined the dating rules. The second tier was courtship. In contrast to dating, courtship served to find a mate with desirable traits and began when dating one person became steady, hence the term, “going steady.” Courtship was the step after dating and before marriage allowing for the increase of emotional closeness. Romantic love was still the only reason to marry and the idea emerged that a person would know when she or he had found the “right” partner. Additionally, dancing and movies were couple-oriented activities, not group activities.
During the period of 1945 to 1960 dating and "going steady" became the newest centerpiece of courtship. Dating became more important earlier in life. Girls and boys began group dating in junior high school. Cate and Lloyd (1992) identify group dating as "a group of boys meeting up with a group of girls and subsequently pairing off" (p. 26). This pattern clearly differs from the possible pattern focused on in this research whereby coupling occurs within the same mixed-sex, friendship group as opposed to coupling occurring as a result of members of different groups developing romantic relationships.

The 1960s began with a backlash from the idea that women needed to be frail, while men needed to protect. Women began to question the role of marriage in their lives and often opted to pursue educational and career opportunities over courtship. However, as the feminist movement gained momentum, there seemed to be a parallel movement toward equalizing dating and courtship roles. Not only did women delay marriage, dating changed in two main ways (Cate & Lloyd, 1992). First, the opportunity for informal, opposite-sex interactions increased. Second, dating became less formal and it became more acceptable for a woman to initiate as well as pay for a date. According to Cate and Lloyd (1992), there was not a set progression of stages from first meeting to marriage. This idea seems to contradict the relationship development theories presented during this time that suggest the development of romantic relationships is "generally [emphasis added] systematic and sequential" (Knapp, 1978, p. 32).
As the 1980s progressed, a shift toward more conservative courtship is evident. According to Cate and Lloyd (1992) a look at popular media of the time reflects the importance of a woman finding a good man to marry. Toward the end of the 1990s college dating as a pre-planned, dyadic event is less prevalent than the phenomena of the seemingly spontaneous, group dating (Mongeau, Shaw, & Bacue, 2000). Mongeau, Shaw, and Bacue (2000) redefine dating in the 1990s as “a dyadic pre-planned social activity where there is some romantic interest, the potential for romantic interest, or the investigation of romantic interest” (p. 2). Additionally, the authors identify group dating much the same way Cate and Lloyd (1992) identified it in the period of 1945 to 1960. Group dating is different from double-dating in that group dating involves groups of men and women coming together for planned and unplanned meetings; whereas double-dating involves pairs of dyads planning a date together. At the close of the 1990s no research identified the potentially new pattern of relationship formation whereby participants are part of a mixed-sex group of platonic friends that may have formed without the intent of dating other members of the group.

Finally, it is important to note that during the 1970s the first relationship development theories evolved. Although revisions to these frameworks occurred during the late 1970s, early 1980s, and 1990s, the issue of whether or not the way the couple met influenced the relationship development process was not addressed by Knapp (1973), whose theory is the most common explanation of relationship
development. Additionally, Phillips and Wood (1983) only briefly explore the impact of social circles on relationship development.

**Exploration of the Dominant Relational Development Models**

During the last 30 years three major stage theories of relationship development have evolved. The first theory came from Altman and Taylor in 1973 and consisted of four stages of development. Knapp modified Altman and Taylor’s theory in 1978. Knapp’s theory consisted of five stages of growth and five stages of deterioration. Both the Altman and Taylor theory and the Knapp theory continue to be used today in basic communication texts as models of relationship development. The final theory, developed by Phillips and Wood in 1983, modified Knapp’s theory and consisted of twelve stages. Although these theories are decades old, they continue to be central to the description of relationship development.

Each of these theories presume that self-disclosure moves partners through different stages of relationships; however, none of the theorists identify whether or not these stages happen to the couple, to the individuals independently, or both. Additionally, all of the theorists argue that their frameworks can be applied to all types of relationships, not just romantic relationships. The following section will explore in more detail each of these theories.

**Altman and Taylor’s Social Penetration Theory**

Social Penetration Theory (SPT), written by Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor in 1973, incorporates Social Exchange Theory and formed the foundation
for later theories of relationship development. Their theory was designed to explain the development and dissolution of relationships of all types. Altman and Taylor (1973) made the claim that all relationships “develop through time in a systematic and predictable fashion” (p. 3). They outlined four stages to illustrate the process of relationship development: orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange. A description of each of the four stages demonstrates Altman and Taylor’s concepts both of relationship and development. These concepts inform the later, predominant relationship development theories.

In the orientation stage, for example, the authors reveal a basic assumption about relationships that participants begin all new relationships with uncertainty and caution. During this stage, participants limit interaction to the peripheral layers of personality. The authors write that participants will exhibit “considerable resistance to initiation of interaction. . .regarding central areas of personality” (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p.138). In this stage participants do not allow personal information about themselves to be exchanged. Evaluation is low or does not occur at all and conversation is not smooth. Participants only progress to the next stage through the exchange of more intimate information. Examples of relationships in this stage include newly introduced people and a pair on their first date. This theoretical model seems to exclude participants with significant prior information about one another.
The second stage of SPT is exploratory affective exchange. "Friendly" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, pp. 138-139) is a word the theorists use to describe this stage. During the exploratory affective exchange stage, interaction still resides in the peripheral layers but begins tentative movement toward more internal layers of the personality. Relationships in this stage have a low commitment and are characterized as casual and relaxed. Often at this stage catch phrases, certain glances and facial expressions have precise meanings between the pair. Conversation becomes smoother and more synchronized and cues are more quickly and accurately interpreted. Additionally, participants are more willing to evaluate and be evaluated. Altman and Taylor claim that many relationships do not proceed beyond this stage of limited interaction and low commitment.

At the third level, the affective exchange level of the relationship, the theorists describe the relationship as close and comfortable. Although the theorists assert that all stages of their model apply to various relationship types, their repeated use of "courtship" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, pp. 139-140) in this particular stage description suggests their focus is on romantic relationships. Distinctions between qualities of committed friendships and those of romantic relationships are not clear. In this stage both participants comfortably interact in the peripheral layers of personality. The participants feel comfortable enough in the relationship to initiate exchanges on multi-levels without fear of rejection. Intimate affection is often displayed at this level and dyads begin to see each other as unique individuals. Often during this stage dyads contemplate long-term commitments to
one another. As the description stands, the qualities for committed romantic relationships and committed friendships are interchangeable.

During the fourth stage, the stable exchange stage, participant interactions are efficient and interpretations are accurate. Partners begin to share more core information with one another. Additionally, participants begin to allow partners access to personal belongings. Altman and Taylor provide the caveat that the name of this stage, "Stable Exchange," should not be interpreted as unchanging. They characterize relationships as dynamic, volatile, and ever-changing.

Movement among these four stages of social penetration and depenetration (originally described as the reverse process of penetration) is generated by self-disclosure. Altman and Taylor argue that self-disclosure is the primary instrument for relationship growth (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). It is also the primary instrument for the deterioration in a relationship. Self-disclosure functions in two dimensions: breadth and depth. Altman and Taylor use personality to define these two terms. Breadth refers to the "breadth of personality...made accessible to another person in the course of development of interpersonal relationships" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, pp. 15-16). Breadth is measured by category and frequency. Category refers to the number of different personality regions and the number of topic areas in each region. Frequency refers to the rate of occurrence of interaction within those regions. Depth is defined as "layers' of personality" (Altman & Taylor, 1973, p. 17) where outer layers are superficial and inner layers represent core personality characteristics. Although Altman and Taylor's definition
of personality is vague, it is still a key component to their description of self-disclosure. The personality dimension of breadth and depth was abandoned by later relationship development theorists.

**Knapp’s Relational Stages Framework**

Building on Altman and Taylor’s social penetration theory, Mark Knapp (1978) developed a relational stages framework. Knapp identifies ten incremental stages of relationship development that begin with initiation, build to bonding, and end with termination. Knapp’s model and Altman and Taylor’s model differ in some significant ways: Knapp identifies more stages; Knapp asserts that movement through the stages generally proceeds in an orderly, sequential pattern; and Knapp defines breadth and depth in terms of topics rather than personality regions.

Knapp’s theory reflects two processes: coming together and coming apart. The process of coming together involves five stages: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. Communicating in the initiating stage is brief, generally fifteen seconds or less. The communicators are attempting to show themselves as “pleasant, likeable, understanding, and socially adept” (Knapp, 1978, p. 18). The goal for the communicator is to decide whether or not s/he wants to open channels of communication and if so, whether or not the other person will reciprocate. This type of information is ascertained by attending to nonverbal and environmental cues. Handshakes and general remarks are common during this stage. This stage is reflective of Altman and Taylor’s orientation stage.
The primary activity of the experimenting stage is small talk. Participants partake in a general question-and-answer period in which some self-disclosure takes place so that possible similarities can be ascertained. According to Knapp (1978), "the degree to which a person assists another in finding this integrating topic [an area of common interest or experience] shows the degree of interest in continuing the interaction and the willingness to pursue a relationship" (p. 18). Additionally, Knapp (1978) argues that new and established relationships alike spend a great deal of time experimenting. Perhaps this is done in an "effort to seek greater breadth, to pass the time, or to avoid some uncomfortable vibrations obtained at a more intense level of dialogue" (p. 19). This self-disclosure does not usually contain a lot of depth. Not unlike Altman and Taylor's exploratory affective exchange stage, the commitment level is low and interactions are casual and pleasant. Additionally, agreeing with Altman and Taylor, Knapp argues that most relationships do not proceed beyond this stage.

During the intensifying stage, participants increase the amount of personal information disclosed—breadth—as well as increasing the depth of personal information disclosed. The increase in breadth and depth enlarges the speaker's vulnerability within the relationship experience. According to Knapp (1978), verbally, several things occur during this stage:

1. Forms of address become more informal—first name, nickname, or some term of endearment.
2. Use of first personal plural becomes more common—"We should do this" or "Let's do this."
3. Private symbols begin to develop, sometimes in the form of a
special slang or jargon, sometimes using conventional language forms which have understood, private meanings.
(4) Verbal shortcuts build on a backlog of accumulated and shared assumptions, expectations, interests, knowledge, interactions, and experiences appear more often—one may request a newspaper be passed by simply saying, “Paper.”
(5) More direct expressions of commitment may appear—“We really have a good thing going” or “I don’t know who I’d talk to if you weren’t around.” Sometimes such expressions receive an echo—“I really like you a lot.” “I really like you, too, Elmer.”
(6) Increasingly, one’s partner will act as a helper in the daily process of understanding what you’re all about—“In other words, you mean you’re...” or “But yesterday, you said you were...” (p. 21).

Additionally, nonverbal message transmission increases and the participants begin to show their individual uniqueness (Knapp, 1978). This stage of relationship development closely aligns with Altman and Taylor’s affective exchange stage.

The integrating stage allows for greater intimacy in the relationship. Knapp (1978) writes about this stage, “attitudes, opinions, interests, and tastes that clearly distinguish the pair from others are vigorously cultivated—‘We have something special; we are unique’” (p. 21). Participants begin to be thought of as couples by outsiders. As such, the couple is now a social unit for which each member gives up some characteristics of his or her former self and in exchange he or she becomes a little different. This stage parallels Altman and Taylor’s stable exchange stage.

Bonding is the final stage of coming together. Bonding can be something as simple as each member of the couple acknowledging to others that he or she is only involved with the other person (i.e. going steady). More often, bonding is associated with marriage. From the outside, this stage appears to be another level of the integrating stage; however, Knapp (1978) argues that bonding changes the
nature of the relationship with such force that it necessitates identification as a separate stage. Essentially, the relationship is often viewed differently when the contractual bonds are in place. According to Knapp (1978), "bonding is a way of gaining social or institutional support for the relationship. It enables the couple to rely on law or policy or precedent [and] provides for the relationship through specified rules and regulations" (p. 23). After a couple has bonded, each person needs to reestablish his/her individual identity. This occurs when the bonded relationship begins to experience stress. Although Knapp (1978) argues that his relational model can be applied to all types of relationships, he characterizes the bonding rituals—"going steady, engagement, and ultimately marriage" (p. 21)—as a mixed-sex experience arguing, "American society has not sanctioned similar rituals for same-sexed pairs" (p. 21). As the description stands, bonding would only occur in heterosexual, romantic relationships and not in friendships.

The process of coming apart also involves five stages: differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating. According to Knapp (1978), differentiating is "a process of disengaging or uncoupling. . .[and] communication is generally characterized by what distinguishes the two persons or how little they have in common" (p. 23). The most recognizable form of differentiating communication is fighting or conflict. Intensely occurring differentiating may be the result of the relationship bonding without adequate breadth and depth or it may be the result of "some unplanned individual or social changes that altered the data upon which the original commitment was made" (Knapp, 1978, p. 23).
The circumscribing stage is the first stage in which there is a decline in the relationship. During this stage communication declines in both quantity and quality (Knapp, 1978). Additionally, communication is “restricted to safe areas” (Knapp, 1978, p. 24) and decreases in both breadth and depth. Often participants make “an effort to avoid being seen as not getting along” (Knapp, 1978, p. 24) when participating in social activities.

Couples reach the stagnating stage when circumscribing has been allowed to continue. The relationship becomes stagnant. In other words, there is no new growth in the relationship. Knapp (1978) writes that the best way to describe this stage is as follows: “There is little sense bringing anything up because I know what will happen, and it won’t be particularly pleasant” (p. 25). As a result, functional communication is weak at best.

Avoiding occurs when the stagnating stage becomes too uncomfortable. People in the relationship begin to make space between themselves and their partner through a variety of excuses and sometimes by directly stating their wishes for space. At this point the relationship is all but over.

The terminating stage is the final stage of the relationship. During termination the couples may discuss where the relationship was versus how it will be in the future. This discussion can be done in a positive or negative fashion and can take a very short time to occur or it can take a very long time depending on each person in the relationship. Termination messages can be characterized by messages of distance and disassociation (Knapp, 1978). Knapp defines messages
of distance as "an attempt to put psychological and physical barriers between the
two communicators" (p. 27). Knapp explains disassociation as "found in messages
that are essentially preparing one or both individuals for their continued life
without the other" (pg. 27).

Knapp (1978) argues that movement through stages follows a set of
guidelines. To begin with, "movement is generally [emphasis added] systematic
and sequential" (Knapp, 1978, p. 32) because experiences and information obtained
in one stage are important to the development of the following stage. Knapp also
asserts that movement through the stages may be forward or backward depending
on the perceived relational rewards and costs as well as the ability of the
relationship to stabilize in a specific stage. Additionally, Knapp argues that when a
relationship stabilizes in a specific stage, movement within that stage occurs. For
example, a couple stabilized in the integrating stage will exhibit an overall essence
of integration, yet may experience an argument that appears to indicate movement
toward disintegration. In order for the relationship to maintain stabilization in the
integration stage, movement within that stage should counteract the movement
toward disintegration. Finally, Knapp asserts "movement is always to a new place"
(Knapp, 1978, p. 35). A couple may repeat stages, but the repeated stages are
different as a result of previous experiences at the repeated stage and stages that
followed. As a result, couples will need to work through the "new" repeated stage
before moving forward.
Last, like Altman and Taylor (1973), Knapp proposes that the amount of self-disclosure in a relationship is indicative of the current relationship stage; however, Knapp’s definition of breadth differs from Altman and Taylor’s definition in two ways. First, Knapp (1978) excludes personality layers, instead defining breadth as “the number of topical areas that are made available to another during interaction” (pp. 9-10) and breadth frequency as “the amount of interaction within each category” (p. 10). Second, unlike Altman and Taylor, Knapp does not define breadth category. Finally, Knapp’s definition of depth is reflective of Altman and Taylor’s definition.

Phillips and Wood’s Model of Relationship Development

Building on Mark Knapp’s relational stages framework, Phillips and Wood (1983) developed a twelve-stage theory of relationship development: individual: alone and receptive, invitational, explorational, intensifying, revising, bonding, navigational, differentiating, disintegrating, stagnating, termination, and individual. The theorists argue that the stages of their model are “integrated, each one connected to those that precede and follow it” (Phillip & Wood, 1983, p. 120). The implication, then, is that vital information necessary to the development of future stages must be obtained in an orderly fashion. Phillips and Wood’s theory differs from Knapp’s theory in a couple of key areas. First, they begin and end their model with a discussion of the individual. The concept of the individual as bookend stages to Phillips and Wood’s theory is important. The role these stages may or may not have in the development of dyadic, romantic relationships that
develop from friendship groups may be different from the role these stages have in partnerships that develop from nonexistent relationships. Second, Phillips and Wood (1983) include two additional stages of development: the revising and navigational stages.

Phillips and Wood (1983) begin their model with an exploration of the individual's motivations for forming relationships. According to the theorists, individuals committed to other relationships do not initiate new relationships (Phillips & Wood, 1983, p. 123). When these committed individuals meet new people they are cordial, but do not pursue further contact. Additionally, Phillips and Wood argue that the one to initiate relationships is the person who has time for and is looking to form a relationship. Four questions need to be answered by individuals when considering the possibility of forming a relationship:

1. Am I interested in forming new relationships now?
2. If so, what am I seeking? (Casual friends, supporters, romantic liaisons?)
3. What kind of self-confirmation am I seeking?
4. What kinds of people might be able to provide that support? (Phillips & Wood, 1983, p. 124)

Based on the responses to these questions, participants decide whether or not to pursue the formation of new relationships.

Additionally, Phillips and Wood (1983) end their model with a discussion of the individual. The theorists argue that the individual at the end of a relationship is different from the individual who began the relationship. The individual has redefined who they are and what they want from a relationship. Moreover, the
individual must evaluate who they are as a single individual and make changes accordingly. Some mourning for the lost relationship may occur, but it should be brief. Finally, the new individual is ready to begin the process of relationship development again.

Although Phillips and Wood (1983) present a twelve-stage theory of relationship development, eight of the stage descriptions (invitational, explorational, intensifying, bonding, differentiating, disintegrating, stagnating, and terminating) mirror Knapp's stages. Two of the remaining four are the individual stages and the remaining two are the revising and navigational stages. The revising stage is characterized by the question “Will this relationship work over the long term?” (Phillips & Woods, 1983, pp. 135-136) and occurs as the euphoria wears off and participants begin to revise their view of the relationship reminiscent of Altman and Taylor's (1973) reliance on Social Exchange Theory. During this stage participants re-evaluate “the value of the relationship, take note of its problems, and reconsider their willingness to continue” (Phillips & Wood, 1983, p. 135). This stage tends to focus on a cost-benefit analysis of the relationship. The analysis takes place on an individual level without much discussion between the pair about the costs and benefits of maintaining or terminating the relationship (Phillips & Wood, 1983). At this point, participants decide either to allow the relationship to continue at a less intense level or they decide to end the relationship.

The navigational stage follows the bonding stage. Phillips and Wood (1983) argue that during the navigational stage participants revise themselves and
their relationship in an effort to keep their relationship alive and healthy.
Additionally, partners learn and refine tools of communication that help them to
troubleshoot weak areas of their relationship.

Conclusion

Dominant dating and courtship patterns have evolved over the last 200
years. This evolution in comparison to the relationship formation under
investigation may reflect a recycling of dominant relationship formation patterns.
Relationship development models may only describe the dominant relationship
pattern of the time and may need to be revised when describing other dominant
relationship formation patterns.

Additionally, through the exploration of the dominant stage theories it
should be clear that the models from the last 30 years focus on relationships that
form from individuals to dyads and do not address the impact of relationships
formed in alternate ways. The current theories do not address the issue of prior
knowledge of partners and the impact that knowledge may have on relationship
formation. My research question asks to apply these models to a relationship
whose origin and development is grounded in a mixed-sex, friendship group.
Methodology

The aim of my research was (1) to identify the patterns or pattern pieces of development for heterosexual, dyadic, romantic relationships that emerge from mixed-sex, friendship groups and (2) to compare and contrast the patterns or pattern pieces to existing stage theories. A limited informal investigation had indicated that the practice of developing heterosexual, romantic relationships from mixed-sex, friendship groups was a familiar experience to university students and should be explored. Although theorists for the relationship stage theories argue that their models can be applied to any type of relationship, most of them do not discuss whether or not the way the couple met impacts the relationship formation. Using grounded theory as a discovery tool I attempted to isolate the pattern or pattern pieces occurring during the formation of romantic relationships from mixed-sex, friendship groups. Once the pattern or pattern pieces emerged, comparisons and contrasts were made among the dominant stage theories and the patterns identified when romantic relationships developed from friendship groups.

The relationship development phenomenon at the center of this study first came to my attention as a result of an informal in-class survey where I discovered over 80% of the students reported they had either witnessed or experienced dyadic relationships evolving from friendship groups. Anecdotal evidence that also supported the survey results included students' reports through both oral and written means in lower division, interpersonal communication courses. Additionally, spontaneous reactions by students in other courses and disciplines to
the description of my thesis interest indicated these students immediately recognized and were familiar with the phenomenon. Additionally, examples of romantic partnerships developing from mixed-sex, friendship groups appeared in media outlets such as television and newspapers.

These various indicators led to the study of how these relationships develop. Grounded theory was selected to allow the potential emergence of new perspectives and patterns. University students were invited as participants because of their relatively common and frequent experience of developing relationships. Data were collected to answer the central research question: Is the process by which university students shift to dyadic, heterosexual romantic relationships from existing mixed-sex, friendship groups similar to or different from the process exhibited in existing stage theories that build from couples as isolated units?

Definitions

I allowed participants to define whether or not they were involved in a romantic relationship. As a result, the relationships that were described varied in length, intimacy, and degree.

A friendship group was defined as a group of mixed-sex people who regularly spent their free time with one another without the intent of becoming romantically involved with another member of the group. The participants defined how that group came together, how much actual free time was spent with the group, and how many people were in the group.
Summary of Procedure

Of 182 participants, 155 completed a five-question survey. Some survey volunteers were later interviewed and audio-taped. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using principles of grounded theory. The results of this analysis are reported in the results section of this thesis. Implications and recommendations about further research appear in the final chapter.

Participants

Participants of both the survey and interview portions of this study were students from a mid-sized, northwestern, land-grant university enrolled in a lower-level, undergraduate baccalaureate core course. Undergraduate baccalaureate students were selected as a means to collect data from a group of students from diverse disciplines. Most survey participants were between the ages of 18 and 23; 60 participants were female and 95 participants were male. Most of the interviewee participants were between the ages of 18 and 22; one participant was 26. Seven participants were female and 4 participants were male. All interviewees were engaged in heterosexual relationships that had evolved from mixed-sex, friendship groups. I determined the occurrence of a male-female relationship through the participant’s storytelling and his/her demographic information on the survey.

Survey Instrument

I administered 182 open-ended, five-question surveys at the beginnings of mass lecture class sections of a basic public speaking course. A maximum of three questions needed to be answered by each participant. (See survey Appendix A).
The survey contained a short scenario followed by three questions relating to the scenario. The scenario enabled participants to compare their relationship formation experiences to the type of relationship formation I was looking at for this study. The scenario described two friends who developed a romantic relationship within the context of their larger, mixed-sex, friendship group. The last two questions of the survey dealt with group membership and demographic information.

Participants were given as much time as they needed to complete the survey. Participants were instructed that they did not have to fill out the survey and they would not be penalized for choosing not to participate; they were informed that all information divulged on the survey would be kept confidential. An informed consent form was attached to each survey and participants were instructed to detach and retain the form. (See Appendix B) Additionally, I reviewed the informed consent form using an overhead transparency projector.

Of the 182 participants, 155 completed the survey form. Twenty-seven forms were either blank or incomplete. Forty participants (26%) had witnessed heterosexual relationships emerging from mixed-sex, friendship groups; eighty-one (52%) had personal experience of this relational event. That 78% confirmed the current prevalence of the pattern of heterosexual, romantic relationships developing from mixed-sex friendship groups.

Attached to the survey was a short form inviting participants to be interviewed by me at a later date. (See Appendix C). Twenty-five volunteers returned the short form; fourteen of the 25 were selected to be interviewed. Eleven
participants were eliminated because they had not experienced the phenomenon in their personal, romantic relationships.

To maintain anonymity surveys were numbered sequentially. The short forms inviting participants to be interviewed had corresponding numbers attached. Participants returned the survey and short form in separate piles. I developed a link file that listed volunteer information and corresponding survey numbers. The link file was stored in a locked file cabinet and was destroyed once all interviews had been completed. The short forms used to obtain interview volunteers were destroyed once the link file was created.

**Interview Instrument**

Fourteen volunteers from the survey base were contacted by telephone. During this telephone conversation students’ interest in being interviewed was confirmed and students were asked to retell their relationship story. Through that narration their story was verified again as appropriate for this study. The telephone inquiry was also used to set up interview appointments. During this telephone inquiry two volunteers withdrew; a third was eliminated when the volunteer’s narration revealed their experience did not fit the interview criteria. That volunteer’s romantic relationship had evolved from a dyadic friendship and not a friendship group. The resulting 11 interviewees—four men and seven women—were sufficient for effective grounded theory research.

Each of the 11 qualified participants was individually interviewed for a period lasting no longer than one and a half hours. The interviews were narrative
in nature and I asked the participants to relate the story of how their relationship transformed from a mixed-sex friendship group to a heterosexual, romantic relationship. The interview was conducted in a conversational style rather than a formal, question-and-answer session. The participants were able to disclose their stories in a way that was most comfortable for them. The interviews were conducted at the participant's convenience in regard both to place and time. Questions were open ended; follow-up questions were determined by what the participant revealed as important to him or her. An interview protocol, for my use only, listed all pertinent information. As participants told their stories, I used the protocol as a checklist. At the end of the interview I invited participants to talk about any topics not previously disclosed in their storytelling. (See Appendix D for a copy of the interview protocol.)

At the beginning of each interview, I gave the participant two copies of an informed consent form—one for them to sign and return to me and one for their own records. I orally reviewed the informed consent form, asked them if they had questions or concerns, and then had them sign it. I stressed the participant's right to terminate the interview at any time and their right to refuse to answer any question. (See Appendix E for a copy of the informed consent form.)

The interviews were recorded on audiotape. I was the only person to listen to the audiotapes; tapes were transcribed by me. In an effort to protect confidentiality, participant names were not recorded on the audiotapes; rather, participants were given a pseudonym that was used for publication of any reference
to their statements. Each audiotape was labeled with the title of the study, the month and year of the interview, the participant’s pseudonym, tape number and total number of tapes (i.e. Relationship Transitions, Oct. 99, Jane 1/2). In accordance with Institutional Review Board regulations the tapes and transcripts remain secured in a locked file cabinet.

**Analysis: Application of Grounded Theory**

The data were analyzed using a grounded theory approach recounted by Rubin and Rubin (1995). This approach is similar to Straus’s (1987) system describing the process of locating a phenomenon and comparing that phenomenon with existing theories. Prior to beginning the formal analysis, I reread repeatedly each segment of each interview as part of the process of transcribing the audiotapes. By the time I began the formal analysis, I knew many of the participants’ stories well.

For the formal analysis I began by once again rereading the interviews while thinking about “themes, concepts, and ideas [I was] trying to explore in each interview” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 228). Including both the transcription process and this part of the formal analysis, I read each interview at least five times. Next, I used the themes, concepts, and ideas I was able to identify to develop my initial coding categories. Then, using winMAX (software for qualitative data analysis), I reviewed each interview again, this time to mark every occurrence of my themes, concepts, and ideas. The fourth step occurred concurrently with the third step. As I was coding for the initial categories, new categories developed. At that point, it
was necessary for me to review the interviews again and code for the new categories not previously coded. After the coding was complete, I grouped the data into categories that "allow[ed me to] compare what different people said, what themes were discussed, and how concepts were understood" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 228). Then I examined the components of each category looking for explanations for my phenomena. Finally, I compared my data to previous relationship development theories to discover whether or not my data "support[ed], modif[ied], or contradic[ed the] existing theories" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 228).

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. These caveats provide a critique of this study but they do not interfere with conclusions drawn from these data. To begin with, as a first time researcher my interviewing skills were developing during this process. If I had known at the beginning of this process what I know now I would have had leaner data.

Another limitation was that participants belonged to a land grant, engineering school where a more conservative social agenda may be prevalent. Stereotypically in a conservative culture such as this one, women would provide more relational information. In this case, more men than women volunteered to take the initial survey but more women than men volunteered to be interviewed. When comparing interviews, the data were richer in interviews with women than with men. How the numerical breakdown of male and female volunteers may have affected the results is not clear.
A third limitation to this study centered around the age and experience of the participants. Ages ranged from 18 to 41 with a mode of 19 for the initial survey; ages ranged from 18 to 26 for the interviews. Most of the participant stories stemmed from high school relationships when participants were young and had comparatively limited experiences in relationships. No married or engaged participants were interviewed nor had the participants reached a level in the described relationships where marriage or engagement was an option. As a result the picture of stage theories may have been incomplete. The relationship development theorists argue that every relationship follows the expressed pattern of development; therefore, the age and experience level of the participants at the time of the relationship formation should have little impact on the results. Additionally, since my focus was on the shift from friendships to romantic relationships a complete picture of the stage theories may not have been necessary.

A fourth limitation to this study was that I interviewed only half of the romantic dyad and not the other half or the group. Whether or not having additional input from other participants would have been helpful in understanding the shift from friendship to romance is not clear. Nonetheless, participants were very careful to provide complete and detailed stories that have been helpful in identifying how their relationships shifted from friendships to romantic relationships.

An additional limitation was that participants often identified themselves as part of the kind of group I was looking for yet some of them were “forced” together
by other activities or organizations. On one hand, the fact that they were brought together by a common interest in an activity or organization may not make a difference in the results since they chose to pursue a friendship outside of those activities. On the other hand, the way the group was formed may make a difference in the results when considering factors such as whether the activity or organization was the common thread that held the group together. In either case, relationship formation did occur. Since my focus is on the shift from a friendship to romantic partners, the origin of the friendship should have little bearing on my results.

Finally, interviewees contradict themselves and speak in ambiguous language making assignment to discrete categories difficult. Dealing with this difficulty required me to make judgment calls that included coding each contradictory statement independently and leaving ambiguous language uncoded. How this limitation may influence the results is not clear.

Conclusion

Using grounded theory as a means of discovering potentially new and different patterns of relationship development is appropriate and useful. Open-ended interviews produce rich data that lend themselves well to grounded theory analysis. Limitations identified in this study do not interfere with the production of meaningful results, which will be examined in the next chapter. Discussion of those results will be presented in the final chapter of this thesis.
Results

The aim of my research was (1) to identify the patterns or pattern pieces of development for heterosexual, dyadic, romantic relationships that emerge from mixed-sex, friendship groups and (2) to compare and contrast the patterns or pattern pieces to existing stage theories. Using a grounded theory approach, I coded and categorized the data. Then I grouped all like categories together. As a result of those groupings three dominant topics emerged from the collected data. The first two respond directly to my research question: (1) participants’ perceptions of the development of romance from friendship groups and, (2) participants’ perceptions of indicators of the shift from friendship to romance. The third topic to emerge was unanticipated descriptions of the friendship group from which the romance emerged. Although the third topic area may only be peripherally related to my research question, it was substantial enough to warrant mention here.

Participants’ Perceptions of the Development of Romance from Friendship Groups

The first dominant topic to emerge was the participant’s perceptions of the development of romance from friendship groups. This topic contains information about participants’ ideas regarding the growth of their friendships and romantic relationships. The participants’ perceptions of the development of romance from friendship groups contains four sub-topics: friendships and romantic relationships are the same relationships, friendships and romantic relationships are different
relationships, partners choose between friendships and romance, and the relationship intention was friendship not romance.

**Friendships and Romantic Relationships Are the Same Relationships**

The first sub-topic is that friendships and romantic relationships are the same relationships. As participants described the romantic relationships that developed from their friendship groups, several interviewees disclosed that the romantic relationship and the friendship were the same relationship. For example, when describing her dating experiences within her friendship group Interviewee #19 said:

Everyone ended up dating me. They weren’t scared off by that. They’d last an, you know, an average of like I said about two weeks and it didn’t really interfere with the friendship at all because I was always around these people anyway so it’s not like I had to go off to different groups and stuff... When you were dating someone in the group...everyone pretty much went to the same place and we had like two or three different cars so it just would depend on what car you would sit in basically. You know it didn’t really make much of a difference.

Furthermore, when describing her relationship with her friend turned romantic partner, Interviewee #6 said, “We were like best friends but we loved one another....We just became really close. He was my best friend.” Also, when describing the shift from friendship to romance Interviewee #144 said, “I had always, always like had feelings for him, friendship feelings....We had been best friends for like two years so it wasn’t like all of the sudden into this relationship. It was something that had been increasing that whole time that we were just friends.”
Based on these descriptions, these participants seemed to be saying that the friendship and the romance were simultaneously the same of relationship.

**Friendships and Romantic Relationships Are Different Relationships**

The second sub-topic of the participants’ perceptions of the development of romance from friendship groups is that friendships and romantic relationships are different relationships. When describing the shift from friendship to romantic partners, about half of the interviewees revealed that the romantic relationship was a different relationship than the friendship. For example, when describing differences between friendships and romantic relationships, Interviewee #1 said:

Friends you can be so close with, but once I’ve dated somebody for awhile there’s that level of intimacy you just don’t have with friends and all of that: closeness, interpersonal relation, and all that....I guess to a point you also know a lot more about the person after you have dated them for awhile. You see a different side of them than just being a friend. A lot of the people that, even those that I consider pretty close friends, there is still a little, you have the person you present to other people and then you have a little bit of who you are....You know who they are on the surface and you get a feel for who they are underneath that but until you spend quite a bit of time around them and deal with the different aspects of their lives that you can only do as boyfriend and girlfriend, then you don’t really get to know who they are to the core.

Also, when describing a relationship he has with another member of the group, Interviewee #1 said, “We both realized that we were friends and that was paramount so I think we were both a little bit—that is one of the reasons that nothing has happened is that we are both a little bit leery of something happening and possibly harming this relationship.”
When describing the shift from friendship to romantic partners, Interviewee #290 indicated that the friendship and romantic relationship may be different relationships when he said, “I decided to talk to Lori....It was kind of a point where we wanted to see if we wanted to have a relationship or figure out what we were as friends or whatever.” Interviewee #144 concurred when she described the difficulties she had balancing the need to spend time with her original friendship group, her family, and the new dyadic, romantic relationship that developed from a two year friendship within her friendship group: “We wanted to get to know each other more now in this new way....I think it’s that way for every beginning relationship.” All these statements by these participants demonstrate the idea that the participants view the friendship as one relationship and the romance as another.

**Partners Choose between Friendships and Romance**

The third sub-topic of the participants’ perceptions of the development of romance from friendship groups emerges from partners’ choices between friendship and romance. As participants recounted the development of their romantic relationships, they indicated concern for the future of their existing friendships. For example, while discussing a current attraction to a friend from an existing friendship group, Interviewee #1 said, “…if dating her would cost some of the closeness that I have with her now, I would rather not.” When describing her relationship process with her significant other, Interviewee #144 said, “We were scared that it [the relationship] was going to change…we were just afraid of it changing.” Finally, when recounting her relationship formation Interviewee #6
said, “I knew that like if something went wrong there was a chance of losing a friendship.” These statements reflect concern for the status of the friendship in the face of a possible shift toward romance.

Relationship Intention Was Friendship Not Romance

The fourth sub-topic of the participants’ perceptions of the development of romance from friendship groups is that relationship intention was friendship not romance. As participants told stories of their relationship formations, many indicated they had not planned to form a romantic bond with their eventual significant other. When Interviewee #139 was asked about his plans for a relationship with his significant other, he said, “I didn’t really plan it....It was all of the sudden one day at a choir related event.” Also, when asked about her friendship with her group and her romantic partner, Interviewee #144 had this to say:

It was just normal friendships between all of us. It wasn’t like there was any pressures of us like dating anyone. It was always just an open friendship that like it seemed like we’d all been friends for a very long time...Never once did we ever talk about relationships. I mean we talked about it jokingly; we never even considered it because we were so close of friends....I remember I was sitting in the library and we were just talking about relationships and then we just ended up talking about what if we dated and how awkward that would be.

Other participants expressed an initial disinterest in having a romantic relationship with another member of their group. For example, Interviewee #33 said:

He kissed me and then we went our separate ways and I was like uh-oh and afraid to even think. I was like ‘Oh, no, I don’t really want to get into a relationship with this guy’...By the next weekend
we'd like okay calmed down a little bit and that [the kiss] was an accident, probably not going to happen again.

When describing her interest in her future significant other Interviewee #6 said, “I never liked him like that.” Interviewee #144 indicated an initial disinterest in dating her friend when she said:

When we were, in those two years before when we were just best friends there was occasional, like, we called it our “computer room time” where we would just go and talk and get breakfast and, like, in his house because he was the one in the fraternity. So when we’d go over there, we’d never really have any privacy between just John and I and so we’d go into the computer room and there you could, like, it was just a small little room where nobody would go when it was later and we’d go in there and like we’d sit and eat breakfast and we kissed a couple of times but I was always like ‘Oh, I feel gross’ you know ‘I can’t do this.’ But it only happened like twice in the two years we were together because it just made it too awkward but then we had to talk about it.

The participants seem to express an interest in a friendship with their eventual significant other but indicate they had not planned to become romantically involved. When faced with the opportunity to become romantically involved with their partner, some participants indicate an initial disinterest in moving the friendship to romance.

Participants’ Perceptions of Indicators of the Shift from Friendship to Romance

The second topic to emerge from the data reflected events the participants’ perceived as indicators of the shift from friendship to romance. Seven sub-topics are contained within this major topic: natural evolution of the friendship, actions
regarding shift, flirting, self-disclosure, spending more time with future other, other members see shift coming, and other group members’ influence on shift.

**Natural Evolution of the Friendship**

The first sub-topic of participants’ perceptions of indicators of the shift from friendship to romance is the natural evolution of the friendship. Although this sub-topic was only verbalized by two participants, both participants continually addressed this concept, emphasizing the organic nature of the shift from friendship to romance. Both participants indicated that the movement from friendship to romantic partners was a natural progression of events. For example, when asked when he realized that he could have more than a friendship with his eventual significant other, Interviewee #290 responded, “I think that I was kind of realizing that all along.” Furthermore, when asked about the development of her romantic relationship with her friend, Interviewee #144 said, “It just kept on getting bigger and pretty soon we couldn’t, like, stop it…. It was just so natural, nothing was pushed…. That’s what our next step was in our relationship was just to be girlfriend-boyfriend and that kind of thing.” These participants described an evolution of their relationship.

Other participants also seemed to describe the shift from friendship to romance as a seamless process akin to evolution, even though the term “natural” was not specifically used. For example, Interviewee #6 said “We just became really close. He was my best friend.” Similarly, Interviewee #144 said, “We had been best friends for like two years so it wasn’t like all of the sudden into this
relationship. It was something that had been increasing that whole time that we were just friends.” These descriptions seem to indicate the movement from friendship to romance was not sudden but evolutionary.

**Actions Regarding Shift**

The second sub-topic of participants’ perceptions of indicators of the shift from friendship to romance is actions regarding shift. As participants told their stories, most indicated they either took some specific action toward their future partner to show romantic interest or they were on the receiving end of an action their partner took to show romantic interest in them. To begin with, several interviewees revealed that a kiss initiated the shift toward romance. For example, when describing the development of his romantic relationship, Interviewee #237 said, “I just gave her a kiss, real quick...I went and talked to my neighbor and told her that, ‘Oh, my gosh, I kissed her’ and she was just like, ‘She said she was going to kiss you if you didn’t anyway.’” Similarly, Interviewee #33 said, “He kissed me and then we went our separate ways and I was like ‘Uh-oh’ and afraid to even think. I was like ‘Oh no, I don’t really want to get into a relationship with this guy.’ So for the next week it was real uncomfortable...Then I’m like ‘Max, I like you’ and I kissed him.”

Furthermore, several participants identified other actions taken toward the shift. For example, when retelling her story Interviewee #19 said:

A long time before we started dating I could tell that he, you know, really felt close to me and had a real interest in me...It would just be little things that he’d do like try to cheer me up when I was sad...
all of the time and you know, just kind of touch my hair. Stuff like that, you know, just things showing me that he wanted to be closer.

Likewise, Interviewee #230 identified actions taken by her future partner indicating a romantic interest when she said, “He would be worried about me walking just like over to where I lived, offering me rides and talking to me on AOL [instant messenger], like sign on when I was on and talking to me on the phone and that kind of thing.” Finally, when describing the actions he took to initiate a romantic relationship with his friend, Interviewee #290 said, “It was actually a note that I had written to her during my art class….I said something along the lines that I think that I liked her and I wanted to know what she was feeling or whether we should be friends or we should be something more.”

**Flirting**

The third sub-topic of participants’ perceptions of indicators of the shift from friendship to romance is flirting. Most of the participants identified some type of flirting as a precursor to the romantic relationship. Often, flirting involved hinting or innuendo. For example, Interviewee #139 indicated he knew there would be a shift in his friendship with his significant other. When asked how he said:

Just flirting….I know they [some members of his group] devised a plan….Laura asked a question, I can’t remember and Kim said something about finding a boyfriend who was an honest, good guy and she likes tall guys and she threw that in there and I said, ‘You can’t find any of those around here,’ you know, referring to the school and we were all sitting there lying on the floor and she says, ‘I’m sure I can find one laying around somewhere.
Likewise, on a follow-up question when asked to give an example of flirting between herself and her eventual significant other, Interviewee #340 illustrated innuendo when she replied:

We were smoking buds, I think, and he lit one, and this is so gay, but at the time it meant what he said but he was smoking it and then he handed it to me and he was like, ‘Oh we just kissed’ like, you know, because he had touched it. So, that kind of thing.

Additionally, on a follow-up question, when asked to describe flirting with his friend, Interviewee #290 identified flirting occurring in the form of innuendo when he said, “It would be just things we’d say to each other or kind of jokes we would make or her notes. We’d write back and forth which sometimes hinted, I suppose.”

Flirting also involved teasing. When asked to describe flirting with her friend in more detail, Interviewee #340 responded:

We’d flirt back and forth, we’d tease...like, about the girls he was hanging out with I’d tease him about like, ‘Oh, they like you’ or ‘They don’t like you’ you know or give him a hard time about whatever it happened to be...a way that he was flirting, I don’t know if you’re interested in that, but would be just totally like wrestling and tickling.

Similarly, Interviewee #230 said, “We just kind of made good natured fun of each other....If we were setting up the boat or something we would make fun of each other.” In each of these examples participants perceive flirting as an indication of the shift from friendship to romantic partnerships.

Self-Disclosure

The fourth sub-topic of participants’ perceptions of indicators of the shift from friendship to romance is self-disclosure. Several participants
revealed that an increase in self-disclosure signaled the shift from friends to romantic partners. For example, when describing the shift in her relationship, Interviewee #19 said:

I went to stay with my dad for a couple of weeks and when I came back he was like the one that was most open to me still, and didn’t hold any grudges, understood everything, and he was over to my house, like, everyday after I was back and he was really, you know, comforting and we talked about a lot of stuff and he helped me work out, like, a lot of my problems and I helped him with some stuff and we were hanging out a lot. We’d go like on drives and talk about things and one night we were sitting in the rest area because it was, like, the only place you could go after dark without getting in trouble, so we were sitting there and we were talking and I was just like, you know, ‘I really feel closer to you than as a friend.’ And he said, ‘Me, too’ and he kissed me and so then that’s when we talked about it and we started dating.

Interviewee #19 indicated that she and her partner “talked about a lot of stuff” and were able to share problems. This kind of talk is identified by the theorists as self-disclosure and helps to propel couples through the stages of development.

**Spending More Time with Future Other**

The fifth sub-topic of participants’ perceptions of indicators of the shift from friendship to romance is spending more time with future other. Several participants implied that spending more time with their friend was an indication of the shift from friendship to romantic partners. For example, Interviewee #144 said:

We just hung out every weekend, like, I think I should have brought my calendar because I have, every weekend I did something with him and we were like ‘Oh, what are we going to do next weekend?’...I remember I invited him to come with me to the beach. We were having, like, a cheerleading group party little friendship thing and I asked him to come and I think that was our first actually publicizing us being not together but like hanging out
together, us just hanging out outside of our group because usually when we hung out it was with the group and so then we were doing something in a different group together which I think we started doing that.

Similarly, Interviewee #230 revealed increased time spent alone with her friend signaled a shift in her relationship:

He would invite me out to lunch and stuff using it as an excuse….I realized he wasn’t talking with the vice president and stuff like that about any of this, he was just calling to talk to me and I realized that, like, the invitations to lunch about supposedly official business weren’t….we didn’t talk about anything to do with sailing….I think we started spending time together, like, I took him and he bought rollerblades and we would go rollerblading together, doing things that had nothing to do with sailing.

Finally, Interviewee #237 also indicated that spending more time with his friend helped the romantic relationship develop when he said, “I talked to her about that I liked her a lot and really thought that the relationship had grown with just studying and stuff and getting to know a lot about each other.” Each of these participants revealed that participating in various activities with their eventual partner increased the time they spent with their friend and indicated a shift in their relationships from friends to romance.

Other Members See Shift Coming

The sixth sub-topic of participants’ perceptions of indicators of the shift from friendship to romance is other members see shift coming. As participants told their stories several indicated that other members within the friendship group saw the coming shift from friendship to romantic partners. As an example, when telling her story Interviewee #144 said, “She’s [another member of the friendship group]
like ‘I bet you and John will get together.’ No. I remember we all sat down and we were all watching T.V. It was me, and Ann and both of them were like, you know, we just see it, you know, we see the friendship that you guys have.” Later during the story-telling Interviewee #144 also said:

I don’t think we were just doing things together. We never said we were dating but everybody asked, you know, “Oh, are you and [interviewee] together?” and John would say, “No, no. We’re just friends, just friends.” And then, once we did make it official and people asked I remember he wrote me an email and he said, “Now when people ask me I finally have an answer to tell them, that yeah, we are boyfriend and girlfriend and not just friends anymore.”

In a similar situation Interviewee #33 said, “At first it was uncomfortable when we were together, like, around those friends, especially for me it was because like people would be like ‘Oh, you two finally got together.’” For these participants, some members of the friendship group seemed to foresee the shift from friendship to romance and, in some cases, even discussed the possible shift with the participant.

Other Group Members’ Influences on the Shift

The seventh sub-topic of participants’ perceptions of indicators of the shift from friendship to romance is other group members’ influences on the shift. Many participants revealed that other group members influenced the shift from friendship to romantic partners. For example, when discussing the shift from friendship to romance with his friend, Interviewee #237 said, “That night when we left the party my neighbor had said, ‘Charge um’ to Sarah. But, I didn’t hear her and then she
said it to me. So, she was trying to get us together.” Similarly, when describing
the shift to romantic partners from friends, Interviewee #33 said:

His friend, Scott, came up from his hometown and they’re like best
friends and we’re all hanging out and Scott kept telling me ‘I have a
secret. I have a secret.’ And I’m like ‘What?’ And he’s all ‘I can’t
tell you’ and so Max, like, left to go to the bathroom or something
and he’s like, ‘Max really likes you’ and I’m like, ‘Oh, okay.’ And
he’s like, ‘Well, do you like him?’ and I’m like, ‘Well, yeah I guess
I do’ and he’s like, ‘Well, you should let him know. You know,
kiss him or something.’ So then he left and then I’m like, ‘Max, I
like you’ and I kissed him and then we kind of went from there...Max told him [Scott] to do that.”

Finally, when asked if she considered dating her friend prior to other
members of the group saying something to her about it, Interviewee #6 replied,

“No.” In each of these cases, the participants identify other group members as
participating in propelling the shift from a friendship with their friend to a romance
with their friend.

Unanticipated Descriptions of the Friendship Group from Which the Romance
Emerged

The previous two dominant topics directly related to my research question
and although this third topic area may be only peripherally connected to my
question the components within the topic area continually arose and may provide a
context for the romantic relationship development. Additionally, the third topic
area included information about the similarities of group members. While the
relevance of that information may not be clear, these data were striking enough to
be included in the reporting of the results. Unanticipated descriptions of the
friendship group from which the romance emerged characterize the friendship
group in terms of group composition and group compatibility. Group composition reflects the group make up in terms of number of members and sex of the membership. Group compatibility describes the similarities that emerged from the collected data.

**Group Composition**

The first sub-topic of unanticipated descriptions of the friendship group from which the romance emerged is group composition. Group composition reflects the existence of similar, specific, demographic information that consistently emerged from the data, including group sizes and the numbers of male and female group members. Group sizes varied slightly among interviewees with most groups reportedly containing between 5 and 15 members. Based on participant accounts, the smallest group had between 5 and 8 members, while the largest group had as many as 200 members but often broke into smaller groups of 10 to 15. Two participants stated that their groups consistently had between 10 and 15 members. Additionally, three interviewees described their group membership between 8 and 10. Finally, three participants described their group sizes as 9, 8, and 7, respectively.

Some interviewees described their group numbers as fluid—that is, a core group of a specific number of members always existed and then others fluctuated in and out of the group. For example, when asked how many people were in his group, Interviewee #139 responded “I’d say 8 that were pretty solid together and another 4 to 6 that would float in and out.” Other interviewees described their
groups in terms of fluidity but added that some friendships were closer than others. For example, when Interviewee #290 was asked about his friendship group, he replied, “It’s hard to keep track, you know. It would change from time to time. But, I’d say about anywhere from 10 to 15 I suppose that were pretty close. I mean some were closer to each other than others. Some were acquaintances. . . .” The quality of this sub-topic area is not directly related to the question in this study; however, group composition may peripherally affect the development of relationships. Investigating the connection between group composition and group influence on the development of friendship to romance lends itself well to future research.

The reported number of males and females in each group also slightly varied. According to participant accounts three groups contained between 3 and 5 men and between 4 and 6 women. Reportedly, four other participant groups included between 7 and 8 men and 2, 4, 5, or 8 women. Two groups stated their membership consisted of 10 male members and between 5 and 8 female members. One interviewee indicated that his large group of about 200 members contained approximately 50 men and 150 women, but did not disclose the male-female ratio in the smaller groups that often formed. Finally, one participant disclosed his intimate group was made up of 1 man and 2 women, but did not disclose the male-female numerical data in his larger group of 5 to 8 members. Again this quality of the group is not directly related to the question in this study but could tangentially have effects on such dynamics as the conversational platform, level of self-
disclosure, or perhaps, relational stages that get bridged between the friendship and romance. Again, more research needs to be done to see if the make-up of these groups are relevant and if so, how.

**Group Compatibility**

The second sub-topic of unanticipated descriptions of the friendship group from which the romance emerged is group compatibility. Participants described their friendship groups in a variety of ways that indicated compatibility among group members. For example, when describing her group, Interviewee #144 said “I think the more time that we all spent together the more we realized that we were a lot alike. All of us are very, very similar and our characteristics of like school, we work hard at school but then we also all love to come together and hang out just as friends.” Additionally, some participants identified similarities as the reason their group worked. For example, when asked what made her group thrive, Interviewee #41 said “Similar sense of humor and stuff” and Interviewee #139 replied, “We’re all really alike in personality.” Although this sub-topic is not directly related to the question in this study, this topic may affect the conversational platform, level of self-disclosure, or relational stages that get bridged between friendship and romance. Additional research could establish the relevancy of group compatibility in relationship to romantic partnerships that develop from established friendship groups.
Conclusion

Using a grounded theory approach, three dominant topics emerged: (1) participants' perceptions of the development of romance from friendship groups, (2) participants' perceptions of indicators of the shift from friendship to romance, and (3) unanticipated descriptions of the friendship group from which the romance emerged. The results of the first two topics are clearly more germane to my research question; however, the prevalence of the third topic necessitates inclusion in the reporting of the results. Additionally, thirteen sub-topics emerged. Six sub-topics have been paired with the first conclusion in the discussion where the participants described their friendships and romantic relationships as indistinguishable. Five sub-topics are explored in the second conclusion in the discussion where participants distinguish between friendship and romance. Two sub-topics are examined in the third conclusion where participants describe the friendship group from which the romance emerged. Discussion of the results presented in this chapter will be presented in the next chapter of this thesis.
Discussion

The aim of my research was (1) to identify the patterns or pattern pieces of development for heterosexual, dyadic, romantic relationships that emerge from mixed-sex, friendship groups and (2) to compare and contrast the patterns or pattern pieces to existing stage theories. Using a grounded theory approach two conclusions about relationship development may be drawn from the data under investigation. First, for some participants, the friendship and romance were not distinguishable from one another. Second, for some romantic relationships developing from friendship groups, the friendship and romantic relationship were described as two different relationships. In comparing and contrasting the patterns and pattern pieces of development for romantic relationships emerging from mixed-sex, friendship groups with existing stage theories, six possible recommendations for modifications to the stage theories are postulated.

In addition to the conclusions about relationship development a section emerged that may help contextualize the individuals and/or the couple with information about the friendship group. This contextualization may help locate conversational platforms, self-disclosure, and bridges between friendships and romantic relationships within the developmental models.

Friendship and Romance Not Distinguishable

Through their story-telling, approximately half of the interview participants in this study consistently indicated that the friendship and the romantic relationship were virtually the same relationship. They did not see the friendship and the
romance as different relationships; rather, participants saw them fundamentally as one and the same. For example, when Interviewee #19 described her relationship, she said, "[I]t just would depend on what car you would sit in." From her perspective moving from friendship to romance "didn’t really make much of a difference." She was not distinguishing the friendship from the romantic relationship.

Another way participants identified the friendships and romantic relationships as indistinguishable was by describing the romance as having evolved from the friendship. Participants were not able to distinguish between the end of the friendship and the beginning of the romance. When asked when it occurred to him that he could have a romantic relationship with his significant other, Interviewee #290 replied, "I think that I was kind of realizing that all along." Also, when describing her relationship with her significant other, Interviewee #144 saw hers as a single, naturally, evolving relationship: "[I]t was just so natural...[T]hat’s what our next step was in our relationship was just to be girlfriend-boyfriend." Based on descriptions of the relationship development process like "realizing that all along" and "that’s what our next step was," it would seem that for these participants their experiences of friendship and romance were nearly impossible to differentiate.

These kinds of explanations depict friendship and romantic relationships as so similar as to be indistinguishable; if the relationships are indistinguishable then a conclusion might be drawn that they would follow similar or identical relationship
developmental patterns. Such a conclusion functions to validate the developmental theorists' arguments that stage theories can be applied indiscriminately to both friendships and romantic relationships.

This validation does not apply specifically to the patterns or pattern pieces in question. This validation applies only to the question of whether or not the stage theories describe both friendships and romances. The emergence of a relationship described simultaneously as a friendship and a romantic relationship was unanticipated. Comparing and contrasting the developmental patterns of this emergent relationship with existing stage theories is beyond the scope of this study but could form the basis of future research. Nevertheless, these data suggest that stage theorists' have made accurate presumptions that their models can be applied to both friendships and romantic relationships.

Another way participants saw the friendship and romance connected emerged from a different group of participants who did not see the two relationships as one but who defined their friendships and romantic relationships in two different ways. All of these participants revealed the existence of actions or events that signaled a shift from friendship to romance. These signals focused on the transition from friendship to romance and not on the patterns or pattern pieces of the developmental process. As such, an explanation of these signals is out of the scope of this study. Nonetheless, they are important to identify because of their dominance in participants' stories and the possibility that as the present research continues, these shifts may come under scrutiny.
Participants revealed four signals that their relationships were shifting from friendships to romantic relationships. First, participants said they knew that their relationship was shifting when they either took action or were on the receiving end of an action designed to illustrate romantic interest. As an example, Interviewee #33 illustrated kissing as one type of action: “He kissed me and then we went our separate ways...[T]hen, I’m like, ‘Max, I like you’ and I kissed him.” Other actions included showing concern for the friend. For example, Interviewee #230 said, “He would be worried about me....” Interviewee #290 indicated that writing a note may be an action to illustrate an interest in shifting from friendship to romance. Second, participants identified flirting, in the forms of innuendo or teasing, as a signal that the relationship was shifting from friendship to romance. For example, Interviewee #340 denoted flirting innuendo as a signal when she said, “We were smoking buds...and he handed it to me and he was like, ‘Oh we just kissed.’...because he had touched it.” Third, participants indicated that self-disclosure may signal a shift in the relationship. When Interviewee #19 described the events that led to the shift in her relationship, she identified self-disclosure: “[W]e talked about a lot of stuff and he helped me work out a lot of my problems and I helped him with some stuff.” Finally, signaling a shift in the friendship to romance, participants said they spent more time outside of their friendship group with their friend. As Interviewee #230 described the movement from friendship to romance with her friend she revealed that she spent more time with her friend: “I think we started spending time together.”
As Interviewee #230 and others illustrate, participants report receiving indications that the shift from friendship to romance may be happening. These participants' observations may describe what happens during the transition from one stage to another; however, the observations do not appear to be descriptors of a current or new stage. This is not to say that these observations are irrelevant to relationship development; rather, their relevance is unclear. Further research that focuses specifically on the shift indicators may reveal their contributions to the theory. Since the original models did not include an explanation of transitions, these shift indicators cannot be contrasted to the developmental theories.

**Friendship and Romance: Two Different Relationships**

Although approximately half of the participants indicated that the friendship and romantic relationship was the same relationship, the other half reported their friendships and their romantic relationships as different. Within this group, six themes emerged indicating that participants may not have followed the relationship developmental patterns described in the theories; six corresponding revisions to the theories are recommended. First, participants indicated that they experienced the friendships and romantic relationships differently. Second, the participants indicated a need to maintain their friendship while at the same time needing to explore the romantic relationship. Third, participants revealed an unwillingness to develop a romantic relationship with their friend (although in each case the participant eventually did). Fourth, a few participants reported negative reactions to the introduction of a romantic relationship with their friends. Fifth, the
participants reported that a conversational platform developed from the friendship which allowed them to coordinate coupled movement to the romance. Finally, participants revealed that other group members either influenced or helped facilitate the shift from friendship to romance. For all participants experiencing the simultaneous friendship and romance as two different relationships, new theoretical pattern pieces have been suggested as means to explain the development of romantic relationships from friendship groups.

First, participants in this group talked about the two relationships as separate and distinct. For example, when discussing a current romantic interest he had with another member of the friendship group, Interviewee #1 said, "[We were] both a little bit leery of something happening and possibly harming this [emphasis added] relationship." Using the term "this" he implies two different relationships would exist with the same person if he were to pursue a romantic relationship with his friend. By describing himself as "a little bit leery" and worrying about "harming" the relationship, he also reveals his fear that these two relationships are incompatible. Similarly, Interviewee #144 identifies her romance with her friend of two years as a new relationship when she says, "...we wanted to get to know each other more now in this new way....I think it's that way for every beginning relationship." Although she had been friends with her significant other for two years, her use of "beginning relationship" and her wanting to "get to know each other more now in this new way" indicates that she views the romantic relationship
as a new relationship. Finally, Interviewee #1 reveals that he believes all of his friendships and romantic relationships are different relationships when he says:

[T]here's that level of intimacy you just don't have with friends.... [Y]ou also know a lot more about the person after you have dated them for awhile. You see a different side of them.... [U]ntil you spend quite a bit of time around them and deal with the different aspects of their lives that you can only do as boyfriend and girlfriend, then you don't really get to know who they are to the core.

Interviewee #1's description of friendships and romantic relationships seems to contradict current relationship development theories because he argues that friends do not self-disclose to each other as much as romantic partners do.

For Interviewee #1 self-disclosure functions differently in friendships and romantic relationships. He believes that the knowledge of the different "side" of someone can only be achieved through the higher level of self-disclosure that occurs "only" in the romantic relationship. He implies that a friendship has a cap on the self-disclosure level. No such cap appears in the descriptions of the stage theories. Furthermore, no discussion exists whereby the theorists identify the amount of self-disclosure as being linked to relationship type. If as Interviewee #1 says, his friendship cannot get to the "core" as can his romantic relationship, he has experienced a different relationship stage in his romantic relationships than he has in his friendships. The theorists argue that all relationships develop in a "systematic and sequential" (Knapp, 1978, p. 32) pattern and self-disclosure propels movement through the developmental stages. However, they do not account for qualitative differences described by Interviewee #1. If Interviewee #1 is correct, the lack of
specificity may have eliminated stages in the theories, stages that occurred to him in his experience. Altman and Taylor (1973) began a more specific description of self-disclosure when they introduced breadth and depth of personality; Knapp (1978) and Phillips and Wood (1983) moved toward generalization instead of specificity when they reinterpreted those dimensions as topic areas. More specific descriptions of self-disclosure in amount and in kind at various stage levels of relationship development are necessary before the distinctions observed by Interviewee #1 might become visible.

The second reason that may make the shift from group friendship to dyadic romance different from the developmental theories is that approximately half of the interview participants revealed a need to maintain their friendship while at the same time needing to explore the “new” romantic relationship. First, participants disclosed a need to maintain their current relationship with their friend. As an example, while discussing relationships within his friendship group, Interviewee #1 indicated his concern for maintaining his friendship when he said, “...if dating her would cost some of the closeness that I have with her now, I would rather not.” Similarly, when describing the shift from friendship to romantic partners, Interviewee #144 indicated concern for her friendship when she said, “We were scared that it [the relationship] was going to change...we were just afraid of it changing.” Finally, when Interviewee #6 described the shift in her relationship from friends to romantic partners she indicated concern for her friendship when she said, “I knew that, like, if something went wrong there was a chance of losing a
friendship." None of the developmental theories identify a point in relationships where the participants need to negotiate and/or even sacrifice one type of relationship in favor of another type of relationship with the same person. Even in the revising stage of the Phillips and Wood (1983) theory, the theorists give attention to adjustments and changes in the relationship, but they address the individuals and not the couple. A possible revision to the stage theories as they might apply to these particular relationships would include a pattern piece where couples negotiate the friendship as it affects the romantic relationship or the romance as it might affect the friendship.

Third, participants indicated they had not intended to become romantically involved with their friends. When Interviewee #139 was asked about his plans for a relationship with his significant other he said, "I didn't really plan it ....[I]t was all of the sudden one day at choir." Also, when asked about her friendship with her group and her romantic partner Interviewee #144 indicated that her intention had not been to have a romantic relationship and in fact she and her friend were concerned about keeping the close friendship rather than having a romantic relationship: "[W]e never even considered it because we were so close of friends."

Last, when describing her interest in her future significant other, Interviewee #6 said, "I never liked him like that." In these examples, participants expressed unequivocal unwillingness to develop a romantic relationship with their friend. The unwillingness of these participants to engage in a romantic relationship directly refutes the individual stage in the Phillips and Wood's (1983) model that says that
individuals should be alone and receptive. These participants are expressly not receptive to a relationship with their friend. A more accurate relationship model for these participants might exclude a stage where the individual needed to be alone and receptive. To specifically name this new stage would take more research on this particular point; however, indicators from this study suggest that contextualizing the person in their friendship group could produce critical information about the bridge that gets built between the friendship and romantic development.

Fourth, participants indicated a need to pursue the romance but that pursuit was often initially met with a negative reaction from one or both participants leading to a short hiatus in the romance but a continuation of the friendship. For example, Interviewee #33 said, “He kissed me and then we went our separate ways and I was like uh-oh and afraid to even think. I was like ‘Oh no, I don’t really want to get into a relationship with this guy.’” The hiatus in this relationship occurred over the following week. By the next weekend she re-entered the romantic relationship when she kissed him. Interviewee #144 and her friend attempted a romantic relationship a couple of times during their friendship but indicated that neither initial attempt was at the right time when she said, “We’d sit and eat breakfast and we kissed a couple of times but I was always like ‘Oh, I feel gross’ you know ‘I can’t do this.’ But it only happened like twice in the two years we were together because it just made it too awkward.” These examples demonstrate the difficulty these participants had when juggling two different relationships, each
of which was at a different stage. The stage models describe a development path that is linear and monolithic. These participants experienced a two-dimensional development that meant they had to simultaneously self-disclose in kind and amount appropriate at one stage in their friendship and in kind and amount appropriate to a different stage in their romantic relationship. The difficulty in managing these two stages is evident from participant responses like, “I don’t really want to get into a relationship with this guy” and “Oh, I feel gross.” To accurately model these particular relationships, a revision of the patterns of the development theories might include a series of descriptors bridging stages in separate development models, one for the friendship and one for the romance. Although such a model of bridges is beyond the scope of this study, the participants’ stories suggest that such descriptors may exist. See Appendix F for a speculative first draft attempt to sketch a model. This speculative model also depicts an earlier conclusion that self-disclosure levels of romance may be deeper and wider than the friendship.

Fifth, participants in this study explained that while relationship stages seem to be happening to the individual, the individual uses the conversational platform constructed by the friendship to negotiate further movement with the romance. This conversational platform may not exist in isolated, dyadic, relationships that do not develop from existing friendship groups. These isolated, dyadic relationships may develop without either party having prior knowledge of each other. Since developmental theories use isolated, dyadic relationships to build their models,
these conversational platforms may not be addressed. These conversational platforms may allow participants to experience pieces of the pattern not accounted for in the developmental theories.

For example, Interviewee #290 describes how his shift from friends to romantic partners occurred: "I decided to talk to Lori. [I]t was kind of a point where we wanted to see if we wanted to have a relationship or figure out what we were as friends or whatever...." Based on this description, Interview #290 has thought about moving the friendship to a new or different level—romance—and initiated a talk with his partner so that he could find out if she had thought about shifting the relationship to romance or if she wanted the relationship to remain a friendship. This conversation might not have occurred at this more advanced level in a situation where two romantic partners were negotiating the next step in a relationship but had no historical need to preserve the friendship. The history the pair has of one another may mean the participants begin the romance at a higher stage in the developmental process or at a stage not yet identified in the developmental process. A revised model of this kind of relationship might need to provide the flexibility to allow the couple to begin the romance in a place other than an initiation stage, or perhaps even the exploratory stage.

The last reason the shift from group friendship to dyadic romance may be different from the current theories is that many of the interview participants indicated that other group members influenced or helped facilitate the shift from friendship to romance. In some cases, other group members saw the shift coming
and commented to participants about the possible romance. As an example, Interviewee #144 told a story of how another group member, Ann, predicted that she (Interviewee #144) and a second group member, John, would become a couple. Interviewee #144 went on to say that “everybody asked” if they were a pair and when she and John became a couple, John sent her an email saying, “Now when people ask me I finally have an answer to tell them, that yeah, we are boyfriend and girlfriend and not just friends anymore.” As evidenced from his comment that “finally I have an answer,” John was indicating that he, too, had been receiving messages from the group. Interviewee #33 indicated that in a similar way others foresaw the shift in her friendship when she said, “At first it was uncomfortable when we were together like around those friends, especially for me it was because like people would be like ‘Oh, you two finally got together.’” The inquiries from outside group members may comprise a new pattern piece.

Current theories on relationship development do not include a stage or step whereby members of the friendship group—or outsiders—assign the status of the relationship to the friendship pair, even when that status may appear different or non-existent to the pair themselves. For example, in these descriptions, outsiders perceive the friendship pair as being romantically linked, perhaps assigning Knapp’s integration stage to the pair as a romantic couple. The friendship pair, however, perceives that an advanced friendship exists and although they may be willing to explore a “new” romantic relationship with their partner, they do not necessarily perceive the romance at the same level as other group members.
Not only did members from the friendship group see the shift from friends to romantic partners occurring, they also helped facilitate the movement. When telling the story of how he and his friend became romantically involved, Interviewee #237 suggested that another group member aided him in the shift. He said, “That night when we left the party my neighbor had said, ‘Charge um’ to Sarah. But, I didn’t hear her and then she said it to me. So, she was trying to get us together.” In a similar situation Interviewee #33 revealed that her significant other’s childhood friend instigated the coupling: “Scott kept telling me ‘I have a secret. I have a secret.’ And I’m like ‘What?’ ‘Max really likes you. [D]o you like him? [Y]ou should let him know…. [K]iss him.” Other participants told similar stories. Interviewee #139 indicated his friends had tried to help propel the shift in his relationship from friendship to romance when some members of his group “devised a plan…” The point of the plan was to generate awareness between him and his partner about the possibility of romance. Finally, Interviewee #6 related a similar story when she said she had not considered dating her significant other until other group members suggested it to her.

In each of these cases, friends helped facilitate the shift from friendship to romantic partners. The help of outsiders—either by way of suggestion or intervention—does not constitute a stage or step of relationship development in any of the existing theories. A more accurate explanation of these relationships may need to include contextual information about the group in relationship to the couple. This change would be similar to the revision that Phillips and Wood (1983)
made to Knapp's (1978) theory. Knapp (1978) began his theory with the presumption that relationships begin with the couple. Phillips and Wood (1983) revised that model presuming that relationships begin with the individual. For relationships like those experienced by these participants, the model might need to be revised once again to begin by contextualizing the individuals and/or the couple with information about the group.

Unanticipated Descriptions of the Friendship Group from Which the Romance Emerged

This section may help contextualize the individuals and/or the couple with information about the group. As participants told their stories, similarities among the groups emerged. First, group sizes varied. Second, the numbers of male and female group members varied. Third, participants reported similarities in personality among group members. These similarities may provide a context for romantic relationship development. Three main areas may benefit from this contextualization: conversational platform, self-disclosure, and bridging the friendship and romantic relationship models.

First, group sizes vary. Most groups identified core membership between 8 and 15, while varying numbers of peripheral members “would float in and out” (Interviewee #139) of the group. Some groups reported less membership and others reported more. In either case, group members were reported as being “pretty close...some were closer to each other than others. Some were acquaintances.”
Interviewee #290) suggesting groups were fluid and adaptable to change, at least in membership.

Second, the number of male and female members in the mixed-sex groups varies. While some groups had close to equal numbers of men and women, other groups were more disproportionate, suggesting that sex of the member was not an important qualification for group membership.

Finally, participants revealed similarities among membership that led to group compatibility. These similarities may provide a context for romantic relationship development and might be important to study in more detail to determine what kind of conversational model seems to correlate with friends' discussions before the shift to romantic partnerships. For example, some participants revealed that time spent with other group members enhanced closeness. Interviewee #144 said, “I think the more time that we all spent together the more we realized that we were a lot alike...all of us are very, very similar.” Other participants identified members as having a “similar sense of humor” (Interviewee #41) and being “all really alike in personality” (Interviewee #139). From these accounts, it is evident that self-disclosure plays a role in enhancing closeness in these mixed-sex groups by revealing similarities among the group members. Perhaps, the similarities in personality created the foundation for the conversational platform regarding the shift from friendship to romance. Maybe the experiences within the group helped participants build the bridges linking the friendship and romantic relationship. The group members themselves may have helped the couple
build the bridges linking the friendship and romantic relationship. Nonetheless, more research needs to be done to determine the effect(s) the group relationship has on the dyadic relationship.

Conclusion

In brief, I asked if the process by which university students shift to dyadic, heterosexual, romantic relationships from existing mixed-sex, friendship groups was similar to or different from the process exhibited in existing stage theories that build from couples as isolated units? For some participants, the friendship and the romance were nearly indistinguishable. As such, these data may suggest that stage theorists' may be accurately presuming that their models can be applied to both friendships and romantic relationships.

For other participants, the friendship and romance were two distinctly different relationships. Six revisions to the current models have been suggested as possible options that may more accurately depict these relationships. First, the model may need to contain more specific descriptions of self-disclosure in amount and in kind at the various stage levels. Second, the theories may need to include a pattern piece where couples negotiate the friendship as it affects the romantic relationship. Third, the models may need to exclude any stage that included the individual as needing to be alone and receptive. Fourth, a more accurate model may need to include a series of descriptors bridging stages in separate development models, one for the friendship and one for the romance. Fifth, the model may need to provide the flexibility to allow the couple to begin the romance in a place other
than an initiation stage. Finally, the revised model may need to include contextual information about the group in relationship to the couple. Recognizing that this study was exploratory and discovery in nature, a research agenda designed to explore the six possible revisions can be refined to better explain how romance emerges for couples in the same mixed-sex, friendship group.

**Future Areas of Research**

More quantitative and empirical research needs to be done to establish the prevalence of the phenomenon under investigation. Certainly, empirical research focusing on the prevalence of friendships and romantic relationships that are not distinguishable as two different relationships by the participants involved is necessary. Also, empirical research focusing on the prevalence of friendships and romantic relationships that are identified as two distinct relationships by the participants involved is necessary.

My research suggests the phenomenon of romantic relationships developing from friendship groups exists. The only indicators that are available at this time are this study, the media, and historical data. Historical research on dating and courtship identifies dominant, period-specific patterns of relationship formation. Some of the historical accounts seem to, in part, mirror what may be occurring in present day relationship development suggesting, on some level, a recycling of mate selection patterns but is difficult to confirm because much of the historical data lacks detail. In fact, a review of the literature produces a description of a dominant mate selection pattern occurring during the period leading up to 1830 that
in some aspects appears to be similar to the current pattern under investigation. Cate and Lloyd (1992) argue that during this period young men and women closely interacted with one another in mixed-sex groups from youth and during courtship couples would separate from the group to engage in more intimate activities. Unfortunately, the research does not give us more information about these mixed-sex groups or the subsequent couplings making it difficult to claim that the current patterns of relationship formation are new. Until more data can be collected about the friendship to romance developmental patterns, its existence balances on the information from this study.

Finally, research contextualizing group impact on the shift from friends to romantic partners is necessary. Such research would need to focus on self-disclosure among the group in relationship to the couple, the role of conversational platforms in shifting the relationship from friendship to romance, and on descriptors that build the bridges between two simultaneously occurring relationships.
References


APPENDICES
A Study of Relationship Transitions
Survey Winter 2000

Please read the scenario below and answer the questions that follow. Any information you provide is completely confidential.

*Jane and John are friends; they are part of a large, mixed-sex friendship group. This group of friends spends a lot of free time with one another. People in the group know each other well and enjoy doing things together. Over a period of time, Jane and John become attracted to one another; finally, they decide to start dating each other.*

1.) Has something like this ever happened to you? If so, please tell the story of how it happened in as much detail as you can. (You may use fictitious names to identify the people involved.):

2.) If this scenario has not happened to you but has happened to someone you know, please describe what you heard, observed, or know:

(continued on back)
3.) Please provide information about the group of friends you described in questions one and two.

Number of members: ______________________

Number of females: ______________________

Number of males: ______________________

Approximate ages of group members: ___, ___

4) If the scenario about John and Jane has not happened to you or anyone you know, please describe the most common way (or most common ways) you have met a person you began to date.

5.) With regard to yourself please provide:

Race: ______________________

Sex (Please circle one): Female or Male

Age: ______________________
APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FOR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS
INFORMED CONSENT

Survey

Title: A Study of Relationship Transitions

Investigators: Judy Bowker, Graduate Faculty in the Department of Speech Communication and Angela J. Cordova, Graduate Student in the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies program, the Department of Speech Communication, and the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences.

Purpose of the Research Project: The intent of this study is to research, how people develop romantic relationships. This study is being conducted for educational purposes. It conforms to all policies and practices of Oregon State University regarding educational research.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be strictly observed by changing your name and the names of any people or places you discuss in your survey. Actual identities will be known only to Angela Cordova and Dr. Judy Bowker. Because this qualitative study includes stories of actual events and perceptions, all reasonable precautions will be taken to ensure your privacy and anonymity. All records of this study will be kept in a locked file cabinet and will be available only to Angela Cordova and Dr. Judy Bowker.

Voluntary Participation Statement: I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may either refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Additionally, I understand that completing the survey constitutes my consent to participate in the survey portion of this study.

Questions: I understand that any questions I have about the research study or specific procedures should be directed to:

Angela Cordova
Department of Speech Communication
Shepard Hall
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97331
(541) 737-5395
cordovaa@proaxis.com

Dr. Judy Bowker
Department of Speech Communication
Shepard Hall
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97331
(541) 737-5389
bowkerj@ucs.orst.edu

If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB coordinator in the OSU Research Office at (541) 737-8008. Please remove this page from your survey and retain for your records.
APPENDIX C
SHORT FORM FOR INTERVIEW VOLUNTEERS
If you are willing to partake in an interview about friends who become dating partners, please provide the following information. Your participation will take no more than one and a half hours of time at your convenience:

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Phone Number: ____________________________________________

Email Address: ____________________________________________
APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
A Study of Relationship Transitions  
Interview Protocol

On the survey you completed, you indicated that you had a romantic relationship that evolved from a friendship or friendship group. Tell me the story of your relationship from the time you met him/her until you broke up (or up to now).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you mean by...?</th>
<th>First contact--first encounter with him/her.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Tell me a time that happened. | Early friendship—  
What did you talk about?  
When were you likely to talk?  
How did you know this person was a good friend? |
| Can you remember an example of that? | Developing friendship--getting to know him/her  
What differentiated this friendship from other, less important friendships? |
| What did you talk about? | Mature friendship—  
What did you talk about? |
| To whom could you say it? | First romantic indicators  
What was said?  
To whom was it said?  
About what?  
Who else know about the indicators?  
Whom did you tell? |
| What was the appropriate context in which you could say it? | How you revealed romance to each other  
When?  
Under what context?  
Did you plan it?  
Was it spoken?  
How did you get the messages? |
| How? | How you revealed romance to others  
Who were those others?  
What did you say? |
| Where? | How you revealed romance to group  
What did you say? |
APPENDIX E
INFORMED CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
Interview

Title: A Study of Relationship Transitions

Investigators: Judy Bowker, Graduate Faculty in the Department of Speech Communication and Angela J. Cordova, Graduate Student in the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies program, the Department of Speech Communication, and the Department of Human Development and Family Sciences.

Purpose of the Research Project: The intent of this study is to research, through interviewing, how people develop romantic relationships from existing group friendships. This study is being conducted for educational purposes. It conforms to all policies and practices of Oregon State University regarding educational research.

Procedures:

The Department of Speech Communication at Oregon State University believes in protecting your rights as a research participant. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in this study. Please note that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw and end the interview at any time and without any penalties.

As a participant in this study, I understand the following:

1. The researcher will interview me for a period lasting no longer than one and a half hours. The researcher will audio tape my interview. At any time I may choose to decline to answer any question or to stop the interview process with no penalty.

2. Participating in this study will not put me at any physical, psychological, or emotional risk. Additionally, this study is not designed to directly benefit me, although my participation may increase my self-awareness about my interpersonal relationships.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality will be strictly observed by changing your name and the names of any people or places you discuss in your interview. Actual identities will be known only to Angela Cordova and Dr. Judy Bowker. Because this qualitative study includes stories of actual events and perceptions, all reasonable precautions will be taken to ensure your privacy and anonymity. All records of this study (including audio tapes, notes, and transcripts) will be kept in a
locked file cabinet and will be available only to Angela Cordova and Dr. Judy Bowker.

**Voluntary Participation Statement:** I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary and that I may either refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

**Questions:** I understand that any questions I have about the research study or specific procedures should be directed to:

Angela Cordova  
Department of Speech  
Communication  
Shepard Hall  
Oregon State University  
Corvallis, OR 97331  
(541) 737-5395  
cordovaa@proaxis.com

Dr. Judy Bowker  
Department of Speech  
Communication  
Shepard Hall  
Oregon State University  
Corvallis, OR 97331  
(541) 737-5389  
bowkerj@ucs.orst.edu

If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, please contact the IRB coordinator in the OSU Research Office at (541) 737-8008.

My signature below indicates that I have read and understand the procedures described above and give my informed and voluntary consent to participate in this study by being interviewed. I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

---

Participant’s Signature  
Date Signed

Participant’s Name  
Participant’s Present Address

Participant’s Phone Number
My signature below indicates that I give my informed and voluntary consent for the interview in which I participate to be audio taped. I understand that the information contained within the recorded interview will be used for research and/or publication. I understand that my name will not be used or recorded on the audiotape, except as it might be used by me in my narrative. A pseudonym or alias will be used for publication of any reference to my statements made during the interview. I understand that my participation in this interview and research project will not be disclosed. Additionally, I understand that the audio taped interview will be transcribed and the tape will not be destroyed and will be retained for future research and/or publication by Angela Cordova.

__________________________
Participant's Signature

__________________________
Date Signed
APPENDIX F
SPECULATIVE MODEL
Speculative Model of Relationship Bridge