

Friendship First: A Program on Romantic Relationship Development

by

Adrienne Joy Betzen, B.A.

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Approved

Patrick Hughes
Chairperson of the Committee

Mark Gring

David E. Williams

John Borrelli
Dean of the Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

Friendship is a relationship that has been vastly studied; however, few studies focus on cross-sex friendship and its elements. Further, studying cross-sex friendships as a preliminary phase when developing a romantic relationship has rarely been the focus of cross-sex friendship research. Through a thorough examination of existing research regarding cross-sex friendships and the development of romantic relationships, this program was designed to address the benefits and characteristics of beginning a romantic relationship as friends first. Using Baxter's (1987) Friendship First and Whirlwind relationship trajectories as a guide, this educational program focuses on information regarding the development of romantic relationships. Further, several developmental models provided direction during the construction of this program. Descriptive statistics showed that participants reacted positively to the content and delivery of the program. Additionally, by conducting ten paired samples t-tests, pre-program and post program evaluation scores revealed that participants learned from the material presented during the program. A self-evaluation of the presenter's delivery and content of the program was completed to portray the presenter's point of view regarding the program. Limitations, suggestions for future research and future direction of the program and its content were also discussed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Being in a quality relationship is the number one component contributing to our happiness (Myers & Diener, 1995). Because quality relationships play an important role in the contentment of our lives, it is necessary that we form relationships with others carefully and cautiously. The notion of whether a man and woman can be “just friends” has been debated time and time again throughout relationship research, however, cross-sex friendships remain unique, understudied relationships that at times can seem more complex than a romantic relationship itself. Individuals involved in a cross-sex friendship face challenges within the relationship regarding both self and his/her cross-sex friend. Throughout a cross-sex friendship, individuals involved learn the same, if not more information than that obtained from a romantic or dating relationship. The information gained from a cross-sex friendship, however, can aid in individuals deciding whether they are interested in progressing towards a romantic relationship with one another.

This educational program was designed and implemented based on the premise that romantic relationships are more satisfying when partners start out as cross-sex friendships. Although research has been conducted regarding the area of cross-sex friendships, lack of a literature encouraging individuals to form cross-sex friendships with potential romantic partners provides an area of study in which to propose an educational program. Further, the decision to create a program in the area of romantic relationship development is supported by meta-analysis of premarital programs which show that such programs can have a positive effect on developing and maintaining strong

romantic relationships (Carrol & Doherty, 2003). The development of the program began due to my interest in romantic relationships based on friendship between relationship partners. Interest in relationship development stemmed from both my own personal experience and witness of various failed relationships. Research in relationship dissolution led to information regarding the development of relationships. The program uses Baxter's (1987) growth trajectory schemas (Friendship First trajectory and the Whirlwind trajectory) as a model focusing mainly on the notion of friendship being the first relationship development among potential romantic partners. With the notion that friendship is a significant element in the foundation of a romance, research in the area of both cross-sex friendship characteristics and challenges became the focus while developing the program.

During the development of the program, it was necessary to analyze the audience to whom I would be speaking. After recognizing that the majority of participants would be college students, it was decided that the intended audience of the program would include male and/or female participants between the ages of 18 and 45 due to the content and examples present throughout the program. Because the program focused discussion based on heterosexual relationships, participants should have been interested in heterosexual romantic relationship development. The program took place in five locations on separate occasions. Only two of the programs took place in the same location. Technique was based on the attendance of participants and location each time the program was facilitated. The program involved both lecture-based presentation skills and audience involvement in a pre-program activity.

The program followed five points that address the implementation of a Friendship First relationship. Baxter's (1987) two types of relationship growth trajectories (development) will be addressed: Friendship First and Whirlwind. Although the Whirlwind trajectory was addressed, the program's content is centered on Friendship First relationship development. The introduction of the two relationship development patterns preceded the second point of the program which included the definition of what it means to act as platonic cross-sex friends. Following the platonic friend definition, the program explained how to manage challenges cross-sex friends face when establishing a relationship as "just friends." Fourth, the program involved participants in discussing the characteristics of both friends and romantic partners along with the similarities and differences of the two relationships. The final point of the program focused on the benefits that may be obtained by individuals when beginning a romantic relationship as cross-sex friends.

Two different types of evaluation were employed regarding the program. First, audience reaction and learning were measured by having participants evaluate the program on two levels: presenter's performance of the program and content of the presentation. Evaluation forms were administered to participants both prior to the start of the program's content and immediately following the completion of the program. Upon completion of the five program presentations, data collected from the evaluations were analyzed. The second type of evaluation will be a self-evaluation of my own performance following each presentation of the program. The self-evaluation report will encompass each presentation and is included in the results section.

Based on cross-sex friendship research (Werking, 1997), developing a cross-sex friendship prior to a romantic relationship provides a solid foundation for the romance. Therefore, the program was designed with the intention of educating individuals on the benefits of developing a cross-sex friendship with a potential partner prior to the development of a romantic relationship. While romantic relationship formation and dissolution are unique to the individuals involved, this program provides information for those wishing to improve their romantic relationships. Stable cross-sex friendships can provide a foundation for stable romantic relationships. Although not all cross-sex friendships will develop into romantic relationships, the program suggests that romantic relationships should begin in the cross-sex friendship phase.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-sex Friendships

Cross-sex friendship has a history of being an uncharted, understudied and underappreciated relationship (Monsour, 2002). Although researchers continue to increase the exploration of the mystery that is cross-sex friendship (Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 2001; Guerrero & Chavez, 2005; Monsour, 2002; Reeder, 2000; Rose, 1985; Werking, 1997), romantic relationships that develop out of cross-sex friendships remain a scarcely researched area. The little research that does discuss long-term romantic relationships as motive when developing cross-sex friendships (Bleske-Recheck & Buss, 2001), fails to address the idea that cross-sex friendships should be encouraged as the beginning stage and foundation of romantic relationships. Other cross-sex friendship research focuses on the various challenges presented to those involved in a cross-sex friendship and how individuals cope with these challenges (Monsour, Harris, & Kurzweil, 1994; Monsour, Harvey, & Betty, 1997; O'Meara, 1989). However, not all cross-sex friendships should consider these "challenges" as difficulties or obstacles in the relationship. Rather, these cross-sex friends should look at these "challenges" as opportunities for growth and development into a romantic relationship.

Werking (1997) discussed the societal context of cross-sex friendships, including in her research the challenges cross-sex friends face in their relationship. Further, researchers have left the characteristics of cross-sex friendships and people's willingness to attain these friendships understudied. Most individuals, when asked to identify

characteristics of an “ideal” friend, will have a same-sex friendship in mind when doing so due to the “prevalence of same-sex friendship in this culture” (Werking, 1997, p. 19).

When compared with same-sex friendship, many people listed similar qualities of friendship expectancies in a cross-sex friendship. Werking’s (1997) study did show, however, that there are differences in the comparison of “*actual experiences*” of same-sex and cross-sex relationships due to the sexual composition of the friendship (Werking, 1997, p. 23). The differences included difficulty discussing personal issues due to complications of understanding one another, less similar interests and sexual attraction involved in the development of the relationship. Implications, provided by Rose (1985), are that cross-sex maintenance friendship is considerably different from a same-sex friendship because of complexity, willingness and rate of interest in the formation of a cross-sex friendship. Of course, same-sex friendships differ from cross-sex relationships. Romantic tension is an element of cross-sex friendships not present in most same-sex friendships (e.g. homosexual same-sex friendships). Romantic tension alone causes a gap so large that as far as friendships go, cross-sex friendships should be treated as a different type of relationship all together.

Research additionally states that cross-sex friendships are more common during adolescence and early adulthood than in later adulthood (Reeder, 2000; Werking, 1997, 2000); attributed to the fact that in our society, expectations placed on men and women encourage them to form romantic relationships rather than cross-sex friendships. Therefore, when individuals marry, involvement in a cross-sex friendship can often be considered “somewhat taboo” by our culture (Werking, 1997, p. 3). O’Meara (1989) notes that this type of friendship is at risk of being labeled as deviant due to the affects

the friendship may have on those “(e.g., spouses, kin, dating partners)” that believe the friendship to be abnormal or a hindrance (p. 527). The mere idea that the friendship could develop into a romantic relationship makes most significant others and sometimes family members uneasy about these friendships. Jealousy or the fear of losing a significant other to a cross-sex friend is what drives American culture to not embrace cross-sex friendships. Further, O’Meara explains that the only feasible or harmless cross-sex friendships exist among relatives or friends that are part of a romantic couple’s social network. The labeling of the cross-sex friendship as deviant, O’Meara (1989) argues, reflects “a lack of instructive role models and appropriate terminology to capture its unique qualities” (p. 530). While some might argue these beliefs of cross-sex friendship to be ludicrous, my argument is that cross-sex friendships often do and should form as a beginning stage of a romantic relationship. Therefore, jealousy experienced by significant other is often not unwarranted.

Cross-sex friendships actually decrease as individuals marry and get older (Rose, 1985). This concept implies that men and women’s relationships are largely sexual and romantic (Reeder, 2000). According to O’Meara (1989) differences between heterosexual same-sex friendships and cross-sex friendships exist due to sexuality and passion, elements that may exist in a cross-sex friendship even if romance does not. Other research explains that men and women could be in a cross-sex friendship for different benefits or reasons (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005; Lin & Rusbult, 1995; Reeder, 2000; Rubin, 1985).

Romantic relationships begin with dating and generally move forward with love and marriage as their primary goal of the relationship. Cross-sex friendships, however, do

not always have this goal. Instead, often these friendships function as same-sex friendships and are maintained as a lasting friendship. Cross-sex friendships are not limited relationships; each partner is expected to have other friendships, romantic relationships and coworker relationships (Werking, 1997, p. 31). Participants in Werking's (1997) study identified freedom as a distinction between cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships, "You can be yourself with a friend. In a dating relationship, you are trying to impress them" (p. 35). Further, freedom was related to the lack of anticipation of availability of a friend, "You don't feel that they [cross-sex friends] are somebody you have to account to...you can just call them up and say, "Hey do you want to...?" and not feel bad if they don't want to" (Werking, 1997, p. 35). Less emphasis on jealousy, accountability and instability exists in a cross-sex friendship than a romantic relationship. Based on this freedom among cross-sex friendships, perhaps the strongest, most stable romantic relationship can build off strong, stable cross-sex friendships.

Maintaining cross-sex friendships can be difficult due to the uncertainty about the romantic or sexual aspects of the relationship (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005). Because cross-sex friends may have different ideas about the romantic aspects of the relationship, the development of the friendship into a romance becomes an important, but complicated part of relationship maintenance. Maintenance behaviors are used in cross-sex friendships not only to maintain the "status quo," but in the development or discouragement of the friendship into a romantic relationship as well. Additionally, Guerrero and Chavez (2005), note that managing uncertainty in cross-sex friendships occurs as much or more than in romantic relationships.

Cross-sex Attraction

A few studies have considered motivations behind initiation and selection of cross-sex friendships (Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 2001; Reeder, 2000). Bleske-Rechek and Buss (2001) found that males and females engage in cross-sex friendships with individuals they perceive to have long-term mate potential. When selecting a cross-sex friend, another factor contributing to the selection is sexual attraction. As a common variable associated with cross-sex friendship (Reeder, 2000), sexual attraction has been the goal of investigation including sexual tension, positive and negative sexuality and sexual connotation in cross-sex friendships. The goal of Reeder's (2000) research, then, was to discover how one experienced attraction in a heterosexual cross-sex friendship (p. 334).

Four different types of attraction among these friendships emerged from Reeder's (2000) study. The first two types of attraction were based on physical attraction, subjective meant the partner perceived his/her friend to be attractive or that he/she knew the friend was attractive, but was not attracted to him/her. The romantic attraction occurred when a partner was interested in becoming romantic with his/her friend; and friendship attraction merely discussed the attraction of one to a partner that is seen as nothing more than a friend. While the results covered both subjective and objective physical/sexual attraction, romantic attraction and friendship attraction, Reeder (2000) did not elaborate on whether or not any of these friendships had potential to evolve into more than a friendship. At the time of the study, all participants were merely friends; however, how many of them were contemplating furthering the relationship?

Reeder's (2000) research also poses the question of whether cross-sex friendships can provide "a ripe opportunity for a committed romantic relationship" (p.330). Cross-sex friendships can provide individuals with this opportunity; Bleske-Rechek and Buss's (2001) findings show that cross-sex friendship does and should serve as a long-term romantic relationship achievement strategy.

Cross-sex Friendship Challenges

Existing research regarding cross-sex friendship generally deals largely with difficulties the dyad faces in a cross-sex friendship (Rose, 1985; Werking, 1997). Implications, provided by Rose (1985), are that cross-sex maintenance friendship is considerably different than a same-sex friendship because of complexity, willingness and rate of interest in the formation of a cross-sex friendship. Women may look for masculinity and protection in a friendship that they cannot obtain from a same sex friendship while men look for the nurture and emotional support they do not find in most friendships with other men. Therefore, men may interpret cross-sex friendships to be a phase in developing a romantic relationship more so than women because of emotional support provided by the friendship (Rawlins, 1992). This could be caused by the fact that men, more so than women, have trouble distinguishing the difference between friendly and romantic cues (O'Meara, 1989).

Complications in cross-sex friendships stem from the assumption that a close interaction between a man and woman signifies that they are involved in a romantic relationship. Seldom are individuals encouraged to form cross-sex friendships, rather men and women seek to establish romantic relationships with each other. Previous work by

Werking (1995) found a lack of cross-sex friendship portrayed in the media. Werking (1997) shows that the common debate “over whether or not women and men *can* be friends” challenges these relationships (p. 39). Further, many individuals involved in a cross-sex friendship do not engage in a romantic relationship with one another due to fear that the “friendship would change or worse the friendship would end” (Harvey, 2003, p. 326). While research discusses the challenges presented in cross-sex friendships (O’Meara, 1989; Reeder, 2000), previous research lacks the study of the development of romantic relationships that begin as friendships. The various challenges presented to those involved in a cross-sex friendship and how individuals cope with these challenges have been vastly studied by researchers (Monsour et al., 1994; Monsour et al., 1997).

O’Meara (1989) identified four principal challenges that partners in a cross-sex friendship face when creating an identity for their relationship: “(1) determining the type of emotional bond represented by the relationship” (emotional bond challenge), “(2) contending the issue of sexuality” (sexual challenge), “(3) dealing with the barrier of inequality” (equality challenge), and “(4) the challenge of public relationships” (audience challenge) (p. 531). Additional research has been conducted regarding these challenges to test whether these challenges are present within a cross-sex friendship (Monsour et al., 1994; Monsour et al., 1997).

The challenge of determining the emotional bond exists as the members of the cross-sex friendship struggle to create a joint explanation for the bond, “love,” they experience. This challenge of emotional bond involves the cross-sex dyad selecting the type of emotions felt for one another and deciding “if those emotions are more closely akin to romance or friendship” (Monsour et al., 1997, p. 826). Cross-sex friends may find

this challenge difficult because of the ongoing notion that men and women exist in a culture that encourages romantic bonds. Therefore, this view on cross-sex relationships can increase the possibility of the partners of the cross-sex friendship viewing the emotional bond as one of romance rather than friendship. Upon investigation, however, Monsour et al. (1994) found that while this challenge is more prevalent than O'Meara's (1989) other three, most individuals in a cross-sex friendship do not perceive a problem in this area. This challenge, as an opportunity, allows cross-sex friends to consider one another as romantic partners and decide whether these emotions are more than simply surface sexual attraction or lust.

Second, the friendship faces the subject of sexuality. Because they are faced with the fact that they are members of the opposite sex, cross-sex friendship dyads must recognize the possibility of being sexually attracted to one another at some point in the relationship. How the dyads deal with the subject of sexuality differs from one cross-sex friendship to the next. Both O'Meara (1989) and Monsour et al. (1994) allude to the idea that several individuals in cross-sex friendships like and welcome sexual tension as it adds a spark to the relationship. Other individuals, however, would report that sexual tension could cause friendship dissolution and choose not to embrace it. Males think about the sexual element of the cross-sex friendship more than females (Monsour et al., 1994). These results of the sexual challenge research conducted by Monsour et al. (1994) support O'Meara's (1989) belief that men perceive friendly cues as romantic and certain instances as sexual more than women do. Deciding to begin a romantic relationship as "just friends" may be difficult, especially if there are strong sexual tensions present in the formation of the friendship. However, not acting on these sexual tensions as friends is an

important aspect of beginning the romance as a friendship. Once sexual activity is involved, different dynamics enter the relationship, adding emotional elements that make it more than a friendship even if the partners still consider themselves “just friends.” Deciphering the meaning behind physical acts is a complex goal. Further, with each additional act of intimacy, the cross-sex friends most likely struggle to maintain a “clearly defined friendship identity” (O’Meara, 1989).

Next, the cross-sex friends must manage inequality through the equality challenge. This challenge is distinctive in cross-sex friendships because same-sex friendships usually exist as equal relationships. Two struggles were present within the equality challenge. First, while same-sex friendships generally do not struggle with inequality, cross-sex friendships deal with an emotional imbalance due to the concept that “males fulfill more of the emotional needs through their cross-sex friendships than do women” (O’Meara, 1989, p. 536). This imbalance exists because women attain emotional needs from other women in same-sex friendships. The second issue of the equality challenge stems from “presumed male dominance in cross-sex relationships” (Monsour et al., 1997, p. 826). Because of this cultural belief regarding gender in relationships, men and women struggle with the maintenance of equality. Individuals can overcome this challenge by developing a friendship with a shared identity of power rather than one that exists due to “exchange principles,” or benefits “given with the expectation of receiving a benefit in return” (Monsour et al., 1994; Clark & Mills, 1979).

The last challenge is the audience challenge or how the relationship partner’s social network perceives the relationship. Perhaps the most difficult and detrimental of the four presented by O’Meara (1989), this challenge involves individuals outside the

relationship as factors in determining relationship status. The first three challenges exist on the private level of the relationship although they are influenced by the public perception of the relationship. Individuals of cross-sex friendship not only struggle with their own perceptions of the friendship, but the perceptions of those around them as well. Explaining a cross-sex friendship, like most relationships, is difficult to do verbally (O'Meara, 1989). The challenge of verbally constructing the relationship involves the members of the cross-sex friendship presenting a valid and accurate "picture" of the friendship to the public audience, who at times "assume that the cross-sex friends are actually romantic or sexual partners" (Monsour et al., 1994, p. 827). Nonverbal behavior becomes a major part of a relationship's identity and can often show the evolvement of a cross-sex friendship to a romantic relationship. The more private a cross-sex friendship, the more problematic it could become. Individuals often become jealous and apprehensive about a cross-sex friendship in which their significant other is engaged. Additionally, the impact of the audience's perception of the relationship can impair the friendship. For example, the partners of the cross-sex friendship may begin questioning the relationship and a redefining of the definition of the friendship as a whole can occur (O'Meara, 1989). Often people will assume that the cross-sex friendship is a front for a romantic relationship. When this happens, the individuals involved in the cross-sex friendship have four alternatives: "continue to insist that 'we're just friends;' ignore the messages from outsiders; abandon the friendship; or, consistent with others' expectations, transform the friendship into a romantic relationship" (Werking, 1997, p. 40).

Friendship First Trajectory

Although little research focuses on the phenomenon, romantic relationships that begin as cross-sex friendships are not unusual (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000, Baxter 1987). Research regarding the development of a romantic relationship using relationship growth trajectories supplies relevant information for the current program (Baxter, 1987). These relationship growth trajectory schemata are useful for individuals in a relationship when struggling to understand the developmental events that occur during the formation of relationship. Relationship trajectory schemata differ from that of relationship type schemata in that trajectories focus on how romantic relationships form while type schemata discuss what characterizes the relationship type.

Baxter (1987) identifies two growth trajectory schema: “the proverbial love-at-first-sight” Whirlwind trajectory and “the gradual Friendship First trajectory” (p. 196). These patterns illustrate the rate at which individuals become involved as romantic partners. Both trajectories involve self-reported disclosure and incomplete disclosure as well as direct and indirectness. While both trajectories will be addressed, the current research concentrates primarily on the Friendship First trajectory. As the more frequently reported trajectory, Baxter’s (1987) research explains that romantic partners engaged in the Friendship First trajectory reflect that “friendship [is] a desirable antecedent foundation for the romantic relationship” (p. 196). The notion that friendship creates a foundation for a romantic relationship provokes interest for the current program in that the development of the foundation would most likely form during the friendship phase of the relationship.

Three secondary themes are evident in both trajectories: perceived symmetry of involvement, perceived effortfulness, and perceived degree of autonomy separate from the couple relationship. Symmetry of involvement concerns the partners' consensus on the growth or status of the relationship as opposed to an asymmetrical state, present when one partner wants a romantic relationship more than the other partner. The effortful-effortless theme, which encompasses the presence or lack of effort in the interactions between the couple, reveals the perception of how much or how little effort individuals feel they must put into the relationship in order for it to work. The last theme that emerged among the trajectories was the perception of the degree of autonomy each partner maintained throughout the growth of the relationship.

Although Friendship First is the more often reported trajectory, little is known about the development of a romantic relationship beginning as a cross-sex friendship. Baxter (1987) inquires whether individuals who identified with the Friendship First trajectory understand the progression of friendship to romance. The transformation of a cross-sex friendship to a romantic relationship is an important development because the two relationships have similar characteristics. Defining characteristics that show the transformation "from platonic friendship to romantic involvement" include initial displays of physical affection and romantic outings with one another (Baxter, 1987, p. 198). The process and formation of the romantic relationship are significantly different from those of individuals involved in a Whirlwind trajectory relationship. Individuals involved in Whirlwind trajectory relationships begin the relationship as a romantic couple complete with intimate activity (e.g. kissing, sexual activity). It is important to note that during the Friendship First relationship, the relationship remains platonic during the

friendship stage. Once the partnership moves past friendship boundaries (e.g. kissing, sexual activity), it is difficult to return to the state of the relationship before these intimate activities (Pogrebin, 1987). Further, Rawlins (1982) advises the exclusion of romance, minimizing the importance of sexuality in a platonic cross-sex friendship.

Brown and Amatea (2000) note that when young people go out together in mixed groups, this allows individuals “to explore their compatibility while being ‘just friends,’ thus creating another preliminary relationship stage which is even less committed and exclusive than casual dating. The researchers further support the idea that friendship be a preliminary relationship by stating that individuals who are “good friends” can be considered prospective partners or the “‘on-deck circle’ ...while one explores other romantic interests.” Often times “good friends” seeing one another in other relationships can either help or hinder the possibility of the relationship evolving into a romance.

Friendships that develop into romantic relationships generally have a strong foundation on which to base the relationship. Because lovers tend to try to meet one another’s personal needs while friends generally do not work as hard to so; marriages are not as emotionally stable as long-term friendships (Davis & Todd, 1982). Therefore, it seems logical that a stable friendship should make for a stable romance. In the instance that a cross-sex friendship turned romance does not flourish, there is a greater chance that the couple can remain friends after the dissolution because they were friends before the romance began (Monsour, 2002).

Developmental Models

The current research focuses on the development of heterosexual cross-sex friendships that form the foundation of a romantic relationship. Development of these friendships into romantic relationships has received little attention by researchers (Baxter, 1987). Research focuses on the development of premarital relationships includes the social network of the relationship (Neyer & Voigt, 2004; Surra, 1990), cohabitation of the couple (Booth & Johnson, 1988; Niehuis, Huston, & Rosenband, 2006), compatibility (Houts, Robins, & Huston, 1996) and conflict among partners (Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, & Cate, 1981). While these aspects are important when studying premarital romantic relationships, not all are necessary when researching evolving heterosexual cross-sex friendships. The compatibility and conflict among individuals involved in a cross-sex friendship are two aspects to continue considering when the individuals are deciding whether or not to take the friendship to a romantic level. How compatible are the two individuals as friends? How compatible would they be as romantic partners? How does conflict play a role in their current relationship?

Honeycutt and Cantrill (2001) describe developmental models as relationship life cycles and symbolic representations of the evolution of various types of relationships, from the dyad's first meeting to their last experience as a couple in some instances. Researchers use developmental models to gain insight on the characteristics of a relationship by explaining communication's role in the definition of the current status or phase of the relationship (Knapp & Vangelesti, 1996; Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001). Additionally, models of relationship development symbolize movement in relationships, "based on need, exchange of rewards, social background, and shared relational memory

structure based on similar experiences” (Honeycutt & Cantrill, 2001, p. 88).

Developmental models assist in the continued attempt to comprehend communication within the life cycle of relationships. These models are especially helpful when seeking to better understand the development of romantic relationships.

Some models of relationship development focus on individuals’ communication patterns. One such model describes five phases of growth in communication among partners in a romantic relationship. The reoccurrence of communication behaviors within a period of time defines the relationship stages produced by Knapp and Vangelesti (1996). The model begins with initiating as the first phase in communication behaviors. During this beginning phase, individuals meet with an opportunity to engage in conversation not knowing much about one another. This phase can be utilized for any type of relationship formation (e.g. acquaintance, co-worker, friendship). The second phase is labeled experimenting and starts when interactions begin to occur between the individuals as they discover commonalities in their characteristics. As the relationship escalates from acquaintanceship to friendship, the intensifying phase begins. At this point deeper and more frequent self-disclosure, increased interactions and outside awareness of the couple occurs. Integrating, the fourth phase of the model, takes place when individuals’ personalities join, symbolic interactionism begins and there is a conscious consideration of one another when making future plans. This is also the point in which the couple begins to be noticed by others not involved in the relationship. The final stage, known as bonding, happens when commitment is discussed among the individuals. During this last phase of the model, the couple engages in social norms that inform outsiders of their commitment to one another (e.g. exclusive dating, engagement). When

a cross-sex friendship emerges as a romantic relationship, this phase is especially important as the dyad announces to their social networks that they are no longer “just friends.”

With his fellow researchers, Huston (1981, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2006) continues to study mate selection, psychological infrastructure and marital satisfaction. Most recently, Niehuis et al. (2006) have designed a “developmental, time-ordered, dynamic, ecological model” addressing individual and couple factors and the developmental process of courtship, a relationship that occurs “over time and within various social and cultural contexts” (p. 31). Friendship, like both courtship and marriage, is a process facing social and cultural backgrounds that occurs over a period of time.

The model begins with both partners’ attributes (attitudes, values and beliefs), defined as what each individual brings to the relationship. Together or individually, these qualities influence the evolution of the courtship, in this case the evolution of the friendship into a romantic relationship. The compatibility or combination of partners’ attributes along with individual attributes, “flow ‘downstream’ to courtship processes” (p. 31). Individual characteristics refer to what each partner brings to the relationship. In cross-sex friendships, these attributes generally pertain to the gender roles each sex plays in the relationship. For example, males provide their female friends with a sense of protection (Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 2001) while females listen and nurture their male counterparts (Rubin, 1985). However, these individual characteristics also include expectations and attitudes about the relationships, race or socioeconomic background and individual beliefs on topics outside the relationship. Combining both cross-sex friends’ characteristics or recognizing the similarities among their beliefs and backgrounds may

result in the partners choosing to become romantically involved. When developing a friendship prior to a romantic relationship, individuals have the opportunity to assess one another's attributes before romance is involved. Communication, an important role involved in the combination of partner attributes, provides couples with necessary details regarding compatibility (Niehuis et al., 2006). Again, this can be applied to romantic couples beginning as cross-sex friends as they observe one another in certain situations (e.g. other romantic relationships, interactions with friends). It is during this time, in both a courtship progressing towards marriage and a cross-sex friendship considering entering a romance, that partners become aware of similar and different beliefs and attitudes and the effect these observations might have on the relationship's future.

These courtship processes are then classified into three extensive classes which include the progression of commitment (e.g., length of courtship), interpersonal processes in courtship (e.g., quality of couple interactions) and cognitions and evaluations of the partner and the relationship (e.g., satisfaction in the relationship). These classes do not always exist alone, but are interrelated with one another in some circumstances. Much like a dating couple considering a long-term relationship or marriage, cross-sex friends considering a romantic relationship experience similar relationship processes including commitment; how much they care for both their partner (friend) and the relationship; the value of interactions that take place within the friendship; and length of the friendship.

This developmental model does not subsist without the consideration of the partners' social networks, including parents and friends; and cultural contexts, involving race, ethnicity and socioeconomic background; imposing on the relationship. Thus, the individuals' attributes, compatibility in these attributes and the courtship processes "are

causally related and influenced by social-network and cultural-context factors” in the relationship (Niehuis et al., 2006, p. 42). Social and cultural contexts, comparable to O’Meara’s (1989) audience challenge, consist of the influence of friends and family members (social network) experienced by the individuals in the relationship and the culture in which the couple lives (e.g. socioeconomic region, religion). It is necessary to address that there may be problems pertaining to social and cultural context not apparent during friendship that emerge upon becoming a romantic couple. For example, an individual’s family members unconcerned with his/her partner’s socioeconomic status during the friendship phase may voice opinions or concerns if a romantic relationship is considered. Therefore, this model can also provide a framework in encouraging romantic relationships to begin as cross-sex friendships.

Constructed in research literature by Surra (1990), two additional models of relationship development correlate with the “new developmental model,” although Niehuis et al. (2006) only consider one of these models in the literature. The first of the two, known as the gradual differentiation model of development used as a means of explaining developmental change in relationships, “assumes that relationships pass through alternating periods of growth and deterioration of stability and instability over their existence” (Surra, 1990, p. 857). As cross-sex friendships develop into romance, they too will experience similar phases of growth and stability. These friendships, like Surra’s (1990) couples, will differ in development of commitment if the friendship evolves into a romantic relationship. Similarly, the properties of the relationship will emerge and change if the friendship moves toward the romantic level.

The assumption that a romantic couples' individual strengths and weaknesses are known by their partner prior to marriage describes Surra's second developmental model, the early determinism model; also referred to as the perpetual problems model (Huston, 1994) or the enduring dynamics model (Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith & George, 2001). This additional model, not addressed in Niehuis et al.'s (2006) research literature, also pertains to the development of a cross-sex friendship into a romantic relationship. One of the essential features of this model is that attributes that affect the relationship in its infancy are apt to affect the partners throughout the course of the relationship. For example, compatibility experienced by couples during courtship will be apparent during marriage and couples that frequently endure conflict during courtship will also frequently experience conflict during marriage (Niehuis et al., 2006). Likewise, cross-sex friendships that are compatible during friendship would also be compatible during a romantic relationship and cross-sex friends that experience frequent conflict as friends will experience frequent conflict as romantic partners. Previous research on friendship development (Berg, 1984) generally supports the assumptions addressed with this model.

One temporal developmental model identified by Huston and his colleagues (2001) and later considered by Niehuis et al. (2006) has been positively excluded from the developmental models used regarding cross-sex friendships turned romantic relationships for a reason worth noting. The exclusion of this model when addressing cross-sex friends turned romantic partners stems from the notion that the model describes the process that occurs among individuals involved in a romantic relationship considering marriage. According to the disillusionment model (Huston et al., 2001), dating partners idealize one another and tend to ignore faults or potential problems that may occur during

courtship. Individuals in a cross-sex friendship often do not feel it necessary to put their “best foot forward” (Niehuis et al., 2006), rather they feel a sense of freedom (e.g. ““You can be yourself with your friend...you’re uninhibited with things with your opposite sex friend””) (Werking, 2001, p. 35). Therefore, this model cannot pertain to the development of a romance from a cross-sex friendship because it addresses attributes not present in a cross-sex friendship.

Courtship is defined by Niehuis et al. (2006) as “the process by which unmarried partners select each other as mates and decide to enter matrimony” (p. 24). Because the focus of this program is on the aspect that romantic relationships should begin as cross-sex friendships, the aspect of marital success within the developmental model is not unnecessary. The development of these friendships into a romantic relationship follows the same process as courtship, a phase in the relationship that occurs before marriage. This program was developed based on existing research pertaining to cross-sex friendship and the development of romantic relationships. While the notion of a romance beginning as a cross-sex friendship has been discussed, previous literature has not encouraged the formation of a cross-sex friendship as a preliminary phase of a romantic relationship. Because of the benefits involved in these types of relationships and support from existing developmental models, this program was able to address the advantages, characteristics and challenges of a “Friendship First” relationship.

CHAPTER III

PRESENTATION PROTOCOL

The program was presented five separate times to gather data regarding participant response to the content and delivery of the presentation. Each performance was conducted in the same manner beginning with a pre-program evaluation of the content of the program. Participants completed a 10-item evaluation created based on information presented in the program. This evaluation was designed to assess participant's learning during the program. Following the program, participants were asked to complete a post program evaluation which not only reassessed learning using the same 10-item evaluation, but also measured participants' reaction to the program's content and delivery using Kirkpatrick's (1979) ASTD evaluation as a guide. Finally, an assessment of each presentation was completed and compiled to make up a self-evaluation of the performances.

Recruitment

Participants and Location

Participants (N=119) included individuals who were involved in residence life or enrolled in communication courses at a large Southwestern university and those who had heard about the program from previous participants. The participants included 63 men and 56 women, ranging in age from 18 to 53 ($M = 21.85$, $SD = 3.78$). Participants were predominately Caucasian (82.4%), followed by Hispanic (7.6%), Asian (4.2%), African American (2.5%), American Indian (.8%), and individuals from other ethnic backgrounds

(2.5%). In addition, participants reported relationship status as single (47.1%), committed relationship (35.3%), dating (9.2%), engaged (3.4%), married (3.4%), or divorced (.8%), with the remaining individuals reporting other (.8%). Additionally, participants largely reported their education level as a current college student (84.9%), current graduate student (10.1%), college graduate (1.7%) or other level of education (3.4%). Participants were asked to list the length of their last romantic relationship in months. Individuals with no prior relationship experience listed zero months (10.1%). The range of the remaining individuals' length of last romantic relationship ranged from half of a month to 384 months ($\underline{M} = 16.31$, $\underline{SD} = 36.85$).

Participation in the program was voluntary based on each individual's desire to gain insight to the program's content. A total of five programs were presented over the course of two months. The pilot programs were announced to individuals via word of mouth by me or others who had heard about the program's content. Two of the programs were administered to resident life coordinators during an orientation session, while the final presentation of the program occurred during a communication course. Although some participants did not complete all questions listed on the evaluations, all completed statements were analyzed, meaning that no surveys were discarded. Additionally, no compensation was distributed during any of the presentations; however, the communication course instructor may assess the students' learning regarding the content of the program. Finally, all participants were aware the program would be taking place prior to the day it was performed.

All performances of the program took place in a classroom setting on the university's campus. Location depended on availability of a classroom during the time of

day the program was presented. Seating was arranged so that participants had a full view of the presenter throughout the duration of the program. The program was presented as a single-session seminar lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Length of the program depended on the amount of participants and audience participation during the program's group activity.

Content

[Pass out evaluations]

[Preprogram Evaluation]

Thank you for attending Friendship First: A Program on Romantic Relationship Development. My name is Adrienne Betzen and I am very excited for you to be a part of this program. I am a graduate student pursuing my Master's in Communication Studies. Each of you should have a manila envelope with 3 sheets of paper inside. Before we get started I'd like you to take out the piece of paper with a yellow highlighted title of "Preprogram Evaluation." Please take a moment to fill this out. Answer the items to the best of your ability even if you are unsure about a statement. When you are finished with the evaluation, please place it back inside the manila envelope.

[Icebreaker]

Ok, to begin, what I would like to do is split the room in half. The left side of the room will be referred to as Group One while the right side will be Group Two. Choose one person from the group to be the group secretary and I will bring each group a piece of poster board and a marker.

For the next three minutes:

(Move to Group One): Group one, I would like you to brainstorm characteristics that you value in a cross-sex friend. As a group please decide on the top five characteristics that you value in a cross-sex friend and write these top five answers on the poster board. You will have the next three minutes to do this. Don't begin until I say go.

(Move to Group Two): Group two, I would like you to brainstorm characteristics that you value in a romantic partner. As a group please decide on the top five characteristics that you value in a romantic partner and write these top five characteristics on the poster board. You have the next three minutes to complete this exercise. Everyone ready? Go!

(After three minutes.) Time is up. Please set your lists to the side, we will come back to them a little later.

[Introduction]

Dating isn't easy. I want you to picture yourself at a restaurant on a first date. Maybe it's a blind date, maybe it is your brother's boss' nephew's cousin or perhaps it is someone you met in a coffee shop who asked for your number and to your pleasant surprise, he/she called. Whatever the situation, the first date is often awkward. It can be especially awkward if you have never met the person. You spend the evening (or day) getting to know one another, discuss a second date (or not) and go home wondering what he/she might be thinking of you. A week later, you're out on a second date and before you know it your one month anniversary is here and you're talking about love, marriage, the baby carriage. This is where I say, Stop. (pause)

This is where I ask you, “How long does it take for you to make a new friend?” I’d like you to think for now about your best friend, be it same sex or cross-sex. Perhaps you’ve known him/her for your entire life, perhaps just a few years. How long did it take for that relationship to form? How many obstacles have the two of you faced together? Did you meet your best friend in a coffee shop, get his/her number and have dinner with him/her the following Friday? For some of you the answer might be yes, however, did this individual jump from acquaintance status to best friend status in one week? Hardly. Why then, in a relationship more sacred than friendship do we spend considerably less time forming the relationship? The one relationship with a person you could potentially spend the rest of your life with often happens faster than we think.

[Purpose]

Before I get too ahead of myself, I want you to become familiar with a bit of terminology. First, cross-sex friendships can be considered a branch of courtship, much like the days when courtship consisted of “courting” or getting to know someone. During this beginning phase of a relationship, individuals have the opportunity to assess one another’s character, manners and likes and dislikes. When I use the term romantic attraction I am referring to physical attraction that exists between a male and a female. Therefore, when I use this term, I am not referring to sexual activity. Whether or not members of this audience are sexual active is not relevant to the content of this program. Additionally, the term “romantic relationship” refers to a relationship between a male and female that includes but is not limited to exclusivity between the couple, physical touch with romantic implication (such as hugging, hand holding or kissing), and defining

one another by the terms “boyfriend” or “girlfriend.” There are also portions of the program that ask you to recall a past romantic or dating relationship. If you have never been involved in a romantic relationship, please imagine what you believe to be a romantic relationship. Finally, this program assumes that the goal of a romantic relationship is a long term successful marriage.

Not all cross-sex friendships will flourish into romantic relationships; however, this program suggests that your romances begin in the cross-sex friendship phase. This program focuses on the development of romantic relationships; the definition of a platonic friendship; challenges and opportunities present in cross-sex friendships which include the emotional bond challenge; the sexual challenge, the equality challenge and the social network challenge; characteristics of cross-sex friends and romantic partners; and the benefits of beginning your romantic relationships as friends first.

[Main point one (Baxter’s relationship growth trajectories)]

It wasn’t until I ended my fifth serious relationship that I realized I wasn’t so good at this relationship stuff. However, as I began searching for patterns in my unsuccessful relationships, I found I wasn’t to blame. Figuring it must be my ex-boyfriends’ that were at fault, I continued my search until I discovered, they weren’t to blame either. In fact, the problem wasn’t in the end of the relationship, it was at the beginning! There was something wrong with the development of these relationships.

[Whirlwind trajectory]

For most of us, the development of a romantic relationship begins in one of two ways.

One I'm quite familiar with is called a Whirlwind relationship. This is much like the relationship I described at the start of the program. You may know it better as the "love at first sight" relationship. This is someone you met at a party, a book store, through a friend, a blind date and BAM! He/she ended up your boyfriend/girlfriend after the third date. Now, you're in a relationship. Man, you didn't even see it coming. Yet, as your relationship begins to develop, a small voice begins to tell you things about your significant other that you didn't know prior to becoming the serious couple that you are now. How could you? You'd only know each other for two and a half days! Okay, that may be a little extreme, but even dating someone for one to two weeks before "getting serious" isn't enough time to get to know them. Ladies, you are not going to find out how he treats his mom (unless of course you have already met her, which at two or three weeks is not likely) and how he treats his mom can be a reflection of how he is going to treat you. If you ask him, "How's your relationship with your mom?" and his reply is, "She gets on my nerves, always telling me things I should be doing and nagging me every time I go home," you might get a preview of how he'll talk about his relationship with his wife in a few years. On the flip side, if he tells you he doesn't do anything without first consulting his mom for her approval, you may have a problem there, too. Replay the scenario with him as "just a friend." Perhaps when you heard his response, you could discuss his relationship with his mom without him getting offended.

[Now guys, I haven't forgotten you. Two or three weeks are not a long enough time to get to know the moodiness that makes up the complexity of a girl. When she snatches up your

cell phone and starts deleting anyone with a name that even remotely sounds like a girls' name (example: Bobby? I knew a girl named Bobby once. ERASE!), you have a major problem on your hands. As a friend, she would most likely understand the meaning of friendship. It's doubtful that if she turns into a romantic partner that she'll start deleting every Susie, Jen and Ronda that she sees.]¹

[Friendship First]

There are plenty of Whirlwind relationships that flourish. Yet my own experience screams, "Take it slow!" Take it so slow that your relationship begins as two platonic friends. This is where the second type of relationship development comes in. It's called Friendship First and it represents a relationship in which the romantic partners begin as friends. Like most relationships, developing a cross-sex friendship takes time and initiative. Basically, these friendships take time and there has to be a drive to maintain this relationship. Therefore, developing a friendship with a member of the opposite sex is going to involve much of the same things that a same-sex friendship or romantic relationship does. Yet, there is one major difference between romantic relationships and cross-sex friendships.

[Main point two (platonic cross-sex friends definition)]

Here's where I'll take a minute to lecture you on exactly what a platonic friend is. Platonic friends do not call their outings dates, generally they don't pay for one another, from time to time they may hold hands (yet when this occurs there is usually some

¹ Note: This section will be omitted if audience consists of only female participants.

implication behind it) and they might kiss one another on the cheek when saying hello or goodbye. The platonic cross-sex friends do the same things most same sex friends do, but they do not, under any circumstances, cross the boundary of “just friends” to friends with benefits. Crossing this boundary may take the friends to a more intimate level at which one person in the friendship is generally left feeling hurt or confused. It’s not a good idea. Chances are the friends haven’t played through what might happen if something like this occurred. The physical aspect of a relationship is the fine line that divides cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships. Once that boundary is crossed, it’s generally very difficult to virtually impossible to return to the status of “just friends.” Some of you are probably thinking, “Is she crazy? How do you not act on physical attraction to a friend?” However, it isn’t as difficult as you think. You don’t go around acting on the physical attraction you feel for a stranger on the street, do you? I only ask that you recognize the physical attraction, but hold off until you decide whether the two of you are compatible. While it may be difficult to control, physical attraction isn’t the only problem that cross-sex friends face.

[Main point three (cross-sex friendship challenges)]

Laying a foundation of friendship before romance isn’t always going to be an easy task. Like most relationships, cross-sex friends experience multiple challenges; however, they are a little bit different than those we might see in a same-sex or romantic relationship. These challenges can hinder the relationship or help it develop into something more than a friendship. As the cross-sex friends become closer friends, they naturally begin questioning their relationship. It is not uncommon for cross-sex friends to consider one

another as potential romantic partners somewhere in the course of their relationship. Because it may not always happen at the same time for both individuals, four common challenges are present in cross-sex friendships. They are the emotional bond challenge, the sexual challenge, the equality challenge and the social network challenge. I ask that cross-sex friends not see these challenges as obstacles, but as opportunities for the development of a romantic relationship.

[Emotional Bond Challenge]

The first involves the emotional bond between the friends. Questions arise such as: “How do we establish a bond for our relationship? Is it love? Is it friendship? Is it both?” as partners struggle to establish a common bond between the two of them. This challenge, allows cross-sex friends to consider one another as romantic partners and decide whether these emotions are more than simply physical attraction or lust.

[Sexual Challenge]

Let’s go back to physical attraction one last time as we discuss the second challenge, the sexual challenge. Recognizing the possibility of being physically attracted to one another at some point during the relationship is something both friends will face. Deciding to begin a romantic relationship as “just friends” may be difficult, especially if there are strong romantic tensions present in the formation of the friendship. However, not acting on these romantic tensions as friends is an important aspect of beginning the romance as a friendship. Guys, you are going to think about these challenges/opportunities more than females. Additionally, upon getting to know your friend, you may realize physical

attraction is the only attraction you feel for them. Like many Whirlwind relationships, it will become apparent that romantic relationships need more than just physical attraction to succeed. Sure, your physical chemistry might be fantastic, but can the two of you hold a decent conversation? Think of it this way, if the attraction spark fizzles, you still have a good friend and if it blazes, you have a potential romantic relationship. It's a win/win situation. No messy break-ups, no hard feelings. Allowing physical intimacy to become a part of a cross-sex friendship generally marks the end of "friendship" and the beginning of a romantic relationship.

[Equality Challenge]

While it is less of a problem than the other three challenges/opportunities, the next challenge cross-sex friends' face is labeled the equality challenge. Because same-sex friends generally have an equal relationship while most male-female relationships face inequalities, cross-sex friends face a dilemma when trying to manage equality. In a society where males tend to dominate male-female relationships, cross-sex friendships struggle with both power and control. Embracing the existence of inequality as an opportunity and forming a romance is one way for cross-sex friends to manage this challenge. Boundaries different than those of a same-sex friendship or a romantic relationship should be set when establishing a cross-sex friendship. This challenge can be seen in the question of "who pays?" when a male and female go out together. Generally (though not always the case), if there is no offer for the male to pay, it is a good indication that he perceives the relationship as "just friends." It's also present when establishing relationship responsibilities. The roles and responsibilities taken on

during the friendship phase are likely to be the same as romantic partners. Developing and understanding shared responsibilities allows cross-sex friends to embrace a communal relationship, one in which partners genuinely care for one another, yet are not concerned with repaying or returning favors. An exchange relationship is one in which partners give in order to receive, a “this for that” type of relationship. Have you ever been in an argument with someone (a friend, family member or a significant other) when they start listing off everything they have done for you and perceiving nothing in return? What? I wasn’t aware we were keeping score. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to be in a relationship with someone where I am unsure whether my partner’s intentions are because he/she wants to or because he/she expects something in return. Establishing power and equality in a relationship (friendship or romance) should come early. Now that equality is established, how does the public view this relationship?

[Social Network Challenge]

Perhaps the most difficult challenge for cross-sex friends to manage is the social network challenge, or how the public perceives the relationship. Two of my closest friends are a male and a female and they spend a significant amount of time together one on one. She is recently engaged and he is single, however, when they first met and became friends they experienced the social network challenge to the fullest. As graduate students they faced questions about their relationship not only from our peers, but from our professors as well. People constantly asked if the two of them were dating. In fact, most people didn’t ask, they just assumed they were! If one of them had felt something romantic for the other, this could have led to the demise of the relationship. However, because they

were stable as cross-sex friends, they laughed off the questions understanding that the questions stemmed from the amount of time they spent together. Next, I would like you to think about how our society portrays male-female relationships. I would like you to consider two examples. First, in the sitcom “Friends,” while the characters are portrayed as a group of cross-sex friends, each character had some sort of romantic relationship with at least one of the other characters. The second example is the film “When Harry Met Sally” epitomizes the question of whether or not a man and a woman can really be “just friends.” Our society, whether we like it or not views male-female relationships as romantic, making it extremely difficult to manage this challenge unless both people are stable in their relationship as friends. Questions about the relationship can make cross-sex friends uneasy, especially if one is considering the other one as a romantic partner. Why would people perceive that friends who spend large amounts of time together and seem compatible as more than “just friends?” Let’s find out.

[Main point four (characteristics of friends and romantic partners)]

Have you ever really taken a moment to sit down and think about what you value or look for in a cross-sex friend? What about in a romantic partner?

(Debrief icebreaker activity): Discuss each group’s characteristics. Compare and contrast characteristics of a friend and a romantic partner.

Have you ever, after a break-up, thought to yourself, “That is someone I would never be friends with?” Yet, you were in a relationship more intimate than friendship! What you look for in a friend should closely resemble what you look for in a romantic partner. Now that we have discovered how similar our views on cross-sex friends and romantic

partners can be, let's discuss the benefits of beginning your romantic relationships as friends first.

[Main point five (benefits of Friendship First relationship)]

When you engage in friendship with an individual before romance, it is similar to a trailer of a movie. I like to think of cross-sex friendship as a preview of the relationship, an introductory viewing, a sample, an overview of what a romantic relationship with this person might be like. Sure, you could find out these things about someone without being friends with them. There is a name for that, it's called stalking. Becoming friends with them is a much better option.

Both men and women can benefit from cross-sex friendships! Men find nurturance and an emotional outlet with female friends that is generally absent with male friends while women get a sense of protection and experience a lighter, fun relationship with male friends. However, the benefits don't stop there.

Take a moment to think about reasons why you have left a relationship. Everyone will have different reasons for leaving or being left at the end of a relationship. Yet, do you see a pattern? After a relationship has ended I often find myself saying, "I never even knew him." If you've ever thought this, "I never knew him," "I never knew her," you aren't wrong. You probably didn't. My parents recently divorced after 30 years of marriage. Yep, 30 years. One would expect that after 30 years you would know someone inside and out. Do you want to know what I hear the most from my parents about one another since the divorce? It's probably not what you are thinking. It's, "We never knew each other." What?! You slept next to each other, had dinner every night, raised three

kids, took hundreds of vacations together and you didn't know each other? Why? Because they never took the time to become friends with one another. There was no friendship foundation in their relationship. They just got used to each other until one day they realized they really didn't have anything in common. What took 30 years to figure out could have been prevented if they had established a friendship before romance. Here's another example, about a younger couple. I read the first draft of this program to my mom one day and as she listened she said it reminded her of a 21-year old we know that recently became engaged to his 19-year old girlfriend. They had been dating two months before getting engaged. My mom's concern: "They don't even know each other." From friends and family alike, I have often heard the term I mentioned at the start of the program, "Take it slow." What this really means is get to know someone you engage in a romantic relationship. Getting to know each other is perhaps the most significant benefit that comes out of establishing a friendship prior to romance. Becoming friends with a potential romantic partner allows you to disclose information you may not necessarily disclose to a significant other. Why? It seems to boil down to less pressure. For some reason we are less concerned about what our friends will think of us if we do or say something silly than we are our romantic partners. Think about the difference between calling a cross-sex friend and calling a new dating partner. With a cross-sex friend we simply pick up the phone and dial. With a dating partner, we pick up the phone, then put it back down, dial the number, put it back down, pick up the phone and suddenly panic as you realize he/she might not answer and you might have to leave a message. This of course, then leads to, "What will I say on the message? How do I sound interested, but not too eager? Do I say call me back or I will try you again? Do I leave a message at all

or assume he/she'll see my number and call me back?" All this and he/she hasn't even picked up the phone! In fact, most of the time we call hoping he/she won't answer so we can leave a message. "There, now the ball is in his/her court." This can all be alleviated if you establish a friendship first! Cross-sex friendships allow us to see our friends in their true form. Because we are not struggling to impress one another in a cross-sex friendship (which may not be completely true because males and females are always trying to impress each other), we are more ourselves. Remember, as Elbert Hubbard once said a friend is someone that knows all about you and still likes you (Hubbard, 1923).

Establishing a friendship also allows cross-sex friends to see one another in other romantic relationships. This not only shows you how he/she'll treat a significant other, but it is also a good time to analyze feelings for one another or at least how you feel about him/her (if he/she is the one in the relationship).

In my current relationship, my boyfriend and I were good friends for about a year and a half before we began dating. While we had loosely mentioned the idea of becoming more than "just friends," we both agreed that it wasn't the right time. In fact, it wasn't until he told me that he may have feelings for someone else that I realized I wanted him to have feelings for me! Sometimes, it is not until someone can be potentially taken away from you that you realize he/she is what you want. Because I had already been in a sense rejected (even though he didn't realize that was what was happening), I figured I had nothing to lose so I told him how I felt. Hearing this, he realized he felt the same way. Another example comes from a friend of mine that began her relationship with her husband as "just friends." It wasn't until he was considering asking another girl to the

Homecoming dance in high school that she realized she wanted him to ask her! I call it the Cher from Clueless, "I love Josh!" syndrome. In the popular film, Cher realizes her liking for Josh when he begins to have feelings for another girl.

Seeing your cross-sex friend in a romantic relationship can give you a great indication of how he/she treats his/her significant other. If you like how your cross-sex friend treats his/her significant other, take note. If you don't, take note. Chances are he/she will probably treat you the same way. And you are not going to change that!

I'm going to assume we've all heard the phrase at some point in our lives (whether in a movie or in a relationship), "You treat me differently in front of your friends." It's pretty frustrating is it when your romantic partner treats you one way in private and another way in public. Guess what? If you are a part of your significant others' "friendship circle," chances are the way he/she treats you won't change once you are romantic partners.

Other benefits of beginning a romantic relationship as cross-sex friends include learning more and gaining insight about the opposite sex. We can learn about the thought processes, feelings and behaviors of members of the opposite sex before we engage in a romantic relationship. What does she like to do? What annoys him? What are her fears? Why does he eat that?

One last benefit of being friends before romantic partners addresses the possibility of a Friendship First relationship not working out. The good news is that research shows that individuals who were friends before a romantic relationship have a better chance of remaining friends if the relationship ends than those who were not friends before the romance began. This can be especially beneficial when a marriage ends in divorce. If the

couple has children, maintaining a friendship with an ex-spouse can be a critical part of the children's development. Maintaining a friendship after romance can also be beneficial if the couple has partially owned or shared any type of property. Therefore, even in unfortunate circumstances, developing a friendship prior to a romantic relationship has advantages.

[Closing]

It is important to remember that while I am encouraging you to form a friendship with a potential romantic partner before dating, the same elements that create a close romantic relationship will make up a close cross-sex friendship. (Insert examples from group activity lists) must be present in the cross-sex friendship if you expect them to be present in the romantic relationship. Whirlwind relationships don't always fail, but next time one does, question what it was lacking. It's quite natural to have somewhat of a crush on your cross-sex friends. I mean, let's be honest, something attracted you to being their friend in the first place. Generally, the notion that the friendship might develop into a romance is the motive that drives individuals to form a cross-sex friendship. I'd like you to consider your current cross-sex friends as potential romantic partners as well. Sometimes what we are out there searching for has been right beside us the entire time.

Whether you're considering your current cross-sex friendships or forming new ones, remember to remain platonic friends with no physical aspects in the relationship before it becomes romantic. The existence of a physical relationship is the boundary that separates cross-sex friendships from romantic relationships. As you begin to see your cross-sex friend as a romantic partner, consider the cross-sex friend challenges as

opportunities for relationship growth. Establish the emotional bond of your relationship, embrace the physical attraction you have for one another, accept the inequality of a male-female relationship and face the social network challenge that questions the status of your relationship. Remember that you will see similarities between your relationships with your cross-sex friends and romantic partners and that what you value in one is generally or should be present in the other. Consider the benefits of beginning a romantic relationship as cross-sex friends such as getting to know one another, seeing each other in other romantic relationships and observing how your cross-sex friends act around their same-sex friends and you. While not all of your cross-sex friendships will turn into romances, your romances should begin in the cross-sex friendship phase. Next time you find yourself asking why a relationship failed; think back to the development of the relationship and ask yourself, how did it all begin?

[Evaluation directions]

Before you exit, please take out the stapled sheets of paper from your envelope with the title "Post Program Evaluation" highlighted in pink and fill them out entirely to the best of your ability. I appreciate your participation in this program and your feedback is greatly appreciated. When you are finished please place all sheets of paper back into the envelope and leave them with me on your way out. If you have questions, I would be more than happy to address them. Again, thank you for your participation.

Additional program resources

PowerPoint slides were constructed to emphasize the main points of the program. The slides may have been helpful for participants who were taking notes during the program. Additionally, the PowerPoint slides contained no new information regarding the program.

Procedures

Prior to administering any of the programs, the presenter contacted residence life coordinators and a communication course instructor regarding the presentation of the program. A detailed description of the program was provided as a means of presenting the information to those interested in attending by the residence life coordinators and communication course instructor. Pilot program participants were advised of the program's description via word of mouth by the presenter or others interested in the program.

Evaluations were distributed to all participants prior to the start of the program in manila envelopes. Participants were then asked to take out the pre-program evaluation highlighted in yellow from the envelope. All participants received an explanation of program's purpose, heterosexual research background and both oral and written instructions on how to complete the pre-program evaluation. At the end of the content portion of the program, participants were asked to retrieve the post program evaluation highlighted in pink. Again, oral and written instructions were given on how to complete the post program evaluation. When participants completed the evaluation they were asked to place both evaluations back into the manila envelope. Envelopes were then collected

by the presenter. With the exception of the communication course location, participants were dismissed following completion of the post program evaluation. Participants did not have to complete an evaluation in order to hear the program, however, all individuals who heard the program filled out the evaluation; the response rate was 100 percent.

Program Evaluation

To identify strengths and weaknesses of the present program, an evaluation of the program itself must occur. Kirkpatrick (1996) defines the term evaluation as determining a training program's effectiveness. This definition combined with establishing ways in which the program can improve is the most common reason for program evaluation. Not only can evaluation tell the presenter what needs improvement and effectiveness, it can also "justify existence" of the program (Kirkpatrick, 1994, p. 20). However, in order to effectively evaluate a program, it is necessary to identify what it is that needs evaluating. The program was evaluated in three different ways. Participants evaluated both the content of the program and the presenter's performance as the first method of evaluation. Before the start of the program, participants completed a Pre-Program Evaluation (Appendix A) based on the content presented. At the end of the presentation, participants completed a Post Program Evaluation (Appendix B) which included a demographic section. Second, the presenter constructed a self-evaluation assessing both content and delivery.

Four steps of evaluation considered by Kirkpatrick (1979, 1996) when evaluating a program include: reaction, learning, behavior, and results. By measuring both reaction (How well did the participants like or dislike the program?) and learning, (What new

skills or knowledge did the participants learn? What attitudes were changed?) the evaluation captured the participants' feelings regarding the content and performance as well as whether learning improved after the program. Because this is a single-session program, summative evaluation or evaluation conducted immediately following the implementation of the program was utilized. Summative evaluation encompasses both reaction and "self-reported expectation" of "new knowledge, skills and attitudes" along with accomplishment in the immediate results of program application (Dessinger & Moseley, 2004).

Participant Evaluation

Demographics. Demographic information was asked of each participant on the questionnaire as well. The demographic questions on the evaluation contained: participants' age, sex, ethnicity, relationship status, and length of last romantic relationship. Reasons for obtaining age, sex and ethnicity are done for customary reasons, however, participants' relationship status and length of last romantic relationship may have offered additional background information which provide insight into responses on pre-program and post program statements (Appendix A and C).

Reaction. How well the participants liked the program, or participant/ "customer satisfaction," is perhaps the best way to define reaction (Kirkpatrick, 1996). As the first step in the evaluation process, evaluation of reaction consists of the measurement of the feelings of participants in the specific program. Obtaining and retaining information is likely to be more prevalent if a participant enjoyed the program; therefore, measuring reaction serves as the beginning stage of the evaluation followed by

learning. Based on a rating design used to measure participant reaction at an American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) summer institute (Kirkpatrick, 1979), the evaluation form assessed content and performance of the presenter (see Appendix C). Because the first step of the evaluation process is to measure reactions of participants, questions based on the subject content and presenter performance make up the first portion of the questionnaire. Items assessing participant reaction to the content of the program were written in Likert form and placed on a scale from one to five, with one being “Strongly Agree” and five being “Strongly Disagree” (See Appendix C). The items that followed on the questionnaire measured participant reaction to the presenter’s delivery. These items were also placed on a 5-point Likert-type scale with one being “Excellent” and five being “Poor” (See Appendix C). Although evaluation begins with the measurement of participant reaction, a positive reaction to a program does not guarantee that participants learned anything beneficial from the program. Likewise, it is also necessary to note that a negative reaction to a program probably guarantees that participants did not learn anything. Therefore, whether participant reactions are positive or negative, it was necessary that learning also be measured.

Learning. Kirkpatrick (1996) defines learning as “attitudes that were changed, and knowledge and skills that were learned” (p. 302). As the second step of the evaluation process, objectively assessing learning will further evaluate the subject content of the program. To effectively assess learning, however, not only was learning measured following the program, but prior to participation in the program as well. Because the program focused on principles and practical information rather than skill, both the Pre-Program Evaluation (Appendix A) and the latter portion of the Post Program Evaluation

form (Appendix C) included 10-items used to evaluate participant learning. The evaluations consisted of the same 10-items and assessed participants' beliefs regarding cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships both prior to and following the implementation of the program. The 10-item inventory, also frequently referred to as a test (see Appendix A and C), consisted of statements regarding information covered during the program to determine whether or not participant learning improved regarding what was presented in the program. Participants were asked to agree ("A") or disagree ("DA") with statements regardless of whether they were unsure about some of the information provided. Following Kirkpatrick's (1979) guideposts in creating an accurate measure of the amount of learning that has occurred, "evaluation results will be analyzed statistically so that learning can be proven in terms of correlation or level of confidence" (p. 82). By effectively measuring both learning and reaction of a program, objective data can be obtained to use for the implementation of future programs (Kirkpatrick, 1996).

Self Evaluation

Evaluation of participant reaction and learning are not the only methods that aid a program presenter in effectively evaluating his/her performance. Little research has been conducted in the area of self-evaluation, however, Glasman, Cibulka and Ashby (2002) identify self-evaluation as an essential tool for a program's improvement. Self-evaluation can help a presenter better understand the strengths and weaknesses of his/her program; giving them necessary information needed for improvement. Effective self-evaluation provides the presenter with information necessary to improve both the content and delivery of the program.

Self-evaluation of the performance is based on both the delivery and content of the presentation. A compilation of self reports on each performance make up the final self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation report includes answers from a series of questions listed on the self-evaluation form as well as additional observations from the presenter's point of view. Derived from Roach and Brown's (2005) presentation self-evaluation forms, the 6-item form includes: program organization, physical and vocal delivery, and perceived audience response to both content and delivery. Three of the five presentations were video-taped and later used as a means for the presenter's self evaluation.

Data Analysis

All data analyses were computed on SPSS version 13.0. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were computed for the evaluations to obtain characteristics of the participants. Descriptive and mean statistics were used to determine participants' reaction to both the content and presenter of the program (see Table 4.2 and Table 4.3). All evaluations were used although missing information from two evaluations was excluded from some tests.

Additionally, ten two-tailed paired samples t-tests were used for the statistical comparison of scores on the pre-program evaluation "Friendship First" relationship statements to scores on the same post program evaluation statements. The paired samples t-tests (see Table 4.1) were computed in order to assess whether or not learning improved during the program. Each pre-program evaluation statement was compared with its counterpart on the post program evaluation to determine whether or not participants'

beliefs had changed following implementation of the program. Further, an independent sample t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in responses to “Friendship First” relationship statements on the pre-program and post program evaluations.

Finally, a one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey multiple comparison tests were computed to test differences between presentation groups A, B, C, D and E. Each group’s response to each item on both the pre-program evaluation and post program evaluation with the exception of demographics was compared with the other groups’ response to the items. Differences were considered statistically significant at $p < .05$ for all tests.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics revealed that the majority of participants agreed that the content of the program was relevant to their needs ($\underline{M} = 1.94$, $\underline{SD} = .769$), relevant to their interests ($\underline{M} = 1.74$, $\underline{SD} = .618$), and relevant to their current relationship ($\underline{M} = 2.08$, $\underline{SD} = .886$). These statistics also indicated that most participants believed the content to be both practical ($\underline{M} = 1.59$, $\underline{SD} = .657$) and useful ($\underline{M} = 1.56$, $\underline{SD} = .607$). Regarding participant reaction to the presenter, descriptive statistics revealed that most participants believed that the objectives were presented well ($\underline{M} = 1.42$, $\underline{SD} = .634$), main points were clarified ($\underline{M} = 1.45$, $\underline{SD} = .579$), and that content was summarized at the conclusion of the program ($\underline{M} = 1.49$, $\underline{SD} = .664$). Further, these statistics also indicated that perceived audience involvement was “Good” to “Very Good” ($\underline{M} = 2.17$, $\underline{SD} = 1.01$). Finally, mean statistics revealed participants’ overall rating of the content ($\underline{M} = 1.66$, $\underline{SD} = .742$) and the presenter ($\underline{M} = 1.49$, $\underline{SD} = .624$) as positive.

To determine whether participants’ learning improved after participating in the program, ten paired samples t-tests were computed (see Table 4.1). Six of the ten t-tests produced significant results between the pre-program and post program evaluation items. First, the second paired samples t-test revealed that scores on pre-program item #2 ($\underline{M} = 1.21$, $\underline{SD} = .414$) significantly decreased on post program item #19 ($\underline{M} = 1.12$, $\underline{SD} = .333$, $t = 2.74$, $p = .007$). Results for the fourth paired samples t-test showed that pre-program item #4 scores ($\underline{M} = 1.62$, $\underline{SD} = 1.46$, $t = 3.33$, $p = .001$) were significantly lower on post program item #21. Next, the fifth paired samples t-test indicated that participant

responses to pre-program item #5 ($M = 1.24$, $SD = .431$) dropped significantly on post program item #22 ($M = 1.05$, $SD = .219$, $t = 4.62$, $p = .0001$). The seventh paired samples t-test between pre-program item #7 ($M = 1.14$, $SD = .351$) and post program item #24 ($M = 1.06$, $SD = .251$) indicated a significant difference ($t = 2.22$, $p = .028$). Additionally, pre-program item #8 scores ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .482$) compared with post program item #25 scores ($M = 1.16$, $SD = .367$) were significantly different ($t = 4.59$, $p = .0001$). Finally, the tenth paired samples t-test comparing pre-program item #10 scores ($M = 1.31$, $SD = .464$) to post program item #27 scores ($M = 1.13$, $SD = .333$) revealed a significant decrease in scores ($t = 4.14$, $p = .0001$). The remaining four paired samples t-tests did not yield significant results; however, results of these tests did indicate a decrease in scores from the pre-program evaluation to the post program evaluation. For a listing of each pre-program and post program evaluation item please see Table 4.1.

An independent sample t-test used to determine whether there were gender differences on responses to the pre-program and post program evaluation items revealed that males and females did not significantly differ. Further, the one-way ANOVA and follow up procedures computed to examine whether there were differences among any of the presentation groups did not yield significant results ($p > .05$).

Self Evaluation

Throughout the development of the program, my goal was to provide the audience with research based facts regarding “Friendship First” relationships. I knew that in order to captivate a college-aged audience there would have to be examples and ideas that caught their attention. Using research based information to create my main points; I

embedded media, hypothetical and personal examples throughout the program. In order to incorporate the audience, an icebreaker activity was developed that would highlight the characteristics of cross-sex friends and romantic partners. The activity took place before the presentation began immediately following the completion of the pre-program evaluations. The information generated by the activity was discussed and displayed midway through the program following the discussion of the cross-sex friend challenges. The program followed a basic presentation format including an introduction, body and conclusion. The body included five main points which were each previewed in the introduction and reviewed in the conclusion.

Two pilot programs were conducted in order to find out what parts of the program needed additional examples or information. The first pilot (familiar-group) consisted of friends or individuals familiar with the program and its content. Individuals unknown to me and the project attended the second pilot (unfamiliar-group). Attendance during both pilots was smaller than attendance of the following performances of the program. The pilots also allowed me to test the icebreaker activity and results. Because one of the pilots was videotaped, I was able to see what did and did not work for the program and the activity. During the pilot programs, participants were divided into two groups and each group chose a representative to write for the group. Group one was asked to make a list of characteristics they valued in a cross-sex friend while group two listed characteristics they valued in a romantic partner. These characteristics were listed on a piece of paper and midway through the program I asked the writers in each group to please announce their characteristics. During this time I turned my back to the audience to write their answers on the chalkboard. Upon watching the video of the second pilot, it became

apparent that not only did this process take up unnecessary time; it also created an awkward silence while each writer relayed their lists. Further, turning my back to the audience closed off communication while I was writing the answers on the chalkboard. For the later presentations groups were given a sheet of poster board and asked to make a list of the top five characteristics they valued in a cross-sex friend or romantic partner. During the portion where I discussed the characteristics, the representative from each group simply handed me the sheet of poster board and I was able to display them for viewing by all audience members. This eliminated the awkward silence and allowed more interaction for audience members in having to create a list of only five characteristics.

Administration of evaluations went well throughout all presentations. There were no questions regarding what was listed on the evaluations. Asking participants to place the evaluations back into the manila envelope upon completion and set aside the envelope allowed participants to concentrate on the program rather than the evaluations in front of them. Upon completion of the program, participants were thanked for their participation and handed in their completed evaluations. Using the manila envelopes helped to keep participants' pre-program and post program evaluations together as demographics were only listed on the post program evaluation.

I found both strengths and weaknesses regarding the program's content each time I presented the program. Audience members responded well to personal and media examples, hypothetical illustrations and humor by laughing, nodding or looking engaged. The content presented during this program is information of which many people are already aware. Providing the audience with characteristics and benefits to "Friendship

First” relationships, however, seemed to strengthen or increase their beliefs of these types of relationships. The cross-sex friend challenges portion of the program was lengthy and at times it seemed the audience was ready to move on to the next point. These challenges, however, are a necessary part of explaining “Friendship First” relationships. Returning to the icebreaker activity midway through the program allowed the audience to see how their input would provide a comparison or similarities between cross-sex friends and romantic partners.

I found myself more nervous during the familiar pilot than any other implementation of the program. This nervousness may have been due to the fact that the familiar pilot was the first performance of the program or because I knew the majority of the participants. The nervousness, however, wore off after the first five minutes of the familiar pilot. Mild nervousness, expected during any type of presentation, occurred during the subsequent programs. However, upon watching the videos of the second pilot and following two programs, it was apparent that this apprehension did not interfere with content or delivery.

Based on viewing the videos of three of the presentations, I found that my voice inflection, enunciation and pronunciation were strong points throughout the delivery of each program. Appropriate language was utilized based on the age of the audience members and at no time were inappropriate examples used. Changes in pitch or rate were added during media, personal and hypothetical examples to accentuate content. Speaking at different rates or pitch during different examples seemed to keep the audience engaged. Disfluencies were not a problem during any performances of the program. Therefore, there were very few, if any, vocal fillers throughout the presentations. At times rate of

speech was noticed and corrected to ensure audience members processed all of the information provided.

Gestures were incorporated throughout the program to emphasize points and to add emphasis to examples. Upon watching the video of the second pilot, unnecessary gestures were analyzed and improved for future presentations. Movement analyzed during the second pilot was considered a weakness. During practices for future presentations of the program, I focused on correcting ineffective and repetitive movement. While this was not perfected, participants did not seem distracted or inconvenienced by the movements I deemed unnecessary. Additionally, working with the projector and PowerPoint remote improved with each performance of the program. Because the program was performed in various locations, each new location created a challenge in determining how much movement would be allowed based on location of the projector screen.

Another weakness on which I improved following the two pilot programs included pausing after asking the audience a question or asking them to imagine or recall a situation. It became clear after viewing the video of the second pilot that I was not allowing enough time for audience members to ponder questions, imagine hypothetical situations or recall past relationships.

After the two pilots, additional media examples were added to highlight a few points. It was determined that the audience responded well to the already present media examples and that additional examples would be beneficial for the content. In future presentations of the program, I hope to add even more media or personal illustrations and incorporate video clips to accentuate some of the existing and future examples. I

anticipated that the use of these examples would allow audience members to both better identify with the points and remember details regarding the content.

At the end of each presentation of the program, I allowed time for a question and answer session. Only two of the groups (A and E) took advantage of this opportunity to ask questions regarding the content or delivery of the presentation. Several individuals asked about a time line, however, I informed the audience that the time line is different for each dyad involved in a “Friendship First” relationship. Further, it occurred to me based on a participant’s concern and evaluation that I needed to address the idea that the program was intended for heterosexual individuals or those interested in heterosexual relationships. During the final presentation of the program, I explained to the audience that due to past research which is limited to heterosexual relationships, this program focuses on heterosexual cross-sex friendships. It was also explained that even though this was the case, individuals of other sexual orientations could benefit from the program.

With each presentation of the program, based on the video and self-analysis, my confidence in the content of the program improved. I reviewed the participant evaluations following each presentation of the program to determine what that particular audience thought of the program. Further, my confidence in the delivery of the program also improved as I increased practice and performed the program. With each performance I found myself more comfortable with the audience. In order to connect with the audience, I strived for a conversation-like quality during the delivery of the program. Providing personal examples in the content showed audience members that I also struggled with the relationship issues addressed in the program.

With each performance of the program, my presentation skills improved. Additional strengths of the program's delivery include my storytelling ability, eye contact with the audience and passion for the topic. Because the content of the program is something that I am enthusiastic about, I attempted to share that enthusiasm with the audience. The goal of this program was to educate individuals on the benefits of beginning a romantic relationship as cross-sex friends; therefore, this is what I kept in mind throughout the duration of the program. I wanted audience members to leave believing that their romantic relationships should begin as friends first. By delivering this content in a clear and creative manner, participants reacted positively and left educated about "Friendship First" relationships.

Table 4.1 Paired Samples t-test Between Pre-Program and Post Program Evaluations

| Item | Pre | | Post | | t |
|---|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | <u>M</u> | <u>SD</u> | <u>M</u> | <u>SD</u> | |
| 1/18. Cross-sex friendships provide insight into opposite sex behaviors. | 1.02 | .157 | 1.01 | .129 | .657 |
| 2/19. The “fine line” between cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships involves the physical or intimate element of a relationship. | 1.21 | .414 | 1.12 | .333 | .007** |
| 3/20. To ensure a stable romantic relationship, it is necessary to have a stable cross-sex friendship. | 1.14 | .351 | 1.08 | .278 | .109 |
| 4/21. The social network challenge is the most difficult challenge that cross-sex friendships face. | 1.62 | .486 | 1.46 | .499 | .001*** |
| 5/22. Whirlwind relationships occur when partners do not know each other prior to the relationship. | 1.24 | .431 | 1.05 | .219 | .0001*** |
| 6/23. Romantic attraction can exist in a cross-sex friendship even if the partners are not considering romance. | 1.05 | .236 | 1.03 | .189 | .259 |
| 7/24. Relationship failure can relate to the development of the relationship. | 1.14 | .351 | 1.06 | .251 | .028* |
| 8/25. The potential development of a romantic relationship drives individuals to form a cross-sex friendship. | 1.36 | .482 | 1.16 | .367 | .0001*** |
| 9/26. Establishing a “Friendship First” allows individuals to preview a potential romantic partner. | 1.04 | .201 | 1.01 | .129 | .181 |
| 10/27. “Friendship First” relationships are successful even if romantic relationships fail. | 1.31 | .464 | 1.13 | .333 | .0001*** |

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4.2 Post Program Evaluation Participant Reaction to Content

| Item | <u>M</u> | <u>SD</u> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| 7. The content of the program was relevant to your needs. | 1.94 | .769 |
| 8. The content of the program was relevant to your interests. | 1.74 | .618 |
| 9. The content was practical. | 1.59 | .657 |
| 10. The content was relevant to my current relationship. | 2.09 | .886 |
| 11. I consider the content useful. | 1.56 | .607 |

Note. N=117, Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Somewhat = 3, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5

Table 4.3 Post Program Evaluation Participant Reaction to Presenter

| Item | <u>M</u> | <u>SD</u> |
|---|----------|-----------|
| 12. How well did he/she present the objectives? | 1.42 | .634 |
| 13. How well did he/she clarify main points? | 1.43 | .579 |
| 14. How well did he/she summarize content at the conclusion of the session? | 1.49 | .664 |
| 15. How well did he/she involve the audience? | 2.18 | 1.01 |
| 16. What is your overall rating of the content? | 1.66 | .742 |
| 17. What is your overall rating of the presenter? | 1.49 | .624 |

Note. N=117, Excellent = 1, Very Good = 2, Good = 3, Fair = 4, Poor = 5

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

To understand the effect this program had on audience members, a pre-program and post-program evaluation was designed. The pre-program and post program evaluations provided information necessary to assess whether learning improved after participation in the program. Statements on the pre-program evaluation were designed to discover what participants already knew about friendship first relationships. Asking participants to answer these statements again on the post program evaluation provided scores to compare with the pre-program evaluation scores. Post program evaluations provided feedback regarding both the content and delivery of the program demographic information about the participants.

The paired samples t-tests (see Table 4.1) used to analyze whether learning improved during the program produced a number of significant findings. These evaluations asked participants to answer statements by agreeing (“A” = 1) or disagreeing (“DA” = 2). Therefore, the decrease in scores means that scores were closer to agreeing with the statement because numbers on the post program evaluation scores were closer to one than the scores on the pre-program evaluation (item #2, SD =.414; item #19 SD = .333; item #5, SD = .431; item #22, SD = .219).

The second paired samples t-test produced a significant decrease in agreement from pre-program item #2 scores to post program item #19 scores which may have occurred due to addressing this statement during the program. Participants may have disagreed with this statement (“The ‘fine line’ between cross-sex friendships and

romantic relationships involves the physical or intimate element of the relationship.”) prior to the program due to previous beliefs regarding cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships. Because this statement was addressed several times during the program, this may have led to a change in participants’ agreement of the “fine line” between the two relationships. Additionally, participants may not have thought much about the difference between the two relationships prior to participating in the program.

The next paired samples t-test showed that a significant difference in items assessing learning occurred between pre-program item #4 scores and post program item #21 scores (“The social network challenge is the most difficult challenge that cross-sex friendships face.”). This decrease in agreement may have been largely due to the fact that participants were unfamiliar with the “social network challenge” addressed in this statement. However, upon learning about the “social network” challenge by participating in the program, more agreement regarding this statement seems to have taken place. If participants were aware of the “social network challenge,” but unsure of its level of difficulty, the change in agreement may have occurred due to the program’s point that it is in fact the most difficult cross-sex friend challenge.

Regarding pre-program item #5 scores and post program item #22 scores, there are two possible reasons for the significant change in agreement regarding the statement, “Whirlwind relationships occur when partners do not know each other prior to the relationship,” based on the fifth paired samples t-test. First, participants may have been unsure of the definition of Whirlwind relationships. Therefore, upon learning the definition, disagreement of the statement may have changed to agreement. Second, the fact that the Whirlwind relationship was addressed several times during the program may

have had an effect on the change in agreement. This significant decrease indicates that learning in regards to the development of romantic relationships (Whirlwind or Friendship First) improved following participation in the program.

Additionally, the paired samples t-test which revealed a significant decrease in scores from pre-program item #7 to post program item #24 indicated that participant learning improved in the area of relationship failure during the program. This statement addressed “relationship failure [relating] to the development of the relationship.” Perhaps participants disagreed with this statement prior to the program because individuals generally do not associate relationship failure with relationship development. While the program did not directly state that relationships can fail due to the development of the relationship, several benefits of “Friendship First” type of relationship development were discussed. Therefore, participants may have changed agreement upon learning about the differences between Baxter’s (1987) two types of relationship development.

An additional paired samples t-test revealed the most significant and perhaps most interesting decrease in scores occurring between pre-program item #8 and post program item #25. This item focused on the notion that “the potential development of a romantic relationship drives individuals to form a cross-sex friendship.” This decrease may have occurred due to this item being addressed during the conclusion of the program. Difference in agreement may have occurred if participants were currently in a relationship that did not begin as friends first and did not associate the development of a romantic relationship with cross-sex friendship. Participants may have not realized or recognized that the development of a romantic relationship is the motive that drives individuals to form cross-sex friendships until after participation in the program.

The final paired samples t-test of item scores on pre-program #10 and post program #27 showed a significant decrease from disagreement to agreement regarding the statement, “‘Friendship First’ relationships are successful even if romantic relationships fail.” Disagreeing with this statement may have seemed like the logical choice for some participants due to the idea that we generally do not associate success with failure. However, upon hearing the examples provided in the program regarding the success of “‘Friendship First’” relationships even if the romantic relationship ends may have caused participants to agree with the statement. Further, an explanation based on research of how these relationships can remain friendships based on research may have influenced the change in participant agreement. See Table 4.1 for each pre-program and post program evaluation item.

When answering the pre-program and post program evaluation items, participants most likely focused on what they already knew regarding romantic relationships and cross-sex friendships. However, upon participating in the program, results show that learning improved in several areas concerning the development of romantic relationships and cross-sex friendship. Further, while there were nonsignificant results regarding the additional statements on both the pre-program and post program evaluations, the scores on these items were lower from the pre-program evaluation to the post program evaluation. This supports that learning improved somewhat in all areas assessed on the evaluations.

As shown in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3, descriptive statistics indicated that most participants agreed that the content was relevant to their needs, interests or current relationship and that the content was both practical and useful. These statistics also

revealed that the majority of the participants believed the objectives were presented clearly, main points were well clarified and that content was summarized in the conclusion. Audience involvement was the lowest score regarding the audience's reaction to the presenter, however, this did not seem to have an effect on how the audience rated the presenter and content as a whole. The low score on audience involvement may be due to the location of the icebreaker activity within the program. Additionally, the majority of the participants enjoyed both the content and the delivery style of the presenter. These results may indicate that this program's content interested the audience and that the information was presented well. Therefore, these results may suggest the program's ability to successfully engage and educate individuals on the development of romantic relationships, the definition of platonic friendship, the challenges cross-sex friends face, characteristics of cross-sex friends and romantic relationship partners and the benefits of beginning a romantic relationship as cross-sex friends.

Testing gender differences revealed nonsignificant differences between males and females regarding their reaction to the program's content or delivery. Therefore, this may support the idea that both males and females can benefit from this program and "Friendship First" relationship development. Further, it may suggest that males and females have the same beliefs regarding cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships. Additionally, the ANOVA and follow-up tests showed that there were nonsignificant differences among the presentation groups. The lack of differences could be for a number of reasons; however, one reason may be due to consistently administering the program in the same way every time. This could act as a manipulation check in ensuring that each

participant received the same information in the same manner each time it was presented with the exception of necessary delivery improvements.

In order to improve presentation skills, a self-evaluation of the presenter's performance was necessary. The provided self-evaluation revealed what I believe to be my strengths and weaknesses during each performance of the program. Without a self-evaluation, results show only the audience's perception of the program. While the self-evaluation does not include results to compare with participant results, the perceived audience response to content and delivery was similar to how participants responded. Video-recording of the performances allow for continued self-evaluation long after the completion of this project. Not only do the video-recordings show delivery skills, they also allow a presenter to analyze the audience's response to the presented content. Further, regarding this project, the self-evaluation report indicates that I am concerned with improving both delivery skills and the presentation's content.

As addressed in the research regarding program and participant evaluation, it makes sense that participants who reacted positively to the program's content and the presenter's delivery most likely indicated that learning improved after participating in the program. Those who reacted negatively to the program most likely did not improve learning upon participating in the program. Therefore, these results support the purpose of this program and its goal to educate individuals on the characteristics, benefits and success of "Friendship First" relationships.

CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSIONS

Overall this program was designed using developmental theory to educate individuals on the development of romantic relationships and benefits of beginning a romantic relationship as friends first. Based on previous literature regarding cross-sex friendships, romantic relationships and developmental models, this program and its examples were formed. Perhaps because research supported the content of the program, participants were rarely in disagreement regarding the content. Participant reaction to the content and delivery of the program was positive and it was determined based on paired samples t-tests that participants learned information upon participating in the program. Using Baxter's (1987) "Friendship First" and "Whirlwind" relationship trajectories, this program provides creative insight and education to the realm of cross-sex friendship and the development of romantic relationships (p. 196). This program is a step in providing additional information to the little research on romantic relationships that begin as cross-sex friendships. Finally, the development of this program provides individuals with information on how to perhaps improve the development of their own romantic relationships by beginning as cross-sex friends. If being in a quality relationship is the number one component contributing to our happiness (Myers & Diener, 1995) then it is necessary to educate ourselves on the development make up of these relationships so that we might improve the success of our future relationships.

Limitations

This program and the research behind it are not without limitations. First, this program is based on heterosexual research on cross-sex friendships which limited the content of the program to heterosexual individuals or those interested in heterosexual relationships. Although the content could be applied to a relationship of other sexual preference, the examples and details provided in the content only addressed heterosexual relationships. This limitation also addresses the issue that there is limited current research on friendships which evolve into romantic relationships.

A second limitation addresses that the lack of participant understanding regarding the statements or definitions on the pre-program evaluation may have caused the change of agreement on the post program evaluation. Participants were asked to complete the pre-program evaluation regardless of whether they were unsure of a definition or statement. However, lack of understanding during the pre-program evaluation and change in agreement still shows that learning or education took place during the program.

Performing the icebreaker activity at the beginning of the program may have limited audience participation in the activity. Lack of knowledge in the subject area may have caused some audience members not to provide input during the icebreaker activity. Additionally, other participants may not have felt comfortable sharing opinions with their group. Therefore, the valued characteristics provided during the icebreaker activity may have been limited to only a few members of the group. Little audience interaction (i.e. asking questions, discussion) during the body of the program also limited the audience's participation and involvement.

Further, individuals who were in a committed relationship, including those who were dating or married, may not have felt that this information applied to them. However, gaining knowledge regarding the development of romantic relationships may allow participants who are already involved in committed relationships to share this information with friends, family members or acquaintances who are not currently involved in a romantic relationship. One last limitation was the lack of diverse participants. The majority of participants were Caucasian college students which may have affected participants' response to the content and deliver of the program.

Future Programs

Future development of this program could occur in various ways. First, providing information and examples for individuals of all sexual orientations could reach a larger audience. Also, amending the program for audiences of specific demographics could attract more individuals as well. Depending on to whom the specialized program would be delivered, creating a program specifically designed for adolescent participants, Christian participants or later life participants could provide information relevant to the individuals who would participate in those programs.

Reaching adolescent participants through a specialized program could provide these participants with not only knowledge regarding romantic relationships, but the development of cross-sex friendships as well. These individuals may benefit more from learning about the Friendship First perspective than other participants. Because adolescence is generally a time when cross-sex relationships begin to have romantic implications, educating adolescent participants on the development of romantic

relationships may play an important role in the formation of healthy adolescent relationships. Providing hypothetical and personal examples for adolescents to relate to may increase the success of the program specialized for adolescent participants. Further, using media or popular examples that adolescents find interesting may aid in the education of these participants on the development of cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships. This specialized program would have more emphasis on the importance of forming a platonic cross-sex friendship. Because adolescence is a time when teenage individuals begin experimenting with both interpersonal and physical relationships it is important to educate these young individuals on the different elements of cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships (Jarrell, 2000). Perhaps if adolescents knew more about interpersonal relationships, they may be more cautious when forming friendships and romantic relationships. Additionally, more interactive activities such as role play, small group activities and sharing thoughts would be implemented to sustain interest from the adolescent participants. Parent participation in the program with their child may increase retention of the program and continuous encouragement to form these types of relationships.

A Friendship First program designed for Christian participants would resemble the current program; however, supporting current and additional examples with Bible scripture would be included. This particular program would feature religious reasons for the benefits of Friendship First relationships along with moral implications for the main points within the program. Overall, this specific program will exhibit a Christian foundation with suggestions on how a Christian may incorporate the idea of beginning a romantic relationship as cross-sex friends first. Other benefits regarding religious

activities in the relationship (cross-sex friendship or romance) such as attending the same church, bible studies or Christian organizations may be included. The definition of platonic friendship with examples from Bible scripture may emphasize the importance of beginning a cross-sex friendship with no physical aspects of the relationship. Moral beliefs about the physical aspects of a relationship may make this a straightforward explanation for Christian participants. This specific program directed toward Christian participants could also be implemented to different age groups. For future programs, the ideal audience would be that of Christian adolescents.

Perhaps the most challenging specialized program to develop would be to an audience of later life adult participants. One challenge refers to me as the presenter not having been married, divorced or widowed. Lacking personal knowledge of any of these later life experiences may limit personal examples within the program. Educating later life adult participants on friendship first relationships could provide these individuals with knowledge regarding not only romantic relationships, but for cross-sex and same-sex friendships as well. According to Dickson, Christian, and Remmo (2004), later-life adults have a smaller social network, yet closer more intense relationships. A divorce could jeopardize these close friendships (i.e., if friends have trouble choosing sides with the couple) causing those experiencing the divorce to feel lonely. However, this loneliness and need for companionship are the two reasons that remarriage occurs in later-life (Bowers & Bahr, 1989). Later-life adults can find difficulty forming new relationships because individuals favor stability in their social networks and are hesitant when establishing new interpersonal relationships (Antonuci, 1998). For this reason, the program designed for later-life adults may also provide examples or information

regarding interpersonal relationships and skills in general. Educating later-life participants on the benefits of forming a cross-sex friendship prior to a romantic relationship may in turn cause these participants to encourage others (i.e. children, grandchildren, friends) to do the same.

Additionally, this program was designed to be administered to individuals who list their current relationship status as “single.” An audience of all “single” participants may benefit more from the content of the program. Future studies on the development of romantic relationships from cross-sex friendships could provide extra examples for the program. A future study may be conducted including a comparison group who would not receive the program with which to compare results of groups who participated in the program.

Further, additional media devices (i.e. video clips) and examples may be added to increase audience interest in the program content. Video clips, audio clips or additional visual aides allow audience members to see the examples or points being addressed. Depending on the audience, different examples may be added or excluded from the program. Also, more PowerPoint slides may be added to increase audience retention of the information.

Regarding future self-evaluations of the program, other self-evaluation models could be utilized. An interactive exercise on a public speaking website created by Allyn and Bacon (2006) publishers asks public speakers to a series of questions that analyze the presentation including questions about nervousness, credibility, organization, and question/answer sessions. Having a more thorough self-evaluation guide may allow for a more detailed analysis of the presentation. It would also be beneficial to include questions

or statements within the self-evaluation regarding perceived audience involvement or response to the program.

Finally, it is my hope that audience involvement in this program will increase as the program develops. Based on audience response to the involvement of the audience throughout the program, several new ideas were considered regarding the icebreaker activity and audience participation. Moving the icebreaker activity to the middle of the program allows for a break in content for the participants before providing them with additional information. This would allow participants to hear the definition of cross-sex friendship and some information regarding the content before creating a list of valued characteristics. Also, asking questions which call for audience response is another option for increasing audience involvement. Creating small groups in which partners may share experiences or answers to questions can provide an even stronger connection between the audience and the content of the program. It is my hope that this program may be amended to involve all types of presentation styles and to satisfy all types of participants.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT PRE-PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Pre-Program Evaluation

Please circle A=agree or DA=disagree for the following questions. Please answer all statements even if you are not sure.

1. Cross-sex friendships provide insight into opposite sex behaviors. A DA
2. The “fine line” between cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships involves a physical or intimate element of the relationship. A DA
3. To ensure a stable romantic relationship, it is necessary to have a stable cross-sex friendship. A DA
4. The social network challenge is the most difficult challenge that cross-sex friendships face. A DA
5. Whirlwind relationships occur when partners do not know each other prior to the relationship. A DA
6. Romantic attraction can exist in a cross-sex friendship even if the partners are not considering romance. A DA
7. Relationship failure can relate to the development of the relationship. A DA
8. The potential development of a romantic relationship drives individuals to form a cross-sex friendship. A DA
9. Establishing a “Friendship First” allows individuals to preview a potential romantic partner. A DA
10. “Friendship First” relationships are successful even if romantic relationships fail. A DA

APPENDIX B
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Age _____

Sex _____M _____F

Ethnicity

- _____ African American
- _____ Caucasian
- _____ Hispanic
- _____ Asian
- _____ American Indian
- _____ Other (please specify): _____

Education

- _____ High school student
- _____ High school graduate
- _____ College student
- _____ College graduate
- _____ Graduate student
- _____ Doctoral student
- _____ Other (please specify): _____

Relationship Status

- _____ Single
- _____ Dating
- _____ Committed Relationship
- _____ Engaged
- _____ Married
- _____ Divorced/Separated
- _____ Widowed
- _____ Other (please specify): _____

Length of Last Romantic Relationship (in months): _____

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT POST PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Post Program Evaluation Questionnaire²

Directions: For the following questions, please mark the appropriate box that best describes your response for each item. Please note that the first portion of the questions pertain to the delivery of the program while the second portion concerns the subject content of the program.

Consider the program’s content for the following items:

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Somewhat | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| 7. The content of the program was relevant to your needs. | | | | | |
| 8. The content of the program was relevant to your interests. | | | | | |
| 9. The content was practical. | | | | | |
| 10. The content was relevant to my current relationship. | | | | | |
| 11. I consider the content useful. | | | | | |

Consider the presenter for the following items:

| | Excellent | Very Good | Good | Fair | Poor |
|---|-----------|-----------|------|------|------|
| 12. How well did he/she present the objectives? | | | | | |
| 13. How well did he/she clarify main points? | | | | | |
| 14. How well did he/she summarize content at the conclusion of the session? | | | | | |
| 15. How well did he/she involve the audience? | | | | | |
| 16. What is your overall rating of the content? | | | | | |
| 17. What is your overall rating of the presenter? | | | | | |

² Note: Participant Demographic Questionnaire was included with this survey, because those items were numbered 1-6 this questionnaire begins with question 7.

Please circle A=agree or DA=disagree for the following questions. Please answer all statements even if you are not sure.

18. Cross-sex friendships provide insight into opposite sex behaviors. A DA
19. The “fine line” between cross-sex friendships and romantic relationships involves a physical or intimate element of the relationship. A DA
20. To ensure a stable romantic relationship, it is necessary to have a stable cross-sex friendship. A DA
21. The social network challenge is the most difficult challenge that cross-sex friendships face. A DA
22. Whirlwind relationships occur when partners do not know each other prior to the relationship. A DA
23. Sexual attraction can exist in a cross-sex friendship even if the partners are not considering romance. A DA
24. Relationship failure can relate to the development of the relationship. A DA
25. The potential development of a romantic relationship drives individuals to form a cross-sex friendship. A DA
26. Establishing a “Friendship First” allows individuals to preview a potential romantic partner. A DA
27. “Friendship First” relationships are successful even if romantic relationships fail. A DA

APPENDIX D

PRESENTER SELF EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Presenter Self Evaluation Questionnaire

Directions: Create self evaluation report based on the following evaluative questions about content and delivery of the program.

1. Describe strengths of the content.
2. Describe weaknesses of the content.
3. Describe strengths of the delivery.
4. Describe weakness of the delivery.
5. Describe perceived audience response to content.
6. Describe perceived audience response to delivery

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03/20/07
Date