RUSSIAN WOMEN’S EXPERIENCE OF FRIENDSHIP: EXAMINING THE APPLICATION OF AMERICAN THEORIES

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A

THESIS

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By

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Abstract

This qualitative exploratory study examined Russian women’s lived experience of their friendships with other Russian women, and the applicability of American theories of interpersonal relationships and friendship in interpreting that experiencing. The relational dialectic approach to friendship served as the theoretical framework of this study. The capta obtained by means of conversational interviewing of five Russian women were analyzed thematically. Interpreting the women’s experience using relational dialectics produced four themes involving three dialectics. Two more dialectics observed in American friendships, certainty/uncertainty and affection/instrumentality, were not evident in interpreting the friendship experiences of these women. Analysis also provided insight on cultural similarities and differences between Russian women and American in the definition of friendship. Implications for future research considering the culture and the relational dialectics of friendship were noted.
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Chapter 1

Literature Review

Statement of the Problem

Being away from home, from family, and from friends is always a challenge. In leaving one’s home country, one leaves behind one’s history and friends as well as material things. In thinking about my experience in the U.S., I have realized that I have not made close friends here, although I have lived here for two years. It is not that I do not have friends. There are some people in the U.S. whom I can call “friends,” but they are not what I understand by “close” or “best friends.” The people whom I considered to be my best friends back home in Russia still remain my best friends, despite the space between us and our rare contacts. Taking into account all of the above, I became interested in the phenomenon of friendship: How is friendship understood as a communication phenomenon? How do Russian women understand friendship based on their real-life experiences?

Definition of Friendship

Friendship is a topic that has received considerable attention from American researchers in disciplines including psychology, sociology, and communication. Various theoretical perspectives have been taken in order to study different aspects of friendship, resulting in a fairly clear notion of what “friendship” means for Americans, how it is different from other types of relationships, its importance for people, what the stages of this relationship are, and what is going on during each stage. Why has so much effort of so many researchers been put into studying friendship? The answer is
simple. This type of relationship is very common, and few people would question its importance. Friendships are sources of social contact and intimacy, two integral elements in human survival (Gudykunst, 1985).

Coates (1997) notes that having friends is something most people take for granted. The things that are done in order to make friends and to sustain friendship are so much a part of people's everyday practice that often people do not notice such common phenomena. Friendship is a fairly important and ever present part of people's lives, regardless whether or not they pay attention to the significance of having friends. Friendship is an "arena" where people give and receive support, and explore ideas about the world around them and their place in it. According to Coates, friendship involves some or all of the following components: taking part in shared activities, developing a sense of trust and mutual support, and being able to relax and "be him/herself" (p. 245). Friendship is also unlike other relationships in people's lives because it is not framed by formal contracts or socially accepted rituals. Friendship is also usually based on equality. Most relationships in people's lives are asymmetrical: parent - child, employer - employee, customer - salesperson, etc., along with differences in age, social status or ethnic background. Friendship can only be sustained if the participants treat each other as equals; "in other words, friendship is a symmetrical relationship" (p. 247).

In her review of sociological approaches to friendship, Kurth (1970) distinguishes friendship from other types of connections between people and draws a useful distinction between what she calls "friendship" and "friendly relations." More
specifically, a friendship, or "an intimate interpersonal relationship involving each individual as a personal entity" (p. 142), is distinct from a friendly relation, "an outgrowth of a formal role relationship and a preliminary stage in the development of a friendship" (p. 142). People in North American society form friendly relations much more often than friendships for several reasons. A friendly relation may facilitate the interaction associated with fulfilling formal role requirements, as for example, when one establishes friendly relations with fellow workers whose cooperation one relies upon. Friendly relations are also desirable because they lack many characteristics of friendships, such as deep emotional involvement, while still providing a pleasant basis for association. One can sustain friendly relations with several others at one time, but several friendships are difficult to maintain because each requires considerable time and emotional involvement.

According to Kurth (1970), both friendships and friendly relations involve voluntary interaction, a sense of uniqueness, intimacy, and obligations. However, the frequency of voluntary interaction, the depth of the sense of uniqueness, the level of intimacy, and the quantity of obligations vary significantly between friendships and friendly relations. Both friendships and friendly relations require voluntary interaction, but in friendly relations such interaction is less frequent. Kurth also indicates that people tend to interact most frequently, at least at first, with individuals in physical proximity, as in college dormitories, offices, and neighborhoods. People put together in these situations frequently engage in interaction beyond that required by the formal roles they perform as students or neighbors. If voluntary interaction is
limited to the times and settings of formal role relationships, as it often is, a friendly relation but not a friendship exists. So engagement in some voluntary interaction indicates nothing more than the fact that one has established a friendly relation. Friendship necessitates interaction that is more unambiguously voluntary, meaning that one frequently interacts with one's friend despite the lack of physical proximity, while the interaction with one's neighbor may stop after the neighbor moves away. To indicate that one has established an intimate, enduring relationship such as friendship, one gets involved in activities and situations at times clearly beyond those associated with formal role positions, such as coworkers or relatives.

*Sense of uniqueness* is another aspect that distinguishes friendships from friendly relations. A friendly relation lacks the sense of uniqueness that is important in friendship. Persons in friendly relations are bound with one another, so that networks are established. These networks often reflect the ties that these relationships have to formal role positions. For example, a secretary may establish friendly relations with the secretaries in the offices surrounding his/her's, and these secretaries may in turn form connections with secretaries in the offices surrounding theirs. Thus, a number of individuals may be bound up in a complex network of friendly relations, none of which is particularly unique, in that they are defined by a common role position (e.g., secretary) and the activities related to that position. In a friendship there is a feeling that the other individual is involved in a special union with oneself.

Friendly relations, according to Kurth, cannot have *deep intimacy*, or personal involvement of a high order. Friendly relations that endure for some time may attain
deeper intimacy than more superficial ones, but they do not regularly encompass the intimacy that friendships do. If a deep level of intimacy is reached, individuals are propelled into a different relationship. Friendship requires revealing more intimate information about self. Any particular individual reserves what he or she feels is most intimate for a few relationships, such as close friendships. This intimacy is important to friendships.

Whenever people become involved with others on a personal basis, obligations arise that are above and beyond those associated with the formal positions people occupy. The numbers and types of interpersonal obligations are more limited in friendly relations than they are in friendships. Ideally, in friendships, obligations are unlimited, though generally one does not feel the full weight of the numerous obligations involved in one's friendships because of the affective ties that exist. In friendly relations people lack the strong affective ties that lead individuals to become deeply involved with one another. Individuals who form friendships have strong feelings of affection for one another. The higher levels of obligation and stronger positive sentiments are causes as well as consequences of the significant amount of personal involvement in friendship.

In their examination of friendship as it arises in communication, Stewart & Logan (1993) make a distinction between “friendship” and “companionship.” They define companionship as a “long-term relationship in which two persons associate in order to share a common activity” (p. 394). In this case the activity is more important than the person. One chooses to be with a companion because one does not want to be
alone, but essentially, any of several people will do. When one spends time with a friend, the person is more important than the activity. The friend's personal qualities and the friend's uniqueness are what is important, and the activities one does together with one's friend are of secondary importance. According to Stewart & Logan, friendship is voluntary and personal. "Voluntary" means one chooses his or her friends. "Personal" means that one chooses one's friends according to the certain criteria one has for a friend (e.g., appealing personal qualities, common interests, etc.). These criteria might be different among different people. Friends are usually chosen for their personal characteristics that are compatible with one's own personal characteristics. Stewart & Logan also mention several cross-cultural dimensions of behavior that apply across all friendships. Almost regardless of culture, friendships are characterized by: 1) helpful and supportive versus fighting and avoiding behaviors, 2) asking for advice and obeying versus criticism and order giving, 3) intimacy behaviors such as expressing emotions and touching rather than more formal behaviors such as written invitations to occasions, and 4) overt, visible behaviors versus covert, hidden behaviors (p. 396).

Julia Wood (1997) adds another distinction between close relationships and more formal, interpersonal ones. Close relationships are ones that endure over time and in which participants depend on each other for various things from moral support to material assistance. The essence of close, personal relationships is that particular individuals have strong feelings for each other. Unlike formal social relationships, in
close relationships one's partner cannot be replaced. When a personal partner leaves or dies, the relationship ends.

Communication within a close friendship usually involves a sense of openness, ease, and comfort. Friendly relations do not give people the possibility of experiencing these feelings. Friends on the other hand are expected to “be themselves.” This is one of the conditions of close friendship, and one reason why people cherish the confidentiality of a good friendship where they can be at ease, “be themselves” (Rawlins, 1983b).

The distinctions between friendships and friendly relations described above serve as guidelines in this study of close friendships. These characteristics of friendships (as opposed to friendly relations) provide a definition of friendship to enable both the researcher and participants in the study in selecting and focusing on close friendship relationships from among the variety of friendly relations in which they are involved. The study may also provide insight on whether or not Russian women’s definitions of close friendship include the same characteristics described above.

Stability of Friendship

Friendship is something that forms over time. People do not become close friends suddenly after a couple of meetings. At least some period of close and relatively constant interaction is likely to pass before one forms more or less stable relationships that can be defined as close friendships, dating relationships, and so on. Human relationships are co-created through interaction. People need some time to
elaborate patterns of their relationship and to establish the particular way in which they define their relationship. There certainly are situations in which a relatively short time of close interaction is enough to create the context for people to become close friends. However, if their face-to-face interactions are limited only to this short period of time, and the rest of their contact consists of letters and phone calls, one might question whether this relationship is a "close friendship." Indeed, if they think they became close friends after they had met only two times, it would be interesting to learn their perspective on what constitutes a close friendship. In other words, parties have to co-create the reality of the friendship between them through face-to-face interaction that extends over a significant period of time. In order to keep a relationship going, both parties have to agree about internal patterns of their friendship and have to work out ways to manage the different relational situations that inevitably emerge.

This research will focus on friendships that have a history of at least two years, because in such cases both parties have established stable patterns of interaction. "Stability" is a relative construct that might seem rather restrictive, because often the term is used to mean "stagnation," something that does not change. The concept of stability involves three distinct characteristics: 1) Relationships stabilize because participants reach some minimal agreement (usually implicitly) on what they want from the relationship; 2) Relationships can stabilize at differing levels of intimacy; 3) A "stabilized" relationship still has areas of change occurring in it (Ayers, 1983, p.62). That is, intimate friends develop patterns of dynamic equilibrium around a point on a
closeness/distance continuum. The intimacy level in a relationship is kept relatively constant by the interplay of “distancing acts” and “closeness acts.”

In Knapp & Vangelisti’s (1996) terms, a stable relationship is one in which the changes taking place are occurring at a slower rate or at a low level of intensity. In stable relationships participants typically pay less attention to these ongoing relationship changes than they do in developing or deteriorating relationships. Wood (2000) uses the term “dynamic equilibrium” to describe this aspect of relationships. Her term captures both the continuous change and movement of a relationship, and the tendency of the relationship to settle into routine. Thus, “maintenance is change, because a relationship that does not change and adapt is dying” (p.198).

Patterns of Friendship Maintenance

Every relationship is created and maintained through interaction. In being together and talking, people co-create their reality of parenting, dating, marriage, and friendship. Such interaction is reflexive in nature. People are objects and subjects of their interaction at the same time. Every interaction event is unique and every interaction is shaped in accordance with the personal traits of both participants, as well as the history of their prior interactions. In addition, every interaction event shapes future interaction events. These assumptions about interaction in relationships are central to Baxter & Montgomery’s (1996) concept of the “praxis” of relationships. Praxis “focuses attention on the concrete practices by which social actors produce the future out of the past in their everyday lives” (p. 14). Past patterns in relationships
frame the parties' present communicative choices, and whatever their choices at the
moment are, their future interactions can be constrained by these choices.

The patterns of praxis in a relationship like friendship need to be viewed
holistically. A relationship pattern is not a stable entity, but a process that is never the
same. Some interactional events can repeat, but they are not exactly the same as they
were at some point before. Interactional patterns in relationships are very complex,
with all parts intertwined so tightly that it is impossible to split them apart and look at
them separately. The complexity arises from the parties’ personalities, their cultural
backgrounds, their educational levels, family traditions, previous experience in
relationships, context, and so on. One person can form several friendships with
different people, but each of these friendships will be different from one another and
will have patterns of interactions unique to this particular pair’s relationship and
inappropriate for another.

Despite these characteristics of interpersonal relationships, one of the most
well known approaches to conceptualizing relationship formation treats the process as
linear and progressive. Knapp & Vangelisti (1996) expanded upon Altman & Taylor’s
(1973) model in discussing relationships in terms of a sequence of stages of growth or
of “coming together” (i.e., initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and
bonding), and stages of deterioration or of “coming apart” (i.e., differentiating,
circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating), together with the forces that
shape movement across these stages. Knapp & Vangelisti claim that each stage is
characterized by certain patterns of communication distinct from all other stages. For
example, the phase of bonding is the culmination of relationship development; bonding is a public ritual that institutionalizes the relationship. It may occur in the form of an engagement or marriage in dating relationships, or in announcing the formation of a friendship by going out together and keeping company with one another. Once a pair reaches a particular stage, they can either maintain their relationship at that stage in a state of equilibrium, or they can move up and down the hierarchy of stages. Moving forward or up means moving toward greater intimacy. Moving backward or down consequently means moving toward less intimacy.

Although the linear model makes good sense at first sight, it has a number of weaknesses. The model implies that “the way up and the way down are the same” (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1996, p.40), though they are most often not. One gains new knowledge of the person and new relationship experience at each stage of a relationship, thus two people cannot become complete strangers again after being friends for a long time. Even if two people do not remain close friends any more, their relationship is not the same as it was before they became close friends. It is at a completely new stage, which might superficially resemble an earlier stage in the friendship but is nevertheless distinct. Relationships develop in a cyclical mode rather than in a linear-sequential mode. Every new stage happens in a different time span and although it resembles the previous stage, it always includes new relationship experience.

The linear model of relationship development is also rather rigid, in that a relationship can only occupy one stage at once. If two friends have reached the
bonding stage in their relationship and have established patterns of self-disclosure appropriate for this stage, they are expected to engage in these patterns of behavior all the time. If the friends behave differently, i.e., engage in small talk as appropriate to the experimenting stage, the linear model considers the relationship to be deteriorating. Nevertheless, there are moments in every friendship when one does not feel as close to the other as one is used to. This does not necessarily mean that the two people are not close friends any more, or that their relationship has deteriorated. There are also moments in our lives that somewhat alter our vision of our friendship. Graham (1997) calls such moments “turning points.” She explains that “by definition, turning points capture a critical moment, an event or incident that has impact and import. Turning points trigger a reinterpretation of what the relationship means to the participants” (p.351). If one of the friends moves, it does not signal the end of the relationship. The relationship simply enters a new phase. If one of the friends gets married, for example, the marriage itself does not signify the end of the friendship. The relationship continues while there is still contact, interaction. Change might occur, but the relationship still goes on and friends may continue to define it as they did before, or they may include new aspects in their definition.

Given these many problems of linear models of relationships, Baxter & Montgomery’s (1996) dialectical perspective seems to be far more reasonable for the purposes of this research. Baxter & Montgomery criticize the linear view of relationship development as movement or “progress” toward “moreness” (i.e., more intimacy, more openness, more certainty, etc.) which defines the culmination of a
relationship (e.g., close friendship), after which the relational system is held to be in a state of equilibrium. They argue that theories of relational growth as “a unidirectional process, with a relationship passing through a given level or stage of closeness only once” (p. 55) have many flaws. According to Baxter & Montgomery, if the beginning of a relationship can be viewed as a process of growth, how a relationship is maintained in its middle phase cannot be explained by static immobility. Any relationship is maintained through changes that tend to stabilize the relationship around its equilibrium point. Change is adaptive, influenced by causes outside the relationship, as well as by inside it. When a relationship deviates from its equilibrium point, relationship parties normally act by correcting the deviation. Baxter & Montgomery stress that “even the anticipation of such deviation can cause the parties to undertake preventative maintenance efforts” (p. 56).

Baxter & Montgomery (1996) argue that relationships involve “dialogic complexity” as an alternative to “progress.” They derive their theory from Bakhtin’s dialogical view of social life and mention that “Bakhtin viewed social reality as everything in the human experience that was constituted through communicative or symbolic practices” (p. 25). Baxter & Montgomery adopt Bakhtin’s position that cognition is social, not psychological in its origins. They also rely on Bakhtin’s assumption that social life is an ongoing dynamic tension between “forces of unity and difference, order and disorder” (p. 26). Baxter & Montgomery call this dynamic tension “dialogic complexity.” “Dialogic complexity” means that every relationship is complex in that it contains a “knot of contradictions” that cannot be resolved or
eliminated from the relationship. More than that, the relationship exists through the interplay of these contradictions. Rather than conceptualizing relationships as having a "beginning," "middle," and "end," Baxter & Montgomery maintain that a relationship begins with the interplay of contradictions and ends with "dialogic silence" (p.73). A relationship is not oriented toward some idealized destination. Simply by having a relationship, parties already experience dialogic complexity, but this complexity can be present in many different ways that constitute different relationship types, none of which is considered as more or less mature or developed. To Baxter & Montgomery, "dialogic complexity" is simultaneous "moreness" and "lessness" of a variety of contradiction-based characteristics, the more prominent of these being certainty/uncertainty, openness/closedness, and independence/interdependence.

The dialectic of *certainty/uncertainty* implies a dialogue between "given" and "new" in the relationship. From the interplay of certainty with uncertainty, order with disorder, predictability with novelty, relationships sustain their "dynamic ongoingness" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.106). The traditional linear-sequential models view total certainty and predictability as culmination of a relationship, the point toward which relationship parties should head. Repeated research, however, has found inconsistent support for this assumption. Instead of confirming uncertainty in relationships as a negative factor, research suggests that uncertainty is not only tolerable, but positive for a relationship's climate (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.112). More specifically, according to Baxter & Montgomery (1996), research has repeatedly found boredom to be a reason for relationship breakups. Relationship
partners who experience a relatively high degree of certainty and predictability are also more motivated to embrace new experiences and thus prevent stagnation. Relationships that experience some degree of novelty and unpredictability have been found to be more steady and satisfying. From the dialectic perspective, uncertainty is important in forming and maintaining relationships, central to relational well-being. In Baxter & Montgomery’s views, certainty and uncertainty do not reside in one’s mind in the form of beliefs about other’s feelings or behaviors, but rather are constructed by both interactors through dialogue. It is in the mutual interaction of the “given” (familiar) of the past with the “new” (unknown) of the present that two people form an ongoing relationship.

In his extensive research on friendship from a dialectic perspective, Rawlins (1992) did not find certainty/uncertainty to be important, but he did identify specific dialectics that instantiate Baxter & Montgomery’s (1996) more general dialectics of openness/closedness and of independence/dependence. Rawlins’ extensive, interview-based research on platonic friendships among people of all ages has resulted in the only fully developed theory of friendship as a communication phenomenon (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.35). In Rawlins’ view, “a dialectical perspective calls for investigating and situating enactment of friendships in their concrete social conditions over time” (Rawlins, 1992, p.273). He distinguishes two types of dialectics in friendship relationships: contextual and interactional. Contextual dialectics represent contradictions faced by the friendship parties in interaction with their social environment and include two types of contradictions: ideal/real and private/public.
These dialectics are not a concern in this study. Interactional dialectics represent tensions that emerge in the process of management of friendship between the partners. These include four dialectical contradictions: judgment/acceptance, affection/instrumentality, expressiveness/protectiveness, and dependence/independence. The latter two of these dialectics are fully consistent with Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) openness/closedness and dependence/independence.

Rawlins (1983b) employs the concept of expressiveness and protectiveness in friendships which is initially synonymous with Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) concept of openness and closedness in relationships. He criticizes previous researchers who adopt dualistic, either/or perspectives on whether complete expressiveness is best for friendship. Rawlins mentions that traditional perspectives view friendship as involving open, truthful communication. However, revealing personal aspects about oneself makes one vulnerable, and the unrestrained comments of a friend may touch sensitive areas of one's person and create negative feelings toward the friend. Rawlins notes that there is disagreement among researchers about the positive benefits of complete expressiveness and openness, and suggests that the disagreement between researchers reflects the contradictory requirements of communicating in friendship relationships.

Rawlins (1983b) assumes that people have certain perceptions about themselves and about their relational partners, and can make conscious decisions to reveal or to conceal these perceptions. According to Rawlins, expressiveness is necessary for friendship, in that people have to reveal their personal thoughts and
feelings to others in order to shift their relationships from an impersonal to an
interpersonal level. Expressiveness includes not only revealing personal aspects of
oneself, but also commenting on another's individual qualities. But too much candor
about oneself or about the other's qualities can unintentionally uncover tender spots in
both oneself and one's relational partner. To avoid hurting each other, people also
have to use some degree of protectiveness. Therefore, protectiveness is the dialectical
necessity of expressiveness.

Both of the contradictory tendencies of this dialectic are fundamental bases for
constructing friendship. For Rawlins, the development of trust in the relationship
arises in the friends' management of the dialectic of expressiveness and
protectiveness. In friendship one usually protects the other by preserving confidences
and avoiding the other's vulnerabilities. Consequently, the other perceives one to have
benevolent intentions toward the other. This perception of benevolence constitutes
trust. Yet, in order to gain confidence in other's trustworthiness, one has to disclose
something personal, risking being hurt. And if one wants the other to trust one's
honesty, then one has to go through the risk of hurting the other through candor.
According to Rawlins (1983b), "an apt handling of the dialectic means that self limits
self's own vulnerability and strives to protect other while still expressing thoughts and
feelings" (, p.5).

The development of trust depends on how well people manage the dialectic of
expressiveness and protectiveness. There are no straightforward prescriptions for what
communication strategies help to build or preserve trust in a friendship. Thus, it is
sometimes difficult to decide what should and should not be said to a friend. People often face two contradictory dilemmas, first, of protecting self by restricting personal information, while striving to confide in other, and second, of willingness to protect other by withholding a frank opinion, while desiring to be candid with the friend. People employ “informal logics” (Rawlins, 1983b, p.6) to guide them through the process of making a decision about whether or not to reveal particular information. As a result, there is continuous interplay between the expressive and protective functions of communication in enduring bonds such as friendship.

Rawlins (1983a) employs the concept of dependence and independence in friendships, to address the dialectic Baxter & Montgomery refer to as separateness and connectedness. Baxter & Montgomery (1996) indicate that traditionally connectedness and dependence are seen as always positive in relationships. The more close a relationship is, the more dependent parties are on each other. Relationship partners are considered to be interdependent when they can influence one another often and in a variety of ways. If parties fail to influence each other frequently over a long period of time, then their relationship is considered to be less close (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p.81). Baxter & Montgomery argue that although it is important to be dependent on each other in an intimate and close relationship, the intimate connection with another carries the risk of losing a sense of autonomy. They state that partners need privacy for periods of time when they can reflect on their particular relationship. Apparently, the freedom from the other is as important for a relationship as the freedom to be dependent on the other.
Rawlins (1983a) indicates that in friendship, due to its voluntary essence, the struggle between dependence and interdependence is especially prominent. It is strictly a matter of one’s personal choice whether or not to remain friends, as opposed to a ceremonially bound relationship (e.g., marriage) where in order to end a relationship one has to go through another ceremony (e.g., divorce). In friendship, parties are free to be dependent on or to be independent from one another. Both independence and dependence need to be present in a relationship in order for friendship to form. Total independence of parties means no relationship at all; total dependence threatens the voluntary essence of friendship. Rawlins stresses that “friendship is based on perceived freedom of choice, but that such interpersonal freedoms always exist within the constraints of a relationship” (p. 257). Thus, the interplay of the freedom to be dependent and the freedom to be independent should be evident in communication between friends.

*Freedom to be independent* is allowing another to behave in a way the other likes or wants to, unless the other’s actions threaten one’s welfare, while at the same time allowing the same freedom to oneself. *Freedom to be dependent* is allowing oneself to rely upon the other for personal needs, and simultaneously allowing the other to rely upon oneself for the other’s needs, regardless of circumstances. Concisely, “while each person is free to pursue individual goals and interests separate from the other and without the friend’s interference or help, each retains the liberty to call on the other for assistance, should it be necessary” (Rawlins, 1983a, p. 259). The
ability to manage these contradictory freedoms has a great impact on the development and maintenance of friendship.

The remaining two interactional dialectics that Rawlins (1989) has found to be characteristic of friendship are the dialectics of affection/instrumentality and judgment/acceptance. The *affection/instrumentality* contradiction involves liking and caring for one's friend (affection) while using one's friend to benefit self (instrumentality). Rawlins points out that affection is normally readily associated with "true" friendship, and instrumentality presupposes a "false" one, though he argues this constitutes a false dichotomy. "Persons derive utilitarian rewards from friendships regardless of their original purposes for engaging in them" (p. 172), so that both affection and instrumentality are manifested and experienced in friendships. For example, one can express affection in some subtle way in order to receive a display of affection or instrumental aid in return. Likewise, one may help a friend unselfishly in order to receive a display of affection or instrumental help from the friend. In addition, people may derive self-oriented pleasure from their affection for a friend or the opportunity to help the friend. In Rawlins' terms, "in a sense, one's selfishness draws one toward a friend and one's generosity attracts that friend to one" (p. 173). Rawlins finds that the degree of instrumentality and of display of affection varies across friendships, as does the effective management of this contradiction, and that the best friendships are perceived by their partners as more intimate, as well as more useful compared to other friendly relations. Friends may construct relationships ranging from apparently less caring, but highly useful, to tender relations avoiding utilitarian
exchange. Only friends themselves can determine the right combination of affection and instrumentality that will work for their relationship.

The fourth and last interactional dialectic is that of judgment and acceptance. Rawlins (1989) states that people tend to be at ease with their close friends because they feel liked and accepted by someone who knows all their qualities, both positive and negative. Thus friends accept each other as whole persons, including those traits they do not like in one another, and friends often do not criticize one another because they care too much to pay attention to a particular problematic episode. At the same time, however, criticizing one’s friend’s behavior means the friend is important enough for one to judge (p. 175). Whereas acceptance is an important aspect of communication between friends, it usually functions in a dialectical relationship with judgment, with how much the friends are perceived to care about each other mediating the dialectical relationship between judgment and acceptance. People value a friend’s acceptance, especially when they know the other takes them and their ideas seriously. They also appreciate judgment and criticism from a person who accepts them and cares about them. Again, particular friendships develop specific patterns of managing this dialectic.

All of these dialectics intertwine in friendships in numerous ways. For example, the pattern of friends’ mutual dependence/independence will both shape and reflect the nature of their acceptance and judgment, and their affection and use of each other (Rawlins, 1989). Particular patterns of managing these dialectics shape specific friendships and even types of friendships. The same individual will negotiate different
practices for one or more of the dialectics within different friendships and at various stages of friendship development. These considerations emphasize “the contextual and mutable nature of communication within friendships” (p. 177). Reflecting the constructionist nature of friendship, these dialectical contradictions are an extremely useful tool for analyzing specific cases of friendship formation and maintenance.

Women’s Friendship

Previous research suggests that there are some differences in male-male vs. female-female friendships, and that both types are distinct from male-female friendship. As Wood (1997) indicates, masculine socialization emphasizes independence, instrumental activity, and emotional reserve. In contrast, feminine socialization emphasizes interconnections with others, emotional disclosiveness, support of others, and use of communication to build and sustain relationships. According to Tannen (1990), men and women have different understandings of and uses of everyday language, which means they also have different ways of understanding and creating their everyday realities and relationships. Tannen explains this difference in terms of men’s and women’s different assumptions about communication goals and strategies. The conversational goal of men is usually to establish and enhance their status, whereas women tend to negotiate relationships with their partners. Men are likely to be more concerned with the content of the message, whereas women tend to be more concerned with the relationship level of communication. According to Tannen’s theory, men use more nonverbal behaviors than women to complement, repeat, and highlight their messages. Women, as a rule,
use tactics which add personal emphasis and feeling to their conversation, rather than emphasize their status.

According to Wood (1997), there are certain commonalities in how men and women exhibit friendship. Both men and women value intimate same-sex friends. Both men and women generally share similar views of the importance of close friendship in their lives and of its key qualities, such as trust, intimacy, acceptance, and help. Nevertheless, the ways women and men typically communicate in creating friendship differ significantly. Wood notes that women tend to engage each other face-to-face, while men usually interact side-by-side. By that she means that women communicate directly and verbally with each other to share their thoughts and feelings, whereas men tend to share activities and interests with friends, rather than simply talk. Thus a central difference between men’s and women’s friendships is that men tend to do things together and women tend to talk together.

Communication is thus central to friendship, but it appears it is even “more central” to women friends. Talk between women friends tends to be expressive and disclosive, focusing on details of personal lives, people, relationships, and feelings, whereas talk in men’s friendships generally centers around less personal topics such as sports, events, money, and politics. In general, men assume a friendship’s value and seldom discuss it, while women are likely to talk about the dynamics of their relationship. More specifically, in building connections with friends, women share their personal feelings, anxieties, experiences, and problems in order to know each other. Women also tend to share their everyday life events and activities with each
other, and in sharing such things to feel intimately and closely connected to one another. Coates (1997) agrees with Wood, noting that women’s friendship is characterized by intimacy, mutual self-disclosure, and a focus on talk, while men’s friendship is characterized by sociability, a lack of self-disclosure, and a focus on activity.

Wood’s (1997) research suggests several different characteristics that are typical of women’s talk in friendships. As opposed to men’s talk, talk between women tends to be more personal and disclosive. Women feel closer to each other when they discuss their inner feelings and disclose personal intimate information. They act as “confidantes” for one another. Women also tend to be expressive and supportive in their communication. A high level of responsiveness gives a therapeutic quality to the communication of women friends, which is noticeable when women share troubles and problems with each other. In these cases a close friend will usually give needed support and consolation, things many people seek from clinical psychologists. Such disclosure of personal information and sharing of everyday life events make women friends feel emotionally very closely connected, and a part of each other’s life. Wood stresses the connectedness of women friends: “because they know the basic rhythms of each other’s life, women friends often feel interconnected even when not physically together” (p.224).

Research by Roy & Benenson (2000) confirms Wood’s findings. Roy & Benenson investigated gender differences in individuals’ desires to spend more time with their close friends in times of difficulty and in times of success. Their study was
conducted under two assumptions. The first was that women are more interested in transitions in the lives of other individuals than men are, and the second was that women’s friendship is more intimate than men’s. By intimacy the authors understand two major things: discussion of negative events and exchange of private information. The results of the study showed that both males and females equally value their close same-sex friends. However, women are slightly more responsive to their close friends in times of difficulty, and more importantly, are significantly more responsive than men to their close friends in times of success.

American Friendship

The definition of friendship developed above, as well as the theories of and research on friendship that have been examined, are the works of U.S. scholars focusing on the friendships they and their American subjects have experienced. These definitions, theories, and research may well apply in other cultural contexts. However, my own friendship experiences in Russia and my recent experiences with Americans and their talk about their friends have made me aware of potential cultural differences in the way friendship is defined, which may ultimately need to be reflected in theory and research.

There are important cultural specifics that may affect the way Americans construct friendship relationships. According to Beamer & Varner (2001), American culture is individualistic, meaning that American people value the individual over the group. It is performance oriented; it emphasizes personal achievement and winning against competition. People in American culture value independence, which means
making decisions for one's own life, taking care of one's own self, taking responsibility for one's own actions, and not relying on others. Individuals in independent cultures do not like to enter into relationships of obligation by or to someone. Too many obligations make Americans feel that their personal freedom is threatened and that they have lost some control over choices they could have made. Such cultural values will certainly be reflected in Americans' friendships, where obligations and interdependence are central.

What constitutes the American perspective on friendship? According to Stewart & Bennett (1991), Americans often have numerous friendly relations, at the same time avoiding forming closer bonds: “Although Americans have numerous relationships that are marked by friendliness and informality, they only rarely form the kinds of deep and lasting friendships in which friends become mutually dependent upon each other” (p.100). Ideally, in America people choose their friends on the basis of mutual attraction and personal acceptance. It is important for Americans to maintain personal initiative in seeking friendships, in contrast to societies where friendship might derive from social obligations. For example, Stewart & Bennett note that the “American qualities of choice, spontaneity, and personal warmth, run strikingly counter to Japanese friendship patterns involving obligation, duty, and ritualized interaction” (p.101). Another peculiarity of American friendship is that “friend,” for an American, “may refer to everyone from a passing acquaintance to a lifetime intimate” (Stewart & Bennett, 1991, p. 101). No matter whether a person is a close
friend, or merely someone from Kurth's (1970) category of friendly relations, an
American uses the word “friend” when speaking about this person.

According to Stewart & Bennett (1991), American friendship is formed and
maintained in shared activities. Thus Americans may have friendships that concentrate
around work, children, games, and various occasions. Certain people can be “bowling
friends” or “skiing friends.” Such “light” patterns of friendship among Americans do
not imply distrust of people. They simply signify American reluctance to become
more deeply involved with others. In contrast, Russians expect to form much deeper
bonds with their friends. Stewart & Bennett refer to Glenn (1966), who notes that
Russians tend to assume the “obligation of constant companionship, and the rejection
of any reticence or secretiveness” (p. 270) between friends. These patterns of
friendship reflect the willingness of Russians to accept obligations to others, as
opposed to most Americans “who are generally reluctant to undertake deep obligations
to their friends, preferring to keep the relationship more superficial” (Stewart &
Bennett, 1991, p.103). Whereas Americans tend to limit friendship to an area of
common interest, Russians tend to “embrace the whole person” (Glenn, 1966, p. 270).
In addition, where Americans are competitive, even within the group of friends,
friendship for Russians excludes any competitiveness.

Americans also share their friends with other people, which Stewart & Bennett
(1991) note is not normally done in non-Western societies. Friendships among non-
Westerns tend to be rather jealous and carefully guarded from other intruders. For the
majority of the world, true friendship is a serious and long-lasting bond that forms
over time and is maintained through constant close interactions. Contrary to Stewart & Bennett’s observation, however, my experience is that people in Russia are not normally jealous of their friends’ friends. One usually has more than one friend, and that is considered to be normal. Russians also do not tend to make friends as quickly as Americans do. For a friendship to form, time is needed. For example, in both Russian and American societies friends are people whom one invites to one’s house. In the U.S., people can be invited to visit after a couple of previous encounters. Simultaneously, people get called friends. In Russia, people are invited to one’s house only when a much more serious bond is formed and many more encounters have taken place. Home, for Russians, holds a very personal meaning. To invite a person into one’s house is to make a self-disclosure. For Americans it is apparently not.

Based on Stewart & Bennett’s (1991) observations, and on my own experience with Americans, I have the impression that Americans tend to form friendly relations, rather than friendships, because they require fewer obligations and less emotional involvement. I am confused when Americans use the term “friend” to label everybody from a mere acquaintance to a very dear friend. In the Russian language there are different words labeling an acquaintance (знакомый), a friend (предитель), and a Friend with a capital “F” (друг), which means a very close, intimate friend.

Research Question

The distinction between friendship and friendly relations posited by Kurth (1970), the characterization of relational stability, and Wood’s (1997) contrast of men’s and women’s styles of relationships and of communication all appear to me to
apply to Russian friendships. However, Rawlins' (1992) research on friendship relationships has been done in America and may reflect American cultural specifics. Given that there appear to be cultural differences in "friendship," does Rawlins' theory explain how friendship is formed and understood in other Western and Eastern societies? Russia is not really an Eastern country, but it is undeniably not Western either. Russian women are far ahead of Eastern cultures in terms of independence, but they probably have not reached the level of independence of American women. As an initial basis for assessing the cross-cultural applicability of Rawlins' theory, and more particularly for assessing whether or not the relational dialectics approach provides a framework for understanding how these Russian women experience contradictions that are present in friendship. I decided to explore how Russian women understand friendship and what meaning it holds for them. I realize that my experience of friendship may be quite different from the experience and understanding of friendship of other Russian women, hence I address the question: What are Russian women's experiences of their friendship?
Chapter 2

Methodology

Interviews

In-depth, conversational interviews are the appropriate research method for this study for two principal reasons. First, my research question is focused on the lived experience of women in friendship. How do the Russian women whom I interviewed create their friendships, and what do these friendships mean for them? Friendship is embedded in our lives; it is not some extraordinary one-time event, but a process that continues over time through life. It is complex, multifaceted, ever-changing, and subtly nuanced. To address my research question, I needed to hear people telling stories about what their experience of friendship is and was. I wanted to understand their meaning of friendship. I needed to concentrate on specific situations from people’s lives, on concrete examples of people’s experience of friendship, because one always understands better the whole picture of people’s relationships and what they mean by looking at specific examples of these relationships. Conversational interviewing allowed me to access these aspects of people’s experiences. According to Kvale (1996), conversation is a “basic mode of knowing” (p. 37). According to Lomsky-Feder & Rapoport (2000), personal narrative is “a cultural text that links and mediates between personal and cultural meanings that preoccupy [interviewees]” (p. 3). Talking to people and hearing their stories helped me understand their experiences as no other method of data gathering could.
Second, as a method of gathering information, conversational interviewing is fully consistent with the constructionist epistemology grounding Baxter & Montgomery’s (1996) and Rawlins’ (1992) theories. These authors argue that relationships in general, and friendship relationship in particular, are created and maintained in the on-going, face-to-face interactions of the participants – a position also consistent with Crotty’s (1998) explanation of social construction. As Crotty notes, perhaps the strongest argument for choosing a particular research method is that it is consistent epistemologically, with one theoretical stance, which is clearly the case for conversational interviewing (Kvale, 1996). Baxter & Montgomery argue carefully for the appropriateness of this and related qualitative methods, and initially all of Rawlins’ research on friendship has employed in-depth interviewing.

Addressing the issue of narrative interviews and their purpose for my research, it is helpful to look at some epistemological stances. According to Crotty (1998), epistemology is “a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (p.3). Epistemology deals with ways to provide a reasonable explanation of what knowledge one can extract from a given type of research and what ways to obtain this knowledge are appropriate for this research. Standing on the position that meaning is constructed in people’s interaction, I seek to understand in my work what are meanings of friendship created by Russian women. “Different people may construct meaning in different ways, even with relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 1998, p.9), that is why I am interested in hearing perspectives of several women. Simply hearing the participants of the study to tell their stories helps to
understand their perspectives. Their narrations are not mere descriptions of their friendships but they carry meanings of friendship created by these women according to which these women live and act. According to Crotty, “When we narrate something, even in telling our very own story, it is ... the voice of our culture – its many voices, in fact – that is heard in what we say” (p.64).

As Kvale (1996) makes clear, conversational interviewing is both similar to and different from everyday conversation. The interviewer seeks to create a conversational experience with an intimacy which from his or her perspective has the directness and flow of ordinary conversation. At the same time, however, the interviewer is in control and guides the conversation with the purpose of the interview always in mind. My purpose was to understand the experience of Russian women in their friendship relationships with other Russian women, both back home in Russia and here in the U.S. Consequently, I began each conversation by describing to the interviewees that I was interested in their real-life experiences of friendship, and asking them to tell me whatever they felt was interesting or important about the topic. According to the flow of the interview, the stories they told me and the things I felt they emphasized, I followed with additional questions, looking for more information in areas of particular interest.

Conversational interviewing is context-laden, meaning that the personalities, backgrounds, and life experiences of both the interviewer and interviewee, together with the interview setting, affect the outcome of the interview. I did not try to eliminate the effect of these factors, but rather took them into consideration during the
analysis. Being a Russian woman myself definitely affected the interviews, in that I have my own experience with friendships, and my own cultural expectations of what real friendship should look like, which may or may not be similar to those of my interviewees. Every conversation is a co-creation of meaning where "the interviewer and the subject act in relation to each other and reciprocally influence each other" (Kvale, 1996, p. 35). Thus in the interview conversation, new or reshaped meanings of some aspects of friendship emerged for both my interviewees and for me.

Participants

According to Kvale (1996) "in current interview studies, the number of interviews tend to be around fifteen plus or minus ten. This number may be due to a combination of the time and resources available for the investigation and of the law of diminishing returns" (p.102). With that in mind, I initially contacted five Russian women currently living in or visiting Fairbanks as potential interviewees. Selecting participants who were in the Fairbanks area was essential because of the need to do face-to-face interviews. Of the five women selected initially, one was eliminated because it was difficult for her to find the time to meet with me, so I contacted another Russian woman who agreed to participate in the study. None of the interviewees was a person with whom I had a close friendship relationship.

Procedures

The information about the interview provided to the potential participants in the initial contact was that the research dealt with the friendship experiences of Russian women, and that the interviews would explore what meaning the interviewees
ascribed to their friendship experiences with other Russian women. I had no reason to conceal any information about the study or its design from potential or actual interviewees, so all information about the study and its design was available by request. During the initial contact with the interviewees I stressed that participation in the study was entirely voluntary, that I would maintain confidentiality of all participants, and that the interview would be audio taped.

The Informed Consent Form (Appendix 1) was presented to the participants at the beginning of the actual interviews. It addresses issues such as voluntary participation, disclosure of information about the study, and confidentiality. The location for the interview was discussed with the interviewees. My purpose was to make the interviewees feel as comfortable as possible, however, the location needed to be relatively quiet in order to avoid noise and other interruptions, and to have an outlet for the tape recorder. All the interviews took place at my home. I tried to make the interviewing a pleasant experience for the subjects. I tried to be friendly and open to my interviewees and create a relaxed atmosphere between my interviewees and me. Discussing friendship appeared to be relatively easy and interesting for each of them.

Research Tool

My own experience with friendship goes far back to my early school years when some of my first friendships were formed. I still keep in touch with a few of these people, and I formed one close friendship at that time that continues today. Given the focus of my research, however, the more relevant friendships are the adult and consciously made friendships I formed during my college years. My friendship
formation has almost never been an easy and straightforward process. It has taken
time and effort from both parties to establish a close, trustworthy relationship. The
basis for my friendships was events lived together, beginning with taking classes
together and ending with going out together and forming common acquaintances. In
these friendships all such events and every person of our common acquaintance were
thoroughly discussed. More than that, if something happened that was not thoroughly
discussed or at least mentioned in our conversation, this event lost its importance and
did not add to our friendship. That confirms my assumption that women form
boundaries with each other more by talking than by doing. We spent hours talking
about everything in our worlds, which helped us to know each other better and to get
a clearer understanding of each other as persons and of each other's worldviews. I
learned a lot about my friend's life, friends, and relatives through her storytelling.
Discussing things made them common, as if we experienced them together. For
example, I heard a lot about a friend that one of my friends made during her school
years. When I first met this girl I already had an opinion of her based on my friend's
stories about their friendship and my friend's opinion of her. In this case my opinion
was an interpretation of my friend's opinion, which made it very biased. In thinking
about all of the people I call friends, I have come to the conclusion that I do not have
many people with whom I have "friendly relations," and I have very few whom I call
"close friends." For example, my coworkers change when I change jobs and it does
not really bother me. But separation from my close friends matters a lot because
nobody can replace those people for me; each of them is unique in their own way.
In discussing my friendships, I would like to concentrate on one particular relationship with the woman I still consider to be my best friend. She is not the only close friend I have, but neither she nor I are jealous of our other friends. In our relationship we have accepted that a person can have more than one friend and that other friendships in no way threaten our relationship. My friend and I have met each other’s friends at some point or another, but as a rule these companies of friends do not mix. In my case there was only once when almost all my friends gathered together: my wedding. I consider such an event to be an exception, however, and I prefer not to gather “different” friends in one company. And I do not hold any negative feelings toward my friend’s other friends because I have to “share” my friend with them. Friendship, from my point of view, allows a much bigger degree of freedom than does a marital or dating relationship.

This particular friendship did not form right away. It took more than a year for us to accept each other, to shift our friendly relations to another level, and to get really close to each other. By that time we had learned much about each other through shared activities (centered around the University, mostly) and self-disclosure. From the time we became really close friends, our self-disclosure became more intimate. We started sharing more personal thoughts, feelings, and problems. We were always open to each other in terms of discussing family problems, personal problems, giving advice, and so on. We could comment on each other’s clothing, or make up, or action (sarcastic comments, most of them), but we were very careful in commenting on each other’s relational partners or other topics that we knew were touchy. We learned what
to tell and what not to tell to each other by experience and by “collisions,” so we became very accurate in making comments about each other’s lives. Probably the good knowledge of each other saved our friendship and maybe made it even stronger. We were willing to listen to each other’s self-disclosure. As my friend once said, she was glad that I shared my problem with her, it honored her somehow. It was she to whom I told my problem, and for her it meant that I valued her as a person and trusted her as a friend. It meant a lot for us to have a friend: a person who trusts you and whom you can trust.

As I see it now, our relationship involved a significant number of obligations, as I suppose is the case in any relationship. We were willing to help each other out in time of financial difficulty. If one of us needed money for dinner or some other minor thing, we never even accepted back the borrowed money. It was implied that next time my friend will help me out or buy me dinner, what is the point in giving the money back now? Basically, we followed the principle “you can have what I have” in certain situations (like dinner or a bus ticket).

Recalling all of the above, I realize how much time we spent together and how much I miss her now. My departure to Alaska made a big gap between us: a gap in space and a gap in interaction. I realize that even if I were still at home, we would not spend as much time together as we did before we had families of our own or serious jobs. Although we contact one another now from time to time, and I still think of her as one of my closest friends, our friendship now consists more of memories of the time spent together. We will have something in common forever in terms of shared
experiences. Definitely, such close interactions as ours shaped our perceptions of the world in similar ways. We affected each other and our friendship played its role in making us who we are now.

Analysis

The interviews were conducted in Russian, first, because I was targeting the friendship experiences of Russian women with their Russian friends, most of which likely occurred while speaking Russian. The Russian language context of the interview should have helped the participants to recall their Russian experiences more fully. Second, not all the participants were fully fluent in English, although all could speak and understand English at least on an initial level. I made field notes right after each interview in order to record as many details as possible about the interview, and especially about the reactions of the subjects and their nonverbal signs. I personally transcribed each interview in order to ensure a better grasp of all aspects of the responses of the subjects. The transcripts were in Russian.

The focus of the analysis of the interviews was to find themes that were consistent across the interviews, and that represented the meanings that the participants had for their friendship experiences, to structure this meaning through narrative, and to examine these meanings in terms of theory and understanding regarding friendships that have been formulated in the American context. I employed narrative analysis to develop themes from the original interviews. Narrative analysis can be seen as a continuation of the story told by the interviewee. According to Kvale (1996), the interview researcher pays attention to narratives during the interviewing,
the analyzing, and the reporting stages. Much like a novelist, the interview researcher has a plot in mind when starting the interview. The researcher leads the conversation in the direction of this plot. However, new themes and shifts in the plot may occur during the interview because of its relatively free conversational nature. During the final analysis of capta the researcher becomes a “theme finder,” looking for themes apparent in the interview, and also a “narrative creator,” tying many different told experiences into coherent stories.

To analyze, according to Kvale, means “to separate something into parts or elements” (p.184). In my narrative analysis I separated and organized prominent themes from the interviews, however, according to Kvale, “interviews are living conversations” (p. 182), and transcripts are mere collections of words that do not leave much possibility for further exploration. He suggests entering into a dialogue with the text in order to uncover, clarify, and interpret meanings. During this process the researcher re-constructs the interpretations derived from the interview data and comes up with new interpretations. Narrative analysis is in this sense a story about stories. During the final analysis I was looking for the themes consistent across the interviews and structuring the meanings I found according to themes. Repeated words, similar experiences and meanings, emotional reactions to certain events, and topics that stand out as the overall direction of the conversation all can signify themes across interviews. Once the thematic analysis was complete, I considered the extent to which American theory and research on friendship are applicable to friendships among Russian women.
Chapter 3

Narrative Perspectives

Ana's Interview

"Ana" is a pseudonym for a Russian woman who has lived in the U.S. for almost three years. She is 29 years old and currently is enrolled at the University pursuing her Master's degree. She came to my home for the interview and to stay for dinner with my family. Ana needed very little encouragement from me and did most of the talking.

Ana does not have close women friends in the U.S. because she thinks it is hard to get close to Americans - they are different, "foreign." She says she cannot fully understand Americans. Back in Russia, however, she has friends and one very best friend, whom she separates from all the others. She says that "It is impossible to be friends with more than two people. Because, you know, friendship is almost like love...." Ana has many friendly relations in her native town in Russia, but she does not trust these people to the extent she trusts her best friend. She divides all the people she knows into three categories: people to whom you just say hello and go on; people to whom you say hello and stop to chat about how things are going, or whom you may invite to your birthday party; and friends. Ana says that she has been disappointed in people she considered to be her friends so many times before that she does not think it is possible to keep a really close relationship with people if the relationship is based on expectations. There were many situations when friends did not meet her expectations. She remembers that her mother (who is a dentist) was
doing favors for her former friends and they took these favors for granted. Or that she gave things to her former friends without asking for money and these friends in turn asked a pretty price when they had an opportunity to sell something to Ana. Or that she answered a call of one of her former friends and went to her house in the middle of the night to offer support. When Ana desperately needed to talk and asked this friend to come and see her, she was asked to wait a week until her friend had free time. Ana referred to this last case four times during the interview as an example of a friend’s unresponsiveness and lack of care. Ana says these situations affected her view of friendship. She ended up having only one true friend.

I think my mistake was in the assumption that I had had before: if I am in a friendship, I commit myself to it fully, not holding anything back. And I expected people to behave the same way toward me, but it did not happen. And I was greatly disappointed…. I just think I expected too much from people. And from this friend I did not expect anything. We were just meeting, talking about common things, gossiping and at the end something happened…. She adds she did not even realize for some time that they had become friends.

Ana does not believe in friendship (or in love), and uses the word “friendship” very carefully. On my remark that this is a strange thing to hear from a person who has a close friend, she responded that to her “friendship” and “love” are two very worn out words. She calls her friend “a person whom I can trust and who trusts me and can support me in any situation.” Ana trusts her friend. She can tell her everything about herself. She can tell her even more than she can tell her mother, because her mother is
easier to worry. Ana notes that her friend will always tell her the truth no matter what issue is being discussed. She explains that by “trust” she means that if a certain situation happens, and Ana needs help from her friend, she is sure she will get this help. Ana is also sure that all that she tells her friend will remain strictly between them, and if somebody is gossiping about Ana behind her back, her friend will not believe the gossip or carry on such conversation. Concisely, she says, “you can relax with this person. You don’t need to think all the time about what to tell or not to tell.”

However, Ana and her friend do not give each other advice (unless asked directly), but only exchange opinions. They can discuss practically everything, including current political events, literature, cosmetics, and personal life. But they do not ask each other directly about their personal lives. Only if one of them is willing to bring up the topic of her personal life will this topic be talked about. Regarding questions and inquiries about such issues, Ana says: “I don’t know, it’s just not usual for us. If she wants to tell me something, she will tell me it herself.”

Now, that Ana is in the U.S. and her friend is home in Russia, they keep in touch regularly. Ana thinks of them as being close friends, despite the gap between them. They contact each other through the Internet and over the phone, sharing news and simply everyday events. I inquired about topics they discussed now that they are limited to electronic means of communication:

I write to her about how things are happening here, basically what I see every day I describe. She said she did not know what to write to me about. I said to
her just to describe everything that is going on at home. She understood, she writes that now.

Ana says that despite the time they have spent apart, they have not formed other friendships, at least not close friendships. Her friend confessed once in a letter that she does not have anyone to talk and share problems with since Ana left for America. Ana says: “She did not tell me that she loves me or that I am her only true friend. But she wrote that she has nobody to talk to now after I left....”

Ana thinks about their friendship as something very exclusive. Ana and her friend preferred to meet together, just two of them, and walk around town. They could talk about everything or just be silent. Ana feels comfortable with her friend, even if they do not talk but just walk together, thinking about their own matters. Ana says they can just eat up a chocolate bar; and not because they have nothing to talk about, but because they sometimes simply feel comfortable in silence. They did not share any activities, because they had rather different interests. For example, Ana’s friend likes to fish and to gather berries in the forest. Ana does not like such things; she prefers to stay in town. She has an impression not only that they have different interests, but also that their lives do not cross in any other way except in their encounters.

It seems sometimes that there is an inhabited island somewhere in the sea. We live our lives; float on the sea, but from time to time we come to this island, only two of us. And we can relax there without any second thoughts.... And nobody knows about this island except for two of us. I think after some
time I became dependent on it, I have to go and meet with my friend, and talk.

It is a kind of psychotherapy.

Ana notes that she and her friend feel connection with each other. She stresses their lack of obligations, in the sense that they feel they are free, rather than dependent on each other. According to Ana, this makes this relationship especially valuable for her.

Karina's Interview

Karina is a woman in her late twenties from the Russian Far East. She is about to graduate with a Master’s degree from the University. She lived in Alaska for quite a while with her husband, who is Russian as well. Karina had returned to Alaska merely a week before the interview took place. She had to come back to finish her studies, after spending almost a year living in Texas with her husband and their little son. Karina acknowledged that she was upset about having to leave her husband and her son for half a year to return to Alaska. Karina cried when talking about her son, although she acknowledged it to be silly because her son was staying with her mother. But she said she was glad to talk to me, and spent more than six hours in my home, instead of the two hours I had planned to spend on the interview.

It took about an hour to start the actual interview, and to begin talk about friends rather than kids. The first person Karina mentioned regarding her friends was her friend from elementary school, with whom she still keeps in touch and considers a friend despite their rare encounters. They separated after high school when Karina’s friend went off to college. After that, Karina got married and moved from the city, and later left for the U.S. Her friend now lives in Moscow. However, they call and send
emails to each other often. Karina has been at home recently, and met with her friend after almost a four-year separation. As Karina says, they had a lot to talk about. They spent about six hours talking about practically everything. On my question about whether it was difficult to find common topics of discussion after such a long separation, Karina answered that it was not difficult at all. One of her friends from the school complained that it was getting more and more difficult to find something in common with their old school friends, because of the differences in their lives and interests. With regard to this friend Karina explained:

She is not married yet. She is now trying to make a career. Now she is working in an advertisement company, films some clips...I am so interested in what she is doing, I ask her about her job all the time. So, most of our school friends have families, children... I have a family too, but we have more in common in terms of professional interests because I work with contract, economics, etc. She likes to travel, has been abroad. In general, she is interested in what is going on in the world.

Common interests are something that Karina thinks are important in sustaining friendship. She has several other friends from college (four or five). They are all friends among each other, besides being friends to Karina. They all get together often, talk, celebrate their birthdays, their children’s birthdays, and go out together. Their two main interests are talk about their children and their common professions and work. They also share some activities such as parties and picnics with children.
Karina’s university friends are all equally important to her. When most of them formed families, their friendship did not change a lot from Karina’s point of view:

Our husbands are now our friends and friends among themselves, too. Except for the one girl…. The character of our friendship did not change a lot. Before we got together to study for an exam, now we go somewhere with our children. Two of us do not have children, but it does not prevent them from coming along with the rest of us.

Karina missed her friends when she left town, and she misses them still. She expressed it in the interview: “At first, especially, I felt like I have nobody to talk to. I have husband, but he is not really what I want sometimes, because he is a man.” She realized that she had nobody to talk to, not necessarily to share problems, although she does share some problems with her friends, but just to talk. Phone and email do not accomplish that goal. They only help for staying in touch, but cannot substitute for close face-to-face interactions. Karina describes friendship as a prolonged relationship in which one not only has something common to talk about with a friend (because one can basically talk with anyone), but also has an interest in continuing the relationship for a long time. When she goes home, the first thing she does is to call her friends and get together. It is easy for her to immerse herself again in their face-to-face relationships. She says she does not struggle when they first meet after a separation. They always have something to tell to one another. Karina says that they keep in touch all the time via email, so she knows what is going on in her friends’ lives. That helps
to eliminate awkward moments in their first encounters. She feels “updated,” and her friends react the same way: “Hey, you did not change at all!” is their usual greeting.

Karina mentions that she had formed some friendships in the U.S., although they did not become close friendships. Maybe not enough time has passed yet in order for her and her new friends to become close, Karina thinks. One of her friends here in Alaska is a Mexican American woman with whom Karina worked for some time. Karina says this woman is not one of her best friends, but a close one.

Karina describes herself as a relatively individualistic person who tends to rely on herself in most cases. She thinks she does not ask a lot from her friends:

Well, you can help a friend, for example, if she is sick you can help.... But there are some areas.... If I were asked for advice about whether or not start a family or have an abortion.... Even if I were asked, how can you suggest something like that to another person? It is very personal.... And they never gave advice in some serious life situations. Just minor things, for example, if this hair color fits me or something like that.

Although Karina says she prefers to make all her major decisions by herself, she trusts her friends completely in their opinions: she is sure that friends will not lie to her. And she is honest with her friends. Karina makes a major distinction between friends and acquaintances: she can critique a friend, something she will not do with the rest of her acquaintances, first, because she does not care about others, and second, because her friend will understand that the critique is for the friend’s own good and not because Karina is jealous. She will tell her friends what she thinks, but only if
asked, because she does not like to impose her opinion on others. She thinks her friends are grown-ups and can decide for themselves. Karina is not afraid to share secrets with her friends. She is sure that they will share this secret only among each other and with their husbands, not with anybody outside their circle (she notes that husbands are not a threat, because mostly they are not interested in women’s secrets).

Karina thinks that competition between friends is good and normal for relationships. But the competition has to be healthy; it should stimulate a person to achieve more goals in her life, rather than destroy friendship. Most of Karina’s friends are getting (and some already have) their Ph.D. degrees, and this stimulates her to pursue her Ph.D. “It is not exactly competition, it is more like a stimulus for development. It does not mean that I feel worse than they are because they have their degrees and I do not. I think that it might be interesting to study further because they are all doing it.”

In discussing the limits of help one can afford toward one’s friend, I asked her about material help. Talking about money, Karina realized that she rarely borrows and lends money. It is not a problem for her to buy a dinner for her friend, but she is not sure about larger sums. She has not thought about it because she has never been asked. She probably would lend money if a friend, for example, needed it to buy a car. “I think I could give money…. Bank wouldn’t give me a big percent if I put this money in it…. So, maybe not the whole sum, but a part I could give to a friend.” Karina tends not to let money interfere in a friendship because it is one of the sure ways to spoil relationship if one cannot repay the money back.
Now Karina’s interactions with her friends have settled into a routine. They call each other and send emails. When Karina was about to leave her native town, however, she was not sure at all if she would be able to maintain their friendship unchanged, but now she thinks it did not change a lot. She misses her friends. “I can talk with my husband about practically everything, but there are some things that only women are interested in discussing.”

Olga’s Interview

Olga is the youngest of the women I interviewed. She is 22 and has lived in America for several years. She had lived in Fairbanks for some time and went to school here, but about a year ago moved to Colorado to continue her education in statistics. Her parents still live in Fairbanks, and Olga came to visit them for Christmas break. During this visit I scheduled an interview with her. The interview took place at my home, but we did not have a prolonged conversation because she had a relatively tight schedule. We came straight to the point and she left immediately after the interview.

At the time of the interview Olga had been in Fairbanks for more than a week. She says she is bored because Fairbanks is far less entertaining than Colorado. Besides, she misses her new friends and a new boyfriend in Colorado. She says she does not have many friends left in Fairbanks because most of people she was close to have already left, including her best friend.

Olga was not an easy person to interview. Her responses were relatively short, she did not elaborate on her answers, and she needed additional questions from me all
the time. I had to provide her with many examples from my own experience of friendship to give her an idea of what I would like her to talk about. After giving her an example, I asked “Was it like that for you or was it different?” Then she told me her story.

Olga noted during the interview that she was having a hard time concentrating on her women friends and talking about them. She says she has more men friends because it is easier for her to make friends with a man, and sometimes it is more interesting to her to be with men than with women. I made an effort to figure out why it was easier for Olga to make friends with men and what the difference is for her in friendships with men as opposed to women. She could not explain her reasons clearly. She thought about my question a little and then said that with men it is “more interesting, more fun.” However, she does have women friends. Her very best friend today is a Romanian girl. They became friends at UAF. Now this friend lives not very far from Colorado, so Olga has an opportunity to see her from time to time. They do not see each other very often, though, because “not far,” she says, does not mean “close.”

Olga has one very good friend in Russia. They keep in touch but rarely now. Olga wanted very much for this girl to come to visit her in the U.S., but there was a problem with her visa and the friend could not make it. Olga still calls this girl a close or best friend, but she is not sure about their closeness, now, because a relatively long time has passed since they last saw each other:
The distance affects relationships, no doubt. Mostly this effect is negative. When you are far away, you cannot spend much time with the person. In fact, you cannot spend time with her at all. Phone calls are fine, but they are not enough. I don’t know this person in the way I used to any more. Conversations become more and more superficial.

Olga says that she can talk with her friends about many things. She says she likes to laugh a lot, she always laughs with her friends. She mentions sense of humor as one of the most important qualities in a person. Personal things, personal relationships with men are important and unavoidable discussion topics in close female friendships, according to Olga. She is willing to talk about her relationships and she is willing to listen to friend’s talk about relationships. But she is more inclined to conceal her problems than to share them. She says she prefers to tell funny stories with happy endings. She avoids, for example, discussing the details of her breakup with a boyfriend. She always tries to make it sound lighter, no matter how much she suffered, but she does not expect others to do the same. Olga is willing to tell a lot about herself. She realizes, nevertheless, that she is extremely unwilling to talk about her family, or to discuss something about her family’s affairs with her friends. She also tries not to talk about other’s affairs, but she does not always succeed.

Olga is very helpful with her friends. “Yes, I will do practically everything for my friend. Even if she calls me at 4 am. That’s what friends are for.” I realized that there is, however, a limit to her help and asked her to think of something she would
definitely refuse to her friend. It took her some time to find an answer. She decided that she would not do anything that is against her family or that can somehow harm or shame her family. But she was sure that a real friend would not ask her anything like this. She said it was the nature of friendship to be concerned and to help to each other.

Olga made friends many times in her life with different people and she makes friends easily. I asked her if maybe she has worked out some general strategies or rules that make it so easy for her. She could not explain why people appeal to her:

I don’t know. It is just easy for me. I am not shy. I always have something to say to a person. My English does not present a problem any more. Besides, I make friends with people with whom I have common interests. When, for example, we study together and spend time. It is really important to spend a lot of time together in order to form a strong relationship.

Olga says that the more time one spends with a friend, the more strong the bond between these people becomes. She values close friendships, because it is sometimes hard for her to establish a close relationship. At universities the turnover of people is relatively high. Students come and go. Olga barely had time to form a close relationship with the Romanian, woman she met at the University before Olga went to another university. She says that does not bother her, though, because she keeps in touch with her old friends and she is positive she can always form new relationships wherever she goes.
Olga says she is a friendly person. She thinks it is impossible to live without friends. She likes to spend time with friends. Her common activities with friends include sport activities, especially snowboarding, trips out of town, just parties, and long phone calls. She talks over the phone a lot, partially because many of her friends live far from her. But she thinks that friends are important in other ways, too:

Friends are not just a means for recreation and comfort, although you more than often just relax with them. It is rare when you work with your friend (I don’t include studying together). But you learn something from your friends and you teach them something in return.

Olga said that she was really interested in the interview because she had never really thought about friendship and never tried to understand whom she considers friends. Now she realizes that the issue is more complicated than it seems at first sight.

Tanya’s Interview

Tanya is a Russian woman from a small town in the southeast of Russia. She is getting her Master’s degree at the University. She is 29 and is engaged to an American. Tanya talked willingly about her friendships and her relationships with other people. But it was not always easy to keep her focused on friendship during the interview. Starting with friendships, Tanya had a tendency to switch to topics not related directly to friendships or friends and to discuss something that happened to her. I had to ask Tanya new questions in order to focus her on friendship issues. In what follows I describe only the part of the interview about friendship and omit Tanya’s reminiscences about her past.
Tanya lived for a couple of years in Washington before coming to Alaska. She says she has always had a Russian person to talk to here in the U.S. Tanya notes that she is concerned about her engagement to an American, and that cultural differences are the reason for her concern. It is relatively hard to immerse oneself totally in a foreign culture. She stresses that she does not have any problems living here and adjusting to people and the culture, but the prospect of living in an American family is worrying her.

Tanya says she knows she is a very easy-going and light person, but adds she does not mind that people like her. Tanya also says she is very adaptive. She does not pay too much attention to other people’s negative qualities. She can handle them. She says she almost never quarreled with friends and is very forgiving. She can be severely offended, but it never lasts long. “I take the offence, first. And I can spend some time pouting. But then I think, Jeez, what’s the importance of it? I’d better go and spend some time with this person, I don’t want to waste my time on bad feelings, it is not worth it.”

Tanya has many friends in Russia, but she does not see them often, and did not do so even when she lived in Russia. Most of her friendships were formed during her college years. She went to college in another town, not her hometown, and most of her friends were in the same position. When they graduated, they returned to their homes. Tanya says she rarely sees them, but keeps in touch and cherishes the memory of their time together.
Tanya formed some relatively close friendships in Washington. She became close to her roommate, a Russian girl. Tanya says that they were very different, Tanya being very active, always going somewhere and not spending much time at home, and her friend being quiet, sitting home most of the time. But they got along very well. Her friend confided to Tanya her problems with boyfriends and finding an occupation. Tanya says she likes to listen, although she can rarely give valuable advice because it is difficult to decide for someone else. She herself asks for advice quite a lot, not necessarily from close friends, but from other people whose opinion she might be interested in. This does not mean that Tanya follows the advice. She is interested in others’ opinions, because, she says, different people can see her problem from different angles.

It is easy for Tanya to form relationships with people everywhere, and she explains it by her adaptability and her easy character. She told me that once she was renting an apartment with another girl and they did not get along very well. Her roommate was difficult to satisfy. Long after they separated, the girl called Tanya and said that she was her best roommate ever. Tanya tends to get closer to Russians rather than Americans. She realizes that this does not happen intentionally, but rather because of the language barrier and cultural differences. She sometimes does not understand Americans fully, she confesses.

One of her very best friends lives in Russia, in Tanya’s hometown. She is older than Tanya and they have known each other for a long time. Tanya thinks that her friend is an unusual person with strange behavior at times, but this does not
prevent her from liking her and keeping in touch. The only significant problem in Tanya’s relationship with her friend is her friend’s mother, who interferes in their relationship often. Tanya says that her friend’s mother is stuck with the idea of getting her daughter married, and therefore she sees any other female, including Tanya, as a potential threat. Because of this, Tanya has had some misunderstandings and tense moments in her relationship with her friend:

Once she invited me to her birthday party. But when I called her the day before to make sure about the time to come, she told that she had decided not to have the party. OK, I understood then that she did not want to see me because of something. I called her the next day to say “Happy birthday,” and after a pause she suddenly told me that she changed her mind at the last moment and decided to celebrate. I came by and saw the big company at her place. I think she just felt remorseful and invited me. I think her mother did not want me to come and attract whatever guy happened to appear on the horizon.

Tanya says that she does not blame her friends in such situations. Everything can happen between two people, and this is not the worst. Besides, it is very important to Tanya to be able to forgive. Without this life would have been much more complicated.

On my question regarding the most common topics for discussion between her and her friends, Tanya could not give an exact answer. She said that a lot depends on the friend. Mostly she discusses life in general. A lot of talk is dedicated to relationships with men, but Tanya does not reveal everything. “There are some things
that simply are nobody's business.” Tanya also travels quite a lot, and makes friends while traveling. She mentions, however, that it is very hard to maintain relationships with people after they are separated. Phone calls and letters get more and more rare with time, without any particular reason.

Vera’s Interview

Vera is a Russian woman from Kamchatka. She is 33 and has lived in Fairbanks for quite a while. She is married to an American, and I have personally heard others talking about Vera as a very helping and kind person. She works and takes courses from the University. Vera likes Alaska and is planning to live here. She and her husband are now building a house. Vera was willing to give an interview about friendship because, as she explained, she had to conduct a survey once, and she knows that I expect her to talk about and elaborate on questions. Indeed, the interview with Vera proved to be relatively easy to conduct. She was very helpful, always responded in detail, and expressed her opinions and thoughts about the issues discussed.

The first thing we talked about was how she makes friends, and why she chooses certain people over others. Vera told me that the process of making friends is not quick. It takes time. Usually when people work or study together for an extended period they may realize that they like each other, have common interests, or know some of the same people. All this leads to forming a close friendship. Vera stresses that a candidate for a friend should possess certain qualities that she likes, and, more importantly, should not possess qualities she cannot tolerate in a friend, such as
boldness and lack of honor. She says that she does not tolerate gossip: not gossip in
the sense of merely chatting about other people’s affairs, but in the sense of relishing
the idea of discussing some very private or very unpleasant aspect of another person’s
life and even adding some information from oneself. Such person does not have a
chance to be her friend, Vera says.

For Vera a friend is a person whom she can respect. Most of her friends are
older than she, but what is essential is that friends have to treat each other as equals
and respect each other’s opinions. She hates both giving and receiving advice.
Opinions are the most that she tolerates:

To tell you the truth, I hate advice. If I ask for it (which I rarely do) then it’s
OK with me when people give me one. But when somebody gives me advice I
did not ask nor want, I don’t like it. I think it is showing disrespect. For me
their [the friends’] worldview is what matters and their opinion about life. But
I think we are all in a little bit different situations, and nobody can fully
understand me and know what I know.

Vera also stresses that even among friends there are people to whom she is more likely
to listen in terms of advice. She is inclined to listen to women, rather than to men,
because Vera thinks that if not every woman can understand another woman, then men
are even less likely to succeed.

Vera draws the line between those whom she considers to be her friends and
those who are merely acquaintances. She says that acquaintances are people with
whom one can chat about weather, about something that is not of great importance for
one. But one will not share personal secrets or problems with such people. Sharing personal information is what one does only with close friends. Acquaintances are people with whom one has to meet because of some reason other than one’s desire to meet. For example, Vera mentions neighbors, although she stresses that in Russia the word “neighbor” has a broader meaning than in the U.S.:

> There are people whom you like more, and there are people whom you like less. Anyway, you have to behave in the same manner with all of them.

> Friends are people whom you let come close to you, in the spiritual way.

> Besides, for me friends mean time. You have to spend time with your friends, quite a lot of it. Not like with others.

Vera mentions that after living for several years in the U.S., she has started to use the term “friend” more loosely, including all the people she interacts with on a daily basis. They are not really friends, she says. They might be coworkers, or friends of my husband, or neighbors. The American term “friend” applies to all of them, instead of the Russian term that means only close friend.

In describing things she usually does with friends, Vera mentions talk, a lot of talk on different topics. She likes to talk over the phone, and can talk for hours. Back in Russia she and her friends got together, went for picnics, took some classes together: “Then birthday parties, family celebrations. You know and remember about family anniversaries of your friends, unlike about other people.”

Vera remembers different things about her friends and time they spent together in Russia. She says they had good times and they had bad times. They had quarrels;
she thinks they are inevitable in relationships. On my question about what might be a reason for a quarrel, Vera says that usually a quarrel happens when one tells something one was not supposed to tell. She says that friends share secrets, and it is very important to keep these secrets. She told me a story about one of her quarrels. Vera unintentionally revealed some information about her friend and the friend took offence. Vera says that she was really sorry about this entire situation and that she realized what a mistake she had made, but of course, she could not take the words back.

According to Vera, there are situations when people simply stop interactions without any obvious cause. Thus, she just stopped being friends with one friend of hers because they did not have any more common interests. It did not happen suddenly, but step by step. “You don’t even notice how it happens. Then you realize that you are not close any more.”

Vera does not like to ask anything from other people, including friends. She says that if she can do it herself, she definitely will not ask. But she finds it very hard to refuse other people if they ask. She says that even when she realizes that people use her, it takes her a lot of willpower and effort to say “no”:

My friends (they are a couple) often asked me to look after their dog when they go out of town. This dog, a German shepherd, has never been very friendly and easy-going. It was a stress for me to walk this dog. But anyway, I could not refuse. The dog even tried to bite me several times, but I just could not say “no.” But once I was walking with it and suddenly the dog launched at an old
woman on the street. The dog had a muzzle on, but the old lady did not notice it at first. She was so scared, she sat on the curb, started crying. After that I refused.

As far as Vera can remember, this is the only case when she refused something to her friend.
Chapter 4

Analysis

The analysis involved three interrelated steps: finding categories in women's experience of friendship that were consistent across interviews, structuring the meaning of these experiences through a new narrative, and interpreting these meanings in terms of relational dialectics. I examined the transcripts and listened to the audiotapes of the interviews. The stories my interviewees told about their lives during our conversations allowed me to identify five categories of experiences that appeared important and prominent for these women in talking about their friendships: missing friends, keeping and sharing secrets, asking and giving advice, competition, and cultural difference. I structured the meanings of these categories of experience by developing a new narrative that links the experiences expressed by each woman. As I did so, I interpreted experiences of these Russian women using the relational dialectics approaches of Rawlins (1992) and Baxter & Montgomery (1996). On the final section examines what these Russian women include in their definition of friendship.

Experiencing Dependence and Independence in Missing friends

All of the women mentioned in one way or another that they missed their friends, and had difficulties adjusting to the lack of friends in their life when they moved away from their homes in Russia. It took them some time to reestablish patterns of communication with their friends using different means of communication (phone, email, letters, etc.). Such interactions, even if they are frequent, which in
most cases they are not, cannot substitute for face-to-face encounters, though they allow the women to stay in touch. None of the women who participated in the study lost friends because they left Russia. They feel strong connections with their friends and they are sure that those whom they called friends in Russia are still their friends, despite the lack of face-to-face interaction. They share a history in their friendships and that is what matters.

Contacts with friends have a relatively stable character, according to my interviewees. For the most part they use phone and email, which gives them an opportunity to keep in touch and stay connected. Their contacts usually are regular, but not frequent because it is relatively expensive to call, and not everybody in Russia has access to the Internet. Depending on how close the friend is, the frequency of contacts varies. Ana, for example, calls her best friend at least once a week, in addition to sending email messages to her. It helps her to feel connected with her friend and makes her realize she is not alone, but has a person with whom she can share her inner concerns. Other women have more than one best friend and cannot contact each of their friends as often, thus their interactions are less frequent, though they all expressed willingness to continue these relationships.

The reasons that make these women pick up the phone and literally dial their friend’s number are different. Karina is interested in what is going on in her friends’ lives. Besides, she needs to talk to her women friends because, according to her, there are some issues that a woman can only discuss with another woman. Ana feels a strong need to keep in touch with her friend just to stay connected. She simply
describes what is going on in Alaska, at the University, and in her family, and she expects her friend to do the same. In times of difficulties or doubts she feels the necessity to call her friend and share her problem with her. Ana is dependent on her friend for psychological help and advice. Basically, despite the presence of the phone or computer screen in front of them, the topics each woman discusses are the same as if the friends were talking face-to-face.

Olga, however, says that time affects relationships. The fewer interactions one has with a friend, the less one trusts this friend. Olga says that after some time spent apart, one does not know one’s friend as well as before and cannot expect the same relationship to continue. She feels that when two people meet again face-to-face, and spend some time together talking, the relationship pattern may resume, although not without changes. Olga’s comments can be understood in terms of the notion of praxis. People act according to the patterns of the friendship they have constructed in previous interactions, but as they begin to interact less frequently they develop different patterns in their friendship. To these women, face-to-face interactions are necessary in order to reestablish the earlier friendship relationship. Mediated communication merely helps to maintain the relationship. According to Lomsky-Feder & Rapoport (2000) “the unmediated experience of actual travel – involving the conduct of face-to-face interactions and a physical contact with familiar places, people, and culture – has a significant impact, meaning, and importance that differs from any other experience of contacting home” (p.34).
All of the women visit their homes relatively regularly, that is, every one or two years (except for Olga who has not been home for several years). Visiting home is important to these women in that it gives each one an opportunity to meet friends and reestablish connections with them. More than that, meeting friends is in itself an important reason to go home, together with the desire to visit parents and relatives or a native town. The first thing Karina did when she went home for a week was to call her friends and get together. She only had a week, and she did not want to waste any time she could spend with friends. When Ana went home last time she did not for various reasons reveal her plan to anybody except her mother and her best friend. She felt a deep trust and connection with her friend, almost like with her mother. Interestingly enough, it was easy for her to come back and start interactions as if there had not been a year’s separation. Karina says that she keeps in touch all the time via email, so she knows what is going on in friends’ lives. That helps to eliminate awkward moments in the first encounter. She feels “updated” and her friends react the same way: “Hey, you did not change at all!” they said to her when they first met after a year’s separation, during which she had a baby. This relatively common ritual in friendships helps Karina and her friends re-establish their connection. Ana struggled to start conversation with her friend after a separation because they had so much to tell to each other in re-connecting that they did not know how to start.

The dialectic of dependence/independence (connectedness/separateness in Baxter & Montgomery (1996) terms) is evident in the experience all five women have of missing their friends, and making a conscious effort to stay connected with them.
These women live independent lives; they have families and jobs in a foreign country, far from their friends. They do not rely on friends in many aspects of their lives, thus they experience the freedom “to act without considering the other” (Rawlins, 1983a, p. 260). At the same time, they have a need to feel “dependent” or “connected” with their friends. They keep telling things to friends that they do not tell to other people. Ana and Karina are the most prominent examples. Ana needs to talk to her friend because her friend is the only person she can trust and confide in. Karina often calls her friends with questions about childcare and other personal matters. She also trusts her friend’s opinion and experience. Despite the distance, the women’s trust and willingness to rely on their friends has not changed. They use the only option they have, mediated communication, to contact their friends for whatever reasons, whether it is a need for psychological support as for Ana, or a need for advice and opinion as for Karina, or a curiosity about how things are at home, as for all five women.

All of the women contacted their friends because they wanted to or needed to for personal reasons. Their interactions with friends were voluntary, which is consistent with Rawlins’ (1983a) assumption “that friendship is based on perceived freedom of choice … within the constraints of a relationship” (p. 257). In other words, the women exercised their freedom to be dependent which “implies that self has a choice whether or not to rely on other” (p. 260). In Rawlins’ terms, it is experiencing the freedom to be dependent on, together with the freedom to be independent from the other that distinguishes friendships from other types of relationships.
Experiencing Openness and Closedness in Keeping and Sharing Secrets

All five women I interviewed mentioned that sharing personal problems or just talking about themselves was an important aspect of friendship. Some stressed that it is not only important, but also essential for friendship. By definition, friends are people with whom one can confide whatever secrets one wants to share. Vera, reflecting on whom she can call best friends (друзья) and who are merely acquaintances (знакомые или приятели), says that friendly relations are with people to whom one “can tell something that is not really important. But you will not share a personal secret with this person. Or tell that something is really troubling you.” Vera does not seem to trust people in general, but she needs somebody to be open with and to reveal her inner feelings to. Doing so gives her a sense of belonging and connection. Close friends are exactly the people with whom one can discuss such personal and intimate things. Ana mentions that there are only two people to whom she can confide: her mother and her friend. Sometimes the friend is the first choice, because some things make her mother worry, so that Ana avoids telling her. With her friend she feels she can be completely open because she trusts her, unlike others: “I have other friends…. I can talk to them about a recent movie, but you will not tell what’s in your heart to them. But my best friend is the only person I can complain to about everything. I need to complain sometimes, you know.”

One of the main reasons her best friend deserves such openness is that Ana trusts her. Otherwise, she says, the entire town will know what happened to her. She feels at ease with her friend in that she is sure she does not have to ask specifically to
keep this information a secret, because usually friends know that the personal
information disclosed to them is a secret. Revealing it may be a reason for quarrels
between friends. Vera notes that once she had a serious quarrel with her friend because
she accidentally disclosed something her friend wanted to keep in secret. She explains:
“I slipped once and told something I was not supposed to tell to other people. I noticed
it at once and I immediately felt sorry about that. But you cannot take the words back,
can you? But we made peace later, she forgave me.”

My interviewees make a distinction between one’s own secret and somebody
else’s secret one is aware of. Almost all of the women indicated that they discussed
not only their own private affairs with friends, but also other people’s (usually
common acquaintance’s), as well. All interviewees also mentioned that almost all
personal information can be revealed to a friend. Personal information about others,
however, is better kept secret. Karina says: “I can tell many things to my friends,
practically everything. I mean, I can tell everything about myself, because I know
many things about others, too.” Karina feels that she is ethically responsible for
keeping others’ secrets, even from her best friends. Like Karina, Vera is relatively
open with her friends, but she emphasizes that others’ secrets are sometimes more
important to keep that her own. Olga says that she is relatively closed person, in that
she values other people’s privacy and does not tell others’ secrets. As my interviewees
made clear, talking about other people is one of the favorite topics among friends.
However, in discussing other people, these friends experience a tension between
trusting their friend and being open to her, or keeping a secret and being closed to some degree.

In general, friends are open to each other, where “openness” is a communication behavior that “is characterized by being conversational, expansive, affable, convivial, gregarious, unreserved, unsecretive, somewhat frank, possibly outspoken, definitely extroverted, and obviously approachable. Stylistically, the open communicator readily reveals personal information about the self in communication interactions” (Norton, 1978, p. 101). Not only is one open to one’s friends, their problems and secrets, but also one usually expects the same attitude toward oneself. When this does not happen, conflicts can arise. Ana says that she was greatly disappointed in her friends several times during her life. She mentions one case several times during the interview. When her ex-friend needed her for advice and support, Ana took a taxi and went to her friend’s place in the middle of the night to offer her comfort. When later Ana needed somebody to come to her and listen, this same friend asked her to wait a week until she had free time. Ana was genuinely offended. Ana experiences a phenomenon recognized by Baxter & Montgomery (1996): openness with a friend (willingness to talk) and openness to a friend (willingness to listen) are both equally important for friendship. Women achieve intimate, close relationship through talk. These women feel a need to reestablish their connections with others constantly because, according to Wood (2000), for women “intimacy is never finished, never resolved to a final form” (p. 207). In Ana’s example,
her ex-friend was closed to Ana when Ana wanted to be open with her, which created
dissonance in their relationship.

According to Baxter & Montgomery (1996), “the tension between revelation
and concealment appears to be a commonly experienced dilemma in everyday
relating” (p. 140). People struggle with the willingness to be open and candid with a
friend and the necessity to conceal some information in order to avoid hurting friend’s
feelings or being unethical in revealing information about third party. Vera and Ana
clearly distinguished between friendly relations, as relationships where one does not
reveal personal information, and friendship, as a relationship where one shares secrets
and tells a lot of things about oneself. Openness is essential for close, intimate
friendship to develop. According to Baxter & Montgomery (1996, p.135) the
importance of self-disclosure to personal relationship is indicated by the fact that lack
of openness is often cited as a problem in relationships. However, even within close
friendships one is not completely open with one’s friend. Friends always face the
dialectic of openness/closedness in their decisions to reveal or conceal information, as
my interviews show. Karina, who is willing to reveal practically everything about
herself is at the same time surprisingly reserved in revealing the information about
other people. Olga, who describes herself as an open person and can reveal a lot about
her personal life, at the same time avoids discussing her own family. In general, my
interviewees indicated that there is no such thing as complete openness in their
friendships. There are some topics that are not discussed even with one’s best friend.
Nevertheless, a certain amount of closedness does not prevent people from having a close relationship.

**Experiencing the Dialectical Tensions of Receiving and Giving Advice**

Women are known to give advice to each other. Whether or not a friend’s opinion has weight differs significantly among these five women and their friends, but it seems essential for them to share their opinions and to suggest solutions for overcoming various obstacles in life. These women tend to give advice to each other in quite different spheres of life, from choosing a color of lipstick to making major life decisions, such as marriage. All my interviewees admitted that giving and receiving advice is a part of their friendships, but all of them had their reservations about advising.

These women rely on their friends for help, and usually need help when they ask for advice. It is clear from my interviews that in close friendships among women, asking for and giving advice is a common practice. At the same time, the patterns of this practice vary from pair to pair. Some women are more independent and tend not to rely on their friends for help. Olga, for example, avoids asking for advice and avoids giving it, too. She keeps her personal problems to herself. Karina is very cautious about advising, as well. For her, when a woman cannot decide what hair color is best for her, she may rely on friend’s opinion, presuming that the friend will be honest about it. But if a woman has suspicions about her friend’s honesty, she would not trust her friend and more than likely would not ask for advice. When the problem is much more serious, however, such as a family or relational problem, Karina will not
If I were asked for advice about whether or not to start a family or have an abortion... If I were asked, how can you suggest something like that to another person? It is very personal.... And they never gave me advice in some serious life situations. Just minor things, for example, if this hair color fits me or something like that.

Karina stresses that even if she were asked, it is impossible for her to suggest anything so important. She simply does not want to do it because she cannot take the responsibility of interfering in her friends' lives. She clearly separates herself from her friends in these situations. Besides, she thinks that her friends are all grown-up people and are perfectly able to decide for themselves. Instead, Karina says that she and her friends “often exchange experience, for example how to deal with children.”

Vera also stresses that one can hear advice, but one needs to decide for herself because people are independent, and situations and personalities are unique. She really hates advice from anybody, especially when she did not ask for it. Only when a woman herself allows her friend to help is help welcomed, she thinks. Imposed advice threatens a person’s independence and ability to make decisions on her own. Vera values independence and tends to treat other people accordingly. She indicates that people are all different and nobody can know and feel exactly what the other knows and feels. That is why it is nearly impossible and even dangerous to give advice. She says: “For me their [the friends’] worldview is what matters and their opinion about
life. But I think we are all in a little bit different situations, and nobody can fully understand me and know what I know and understand." Vera is more likely to take advice from a woman, rather than a man, because a woman can understand another woman better that any man. Vera will also follow advice given by an older person who carries more respect from her. Thus Vera voluntarily allows herself to be connected to people she chooses, though she also values independence from them.

Ana and her best friend avoid giving advice because it threatens their individuality and creates responsibility and expectations. Ana says that instead they exchange opinions. They do not ask each other about their personal lives because they are close enough that they don't need to. They are both close with each other in that they do not ask. They do, however, share such information with each other freely. This voluntary exchange of information exists because they do not impose their opinions on each other, but merely share them. They both feel free to talk or not talk about personal matters with each other. They both respect their choices in life, and their ability and right to make these choices, thus stressing their independence from one another and the voluntary essence of their relationship. In most cases they choose to share problems because, Ana says, a friend will simply listen and provide comfort. This is more important to her than giving advice. She needs somebody to hear her out. Whether or not the friend tells Ana her opinion is less important. Sometimes when a person tells her story out loud and in detail, one can get a better understanding of the problem and possible solutions. But there are times when Ana needs to hear her friends' opinion, because in most cases, even if it does not help to sort out things, it is
interesting to her to see her friend’s position because it might give her a different perspective on the situation. Ana manifests voluntary dependence on her friend and openness with her, while at the same time in avoiding advising she chooses closedness and independence.

Tanya also explains her need to ask for advice as a necessity to gather the more opinions from her friends in order to see a situation from different angles. However, she makes a decision independently, after considering all the possibilities. In this case, the opinions of friends help to clarify a situation without pushing a person to do anything. The more one is uncertain about what to do, the more likely one is to seek somebody else’s advice. Usually this “somebody” is a friend, because people seek advice from those they can trust and those whose opinion is valuable to them.

Despite the problems they find in giving and receiving advice, these women keep asking for it and giving it to each other. The three dialectics dependence/independence, judgment/acceptance, and openness/closedness are interwoven in their experiences. Of the three, independence/interdependence is the most apparent. These friends experience the need to be connected to each other, and dependent on each other in some cases. When one asks for advice, one establishes a strong connection with one’s friend and makes herself dependent on the friend. When asking for advice one also shows that one values one’s friend’s opinion and needs it. Dependence is evident not only in asking for advice, but also when one receives advice. Consistent with the dialectic receiving advice is experienced as threatening independence, which is why the interviewees were mostly reluctant to receive advice
even from their close friends. The interviewees experienced independence in different ways: Karina said that some issues are too personal for others to interfere with, and that her friends are grown-up people and can decide for themselves; Vera said directly that all people are independent and different. Therefore, the women did not like it when friends imposed advice and threatened their independence. At the same time the women depended on their friends through voluntarily seeking their support, and through accepting their friend’s worldviews and shared experience. Sharing opinion or experience is more frequent and more welcomed in the friendships of these women because it is seen as less threatening to their independence, while at the same time it provides a connection with the friend. Avoiding advice but accepting opinions seems to be one way to manage the dialectical tension of dependence and independence.

Rawlins’ (1989) dialectic of judgment and acceptance is also experienced in the theme of giving advice. Opinions and shared experience, which the women prefer giving and receiving instead of advice, do not imply judgment. They are important and helpful, but unlike advice, do not impose anything on the person and do not contain any overt critique. On the other hand, when one receives advice from a friend on how to behave in a situation, it usually implies how the friend would have behaved in this situation, and thus implies that one’s behavior is wrong, from the friend’s point of view. When friends merely exchange opinions, the exchange does not have this direct critical implication. These women associate advice with judgment, and because of that they dislike receiving it. Ana, Vera, and Karina avoid giving and receiving advice. They believe in their friends’ ability to decide for themselves, and therefore do not
want to be critical or imposing toward them through giving advice. Nevertheless, all of the women gladly shared experiences and exchanged opinions. According to Rawlins (1989), “people value a friend’s acceptance, especially when they know the other takes their ideas, thoughts, and actions seriously” (p. 176). Once again, sharing opinions instead of advising seems to be a good way to manage contradiction these women experience between judging and accepting the other.

Finally, Baxter & Montgomery’s (1996) dialectic of openness/closedness is evident in asking for and in giving advice, as well. By not wanting to hear or suggest advice, the interviewees were closed to and with their friends, though they did not experience their avoidance of advising as affecting their friendships in a negative way. Vera, for example, clearly does not tolerate unwanted advice. In her case the relationship only benefits from her friends’ closedness and restraint in advising. At the same time the women are open to their friends’ opinions: Karina seeks useful experience from her friends, and Tanya is interested in her friends’ opinions because they might give her a new perspective on issues being discussed. Sometimes people are open with their friends, revealing to them information about themselves. Ana, for example, needs sometimes her friend to hear her out, without suggesting or advising anything. At the same time, Ana avoids advising, which implies a certain closedness with her friend. For these women, being open and being closed are intertwined tightly as they construct their relationships in terms of advising.
Experiencing Dependence and Independence in Competition Between Friends

To compete, according to the *American Heritage College Dictionary* is “to strive with another or others to attain a goal” (p. 284). In general women tend to be much less competitive than men. As Tannen (1990) states, women tend to establish and nurture relationships with others. Wood (1997) states that in their talk women exercise their “general desire to create equality and include others” (p. 173). However, some competitiveness exists in women’s relationships with close friends, and is expressed both in talk and in behavior.

In friendship women experience the opposing tendencies to be better than their friend, and at the same time to be a good friend, which sometimes are mutually exclusive. In order to preserve their friendship, friends balance these opposing tendencies and find ways to manage the contradictions. Karina admits that one of her friends was really competitive toward her, and a little jealous of Karina’s achievements, even small ones. Karina relates the story that once she and her friend were playing chess. Karina won. Then her friend overturned the chessboard and said that they were not going to play ever again. They have not played since then. In this case Karina’s friend experienced the tension of the desire to be independent person with better achievements than Karina while at the same time she wanted to remain Karina’s friend. She managed this tension by avoiding the competitive situation altogether.

Karina also notes that her friends have a great influence on her. She confesses that after she graduates with her Master’s degree, she would like to stay at home for
some time with her child. However, the majority of her friends are continuing their higher education and getting Ph.D.s in Russia. Karina admits that this fact affects her decision to stay home. She does not want to feel she is achieving less than her friends, hence she is now thinking about getting her Ph.D., too. Karina mentions that she did not realize what an important factor friends were until her husband pointed out that she wants her Ph.D. mostly because her friends will have theirs. She admits he is right to some degree. Karina stresses that she does not look at this as competition, but as a stimulus for further development of one as a person: “It is not like I compare myself with them and think that I will be worse than them in something because I might not go to school any more. I think more in terms that maybe it is interesting to study further if they do so.”

Ana speaks more about equality than competition. While in the U.S., her friend in Russia started jogging and lost some weight. Ana’s mother mentioned to Ana in a conversation over the phone that she had seen Ana’s friend on the street and that the woman looked very nice and slim. Ana, who had gained some weight, started visiting the gym more regularly and tried harder to achieve noticeable results. In this case, too, the friend’s achievement served as a stimulus for action. Ana may not want to be better than her friend, but she definitely does not want to be worse.

Tanya had some unpleasant moments with her friend because of jealousy and competition. Her friend sees Tanya as more handsome and smart in the eyes of men, which creates dissatisfaction that her friend tries to eliminate by different means. One example is the story of the friend’s birthday party when Tanya was first invited, then
told not to come because the party had supposedly been cancelled, and then again invited to a "last-moment" party. Tanya is sure that her friend did not want her to be present as a potential competitor for suitors, but at the last moment felt remorse and decided she did not want to be mean or to lie to a friend. In this case competition almost took over Tanya's friend, but she thought better of it. Perhaps reflecting the view of Tanya's friend, Ana is sure that competition regarding a man is a sure way to ruin women's friendship (although Ana herself did not have such an experience).

Ana has been involved in another competitive situation that affected her relationship with her friends tremendously. When she first came to the U.S., she was chosen for the program from a group of students in her university in Russia that included her friends. They thought it unfair for her to be chosen over them, and started to ostracize her. The event was stressful for her, she says, because she did not expect such behavior from people whom she considered to be her close friends. She has continued relationships with these women, but they are not her close friends any more. Ana and her friend experienced tension between personal achievement and friendship loyalty, and gave priority to personal achievement. The result of privileging one of the contradictions over the other was a shift from close friendship to a more superficial relationship.

My interviewees each experience some form of competition in their friendships. By definition, competition precludes equality in that one person seeks to win over another. Equality is not something one aims for in competition, yet for Coates (1997) equality is a central defining element of friendship. In their
relationships with their friends, my interviewees thus face the dilemma of achieving equality on one hand, and competing on the other hand. In some cases competition is a stimulus for better achievement and makes relationships stronger, as in Karina’s or Ana’s examples. In other cases, competition can take over friendship, as in Ana’s U.S. trip situation or in Tanya’s friendship. Competition exists in friendships, but how well it is managed clearly affects the relationship. Importantly, the experience of competition can be understood in terms of the dialectic of separateness/connectedness. In trying to achieve better results than one’s friend, one exercises one’s freedom to be independent, and manifests separateness from one’s friend. On the other hand, competition requires direct engagement with another person, and in comparing oneself with a friend, or in trying to achieve the same results, one manifests connectedness. The dialectical tension between separateness and connectedness is experienced in the necessity to balance one’s desire to achieve personal results with one’s loyalty toward one’s friends. This contradiction can never be resolved, but can be managed in order to maintain a stable relationship.

Cultural Difference in the Nature of Friendship

Apart from their experiencing of these dialectical tensions, my interviewees indicated directly and indirectly what they felt were the key characteristics of close friendships. The women who participated in the interviews were talking almost entirely about their Russian friends who remained in Russia or with whom they had close face-to-face interactions when they lived in Russia. All of the women have lived in the U.S. for more than two years, and see their friends rarely (as rarely as once in a
few years). All five women expressed some degree of sadness about this fact and said that they missed their Russian friends. For the most part, they did not develop a new close friendship here in the U.S. Only two of them, Karina and Olga, mentioned that they had American friends, though neither woman used the Russian equivalent of “best” or “close” in referring to them. Olga, who does not have many women friends at all, formed a rather close friendship with a woman here in Alaska. This woman, however, was Romanian. Olga herself did not acknowledge the likely cultural basis of the friendship. She said that for her it did not matter what culture her friend was from, the personality of the friend was what mattered.

Karina mentioned a Mexican American friend with whom she has relatively close interactions. Karina had planned to be a roommate with her Mexican American friend, but ended up living with another Russian women instead. Karina explains simply that: “I decided at the end that she will do better, that we’ll have less problems together.” Ana has not formed close relationships with American women at all. Apart from the fact that Ana can only name one person as a close friend, and that she is a reserved person, meaning that she tends to share very little personal information with other people, she does not understand how a Russian woman can possibly have a really close friendship with an American woman. Ana considers Americans to be cultural strangers and, thus, unable to understand Russians. Vera and Tanya, despite the fact that one is married to and the other is engaged to an American, do not have close American friends either. However they both formed friendships with Russian women who live here in America. Vera named two women in the Fairbanks area
whom she can call friends for sure. Both are Russian. She has doubts about whether or not these women consider her their friend. She confesses: “The point is that in Russia it was clearer somehow, the relationship. But yes, I think they are my friends.” Vera is confused about whom Americans consider to be friends, and because of Americans’ free use of the term “friend,” Vera is uncertain about whether or not she has true friends in the U.S. at all.

In searching for reasons for this reluctance or inability to become close to Americans, I examined what each of the women said about her understanding of friendship. The aspects of friendships mentioned by my interviewees are those mentioned in the American literature on friendship, in particular, voluntary interaction, talk as essential component in women’s friendship, self-disclosure, trust, and equality.

Kurth (1970) indicates voluntary interaction as one of the key elements of friendship as opposed to friendly relations. All five women I interviewed agreed that they valued their friend and took the time and effort to keep in touch with them, although it was not always easy to do so because of the distance between Russia and America. The women seek interactions with their friends purposefully, separating friends from other people they know. Vera said that a real friend is a person with whom one meets because one wants to, and not because one has to, like with neighbors.

Women’s friendship, according to Wood (1997) rests primarily on talk. My interviewees indicated talk is central to their friendships. Ana said that talk is basically what constitutes the essence of their friendship, because she and her friend
do not share any common activities or interests in lives. Vera mentioned that she could talk for hours over the phone with her friends. A foreign language does not seem to be a barrier in the process of forming close friendships for my interviewees. Olga was the only one who mentioned that at the beginning she had had difficulties with English that prevented her from forming friendships, though now the language does not constitute a problem for her. The other four women did not mention English as a reason for not forming friendships in America. However, all five women expressed a tendency to form close relationships with other Russians, or a preference for communicating with their friends in Russia via electronic means of communication over interacting face-to-face with Americans.

None of my interviewees mentioned that she had a really close friend among Americans. None referred to an American as a person to whom she could confide personal information or give advice, either, although each was engaged to some extent in giving and receiving advice with friends. Karina, Vera, and Ana mentioned time as an important variable in forming friendships, though all five women have lived in the U.S. for enough time to form friendships. The notion of trust, which Rawlins (1983b) notes as an important variable in forming friendship, was prominent in the interviews. Ana even stressed that she avoided using the word “friend,” preferring “a person whom I can trust,” instead. Vera mentioned respect and equality as necessary parts of friendship, which is consistent with Coates (1997). Indeed, Vera almost quoted Coates in saying that it is important for friends to treat each other as
equals and respect each other’s opinions; otherwise these people cannot be called friends.

Apparently, than, the characteristics these five Russian women associate with friendship are similar in many respects to those seen by Americans. But despite the fact that these Russian women named the same vital aspects of friendship as American scholars, the women do not form close friendships with Americans and feel as if they are cultural strangers among them. My interviewees are not sure what the appropriate patterns of friendship are in the U.S., nor how to behave with a potential American friend. The fact that Americans use the term “friendship” more loosely is clearly confusing. These women are not sure what would be expected from them, because friendship in the U.S. seems to be superficial. The relationships my interviewees developed with Americans fit clearly under the description of friendly relations, rather than friendships.

Conclusions and Implication for Future Research

In this study I examined the lived experience of friendship of five Russian women. Generally, these women’s definitions of friendship resemble those of Americans, in that they indicated voluntary interaction, equality, trust, and self-disclosure were important aspects of friendship that separate it from friendly relations among people. Despite these similarities, the women also indicated that cultural differences prevented them from forming close friendships with American women. Research examining these cultural differences is needed.
In interpreting these Russian women's experiences of friendship, I employed a dialectic approach to understanding interpersonal relationships. Although my decision to focus on dialectical tensions probably limited me in identifying other dimensions of the lived experiences of these women's friendships, it also provided me with a framework for understanding friendships as a complex, tension-filled experience. The dialectics of independence/dependence and openness/closedness were the most apparent in my interviewees' friendship experiences. Rawlins' (1992) dialectical tension between dependence and in friendship independence (separateness and connectedness in Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) terms) was evident when talking about the experience of missing friends, asking and giving advice, and keeping and sharing secrets. These Russian women, like Americans, are individual persons with individual goals and interests in their lives, but are nevertheless connected with their friends on a voluntary basis. To this extent, at least, this American theory of friendship is applicable in understanding Russian women's friendship experiences. However, because this study was not designed as a comparison of Russian and American friendship patterns, it is impossible to say at this point whether or not the degree of dependence in Russian friendships is somehow different from that for American ones, or whether or not Russian women rely on their friends in different situations than Americans. To answer these questions more research is needed.

The dialectic of openness/closedness appears in two narratives: experience of asking for and giving advice and experience of sharing secrets. It seems applicable in these cases and helps to understand the patterns of sharing or keeping secrets and
asking and giving advice in these women's friendship experiences. Both openness/closedness to and openness/closedness with appeared to function interdependently in friendship patterns of these Russian women. However, the issue of cultural specifics of Russian women's friendship patterns in terms of openness/closedness dialectic might be another implication for future research.

Rawlins' (1992) dialectic of judgment and acceptance is evident in the narrative of the experience of asking for and giving advice, together with two dialectics above, but it was not as prominent in my conversations with my interviewees. Judging or criticizing a friend was not mentioned directly. I assume that advice can contain a degree of critique, which makes it undesirable in most situations. However, my personal experience suggests that the dialectic of judgment and acceptance is present in Russian women's friendship maintenance patterns, despite the fact that it was not clearly evident in this study. The same can be said about Rawlins' dialectic of affection/instrumentality and Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) dialectic of certainty/uncertainty, neither of which was apparent in the conversations that are the capta for this study. I noted some instances where the affection/instrumentality tension was potentially relevant during the analysis of the interviews, but not to the extent that the dialectic was helpful in understanding any of the themes. Thus it is not clear whether or not these latter three dialectics from American theories of relationships and friendship are applicable in understanding Russian women's friendship experience. Evidence for these dialectics may be lacking because it did not specifically direct the conversation toward such issues, or because these dialectics are not productive for
understanding the experience of constructing close friendships in a different culture. Further studies are needed to address the problem of whether and how these latter dialectics work in Russian women’s friendships.

Accordingly, while the evidence from this study is mixed, relational dialectics appears to be a useful approach to studying interpersonal relationships in general, and friendship in particular, in cultures other than the American culture in which these theories were developed. Unlike more traditional linear-sequential models, it reflects the social construction of relationships and encompasses their complexity, and hence opens new potentials for research on interpersonal interaction. Researchers who employ dialectical perspective of human relationships “welcome a dialogue that has no common language but that holds promise for exasperation and creativity” (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 231). Hopefully, that dialogue will continue to develop between researchers in different cultures.
References


Appendix 1

Informed Consent Form for Russian Women’s Friendship Interview

This interview is being conducted in connection with my pursuit of Master’s degree from the Department of Communication at UAF.

The goal of this research is to explore Russian women’s experiences of friendship. You will be asked to spend approximately one hour for an interview. During the interview, you will be asked to describe in Russian your friendship experiences with other Russian women. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed afterwards. The audio tape will be destroyed immediately after the research is complete.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. In case you choose to withdraw, you can simply inform me about your decision by calling or via email. Your name will not be used in any report or paper. A pseudonym will be used for the narrative story from your interview. Strict guidelines for participant confidentiality will be followed in the study and all participants will be treated with respect. There are no apparent risks involved in the research process to participant or researcher. You will be free to keep from discussing issues that you do not feel comfortable discussing. You also are not expected to mention any real names of other people in the interview unless you choose to do so.

By reading and signing this form you accept the ethical principles listed above and agree to participate in the study.

Name ___________________________ Date ___________________________

Thank you for your interest and participation in this research project. A copy of the research results will be available for you at your request. If you have any questions please contact me at the office:

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