

Application for Human Subjects Protocol Exemption  
**Close Same-Sex Friendships And Role Transitions**

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**A. What are your research objectives?**

We are interested in learning about close same sex adult friendships that successfully survived a dramatic personal change for one friend, but not the other. How do close friends adjust, cope or change when one friend becomes a parent, divorces a spouse, experiences a serious illness but the other does not? Most research investigations of close same-sex adult friendships rely on quantitative surveys and interviews. Although interesting, we think this research treats adult friends as either a uniformly positive source of emotional and instrumental support for people or a uniformly negative drain on people's energy and resources. We think that longer and deeper qualitative interviews will enable us to understand the complexities and contradictions of adult same-sex friendships that has not been addressed in previous research.

**B. Discuss the significance and scientific merit of the study.**

We think this study is important for at least two reasons. First, it will provide a context for examining the assumptions and conclusions that are based on quantitative surveys of adult friendships. For example, most researchers who investigate same-sex friendships assume friends are and will be demographically and attitudinally similar (Brehm, 2003). These researchers assume that as people's circumstances change, so will their social network of close friends and acquaintances. However, this emphasis may have missed the ways in which friends cope and grow from change and difference. Second, the few qualitative studies of adult same-sex friendships that we have found adopt a psychodynamic framework. The authors focus on how adult same-sex friendships reflect biological and developmental gender differences that emerge in early childhood. We think that adult same-sex friendships may serve different goals and needs than early childhood friendships. We also think that previous research has ignored adult friends' cultural backgrounds and social networks.

**C. In what manner and to what extent will human subjects be involved?**

We plan to conduct face-to-face interviews with twenty participants. Each class member will interview an individual participant for approximately one hour to two hours.

**D. What procedures, instruments, etc. will be employed?**

A draft of the interview guide is enclosed with this protocol.

**E. What existing data, if any, will be used?**

None.

**F. What will the participants be told about their involvement in the study?**

As summarized in the consent form and the interview guide, participants will be told what the interview will cover, how long it will take and how the information will be used.

**G. Describe the procedures for obtaining and recording the informed consent of participants.**

The interviewer will give each participant two copies of the consent form. We will ask participants to sign both copies and keep one for themselves. Once signed and dated, the consent forms will be kept on file by the investigators separately from the collected data.

**H. Describe any potential risks to the subjects, including psychological stress and physical hazards.**

We believe there are two possible risks. First, discussion of ethnic, cultural or religious differences can be sensitive. We might ask questions about experiences or opinions that the participant has never discussed with the friend. However, all participants will know from the moment we ask them to participate what our interest is. We will make it clear that they don't have to answer any question that makes them uncomfortable and if they reveal something they feel is too private, they can take it "off the record". Finally, we have spent several hours writing and discussing our possible biases and how we might treat this topic with the sensitivity it deserves.

Participants might also be concerned that class members might know them or their friends personally. All class members will remove identifying comments and assign pseudonyms during their transcription. We also have discussed the importance of maintaining confidentiality, anonymity and what our research goals are. We hope to identify broad themes across all participants, not psychoanalyze any particular individual.

**I. Describe any interventions or manipulation of participants or their environment.**

None.

**J. What measures will be taken to safeguard the welfare of participants, their right to privacy and the confidentiality of information?**

After the interviews have been transcribed, the original tapes will be erased. Any identifying information (names, ages, locations) will be changed or omitted in any presentation of the data. We will tell participants that they can choose not to answer any question, or to ask us to not use their answers for any particular question.

**K. Are school-age children or other minors to be involved?**

No.

**L. Are psychological tests to be used?**

No.

**M. Describe the debriefing of participants.**

At the end of each interview, before thanking the participant for their time and cooperation, we will reinforce our confidentiality promise and tell participants how they might learn more about the project.

**N. What procedures will be taken to insure prompt reporting to the CRHS of proposed changes in the research project?**

CRHS will be informed in writing within two weeks of any changes. However, if any problems or risks occur, CRHS will be informed immediately.

**O. What, if any, type of remuneration will be offered to participants for their participation in this research?**

None.

**Written Materials.**

Included in the appendix are the following materials:

1. Informed consent form.
2. The interview guide.

**Consent Form**  
**Study of Close Same Sex Friendships**

Your participation in this project is greatly appreciated. We are interested in learning more about close same-sex, non-romantic friendships in which one friend has become a parent, went through a divorce or had a serious illness and the other friend has not. We want to learn more about how friends adjust, cope or change when one friend adjusts to new challenges. The interviews typically last between one hour and two hours. We will audiotape and transcribe the interviews. We also may take notes as we interview. Some people find participating in this type of interview useful and enjoyable because it gives them a chance to talk about things that matter to them.

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality. We will keep your tapes and transcripts in our research laboratory. Only the project members will have access to your transcripts. Your name will not appear in the transcripts. In any publication or public statement based on the study, all names, occupations or other potentially identifying information will be omitted or changed.

You may ask any questions regarding the research and they will be answered fully. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation is completely voluntary.

*If you wish to participate, please complete the following:*

I, (print your name legibly) \_\_\_\_\_, heard and read the introduction to this study and understand its contents. Any questions I have had have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand my right to withdraw my consent to participate at any time. I hereby freely give my consent to participate in this research project.

NAME (Signature): \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Please feel free to contact us if you have any further ideas or concerns about the project. In a few months, we will post a summary of our conclusions on Dr. Heather Smith's web page (<http://www.sonoma.edu/people/hsmith/default.html>). Thank you again for your help.

## **Interview Guide (DRAFT)**

The purpose of this interview is to learn more about how close same-sex friends adjust, cope or change when one friend is faced with new challenges. As I understand it, you (or your friend) became a new parent (coped with a divorce, experienced a serious illness). I hope that we can talk about your experiences further.

This interview is part of a course project for a qualitative research class. Only class members will see any portion of the original transcript, and only I will hear the interview tape. We want these interviews to be a collaborative effort and we are very interested in what you have to say.

### **Begin by asking the participant to describe their friendship.**

#### **Possible prompts:**

How long have you been friends? Could you describe the first time you met? How did you meet?

When did you meet? Where did you meet? What sparked the friendship?  
Could you describe what you did the last time you spent time together?

### **Ask about what they do together, what they talk about, how they support each other. (Some people might prefer the most abstract questions listed below as a place to start.)**

#### **Possible prompts:**

What sorts of activities do you do together? What is your favorite thing you do together?

What kind of things do you talk about? What topics do you avoid talking about?

What do you joke about? What is difficult to talk about? Can you give an example?  
How do you go about making decisions in the relationship?

How do you support each other during times of stress? How do you encourage each other? Help each other? Do you feel supported by this person? If so, in what ways?

What do you fight about? How do you resolve conflicts or problems?

Do you ever celebrate things together? If so, what do you do? What things do you celebrate together? What is the most important event that you shared?

How do you show your affection for one another? What are your rules about hugging?

What is challenging for you about this friendship?

How frequently do you two spend time together?

How do you keep in touch with each other?

Who, if anyone else, is part of this group of friends?

What do you all like to do together?

Do you and your friend share other friends?

How are your families and home lives different or the same? (Intact family, religious differences, cultural differences, etc.)

### **You also might want to explore general descriptions of the friend.**

#### **Possible prompts:**

What do you have in common?

What are some of your differences?

What have you learned from your friend?  
 What do you like most about your friend? What do you NOT like about your friend? What irks you?  
 Why do you consider this person a close friend?  
 What do you value about your friendship?  
 What characteristics of this friendship set it apart from others?  
 What phrase or word best describes your friend?  
 What values or qualities do you admire in your friend?  
 What kind of expectations do you bring to the friendship?  
 What kinds of things do they know about you?  
 What kinds of things do you share with each other?  
 How would you describe a close friendship? What does it mean to describe a friend as close?

**Don't forget to adjust your questions so they are appropriate to the particular event (pregnancy, divorce, illness) and person.**

Tell me about the moment that you learned about (your friend's pregnancy). What happened?  
 How did you feel? What did you expect to happen?  
 Who did you tell first? Why? Did they tell you first? How long did it take to share information with your friend?  
 If not this particular friend, why not? When did you tell them? How did they react? How did it make you feel? Did you have any fears or doubts or hopes that you discussed with your friend? What were they? Any doubts or fears or hopes that you did not discuss?  
 Do you remember anything specific that your friend did? Said?  
 What kind of support did you receive? Offer? Financial, emotional, meals?  
 What else was happening at the time? Did it change your relationships with other friends?

During this transition, how did your friendship change? Did the way in which you communicated change? Did the amount of time you spent together change? Did routines change?  
 How long had you been friends when the event occurred?  
 How old were you when the event happened?  
 Did the event create any difficulties? What were they? How did you deal with them?  
 What did you discover about your friendship given this experience?  
 Did the friendship change? If so, how?  
 Can you talk to me about what changed for you (your friend)?  
 Did this event change the dynamics of your friendship? If so, how?  
 Do you think your friendship would be different if this had not happened?  
 Where do you see your friendship going?  
 Has this experience changed your general feelings about close friendships? If so, in what ways?

**Closing questions:**

Is there anything else you would like to share?

**For each friend, please record their gender, approximate age, ethnic, cultural or religious background, whether they are in a committed relationship, years of education. You might also record whether the friends have ever lived together or not.**