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## Creating Sustainable Workplace Environments: an Exploratory Study of Social Energy Expenditure in Cross-Sex, Heterosexual Organizational Friendships

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CREATING SUSTAINABLE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTS: AN EXPLORATORY  
STUDY OF SOCIAL ENERGY EXPENDITURE IN CROSS-SEX, HETEROSEXUAL  
ORGANIZATIONAL FRIENDSHIPS

Kathryn C. Green

59 Pages

This thesis outlines the reasoning and methods used to investigate the concept of social energy expenditure from Hall and Davis' (2017) communicate bond belong (CBB) theory as a lens for understanding how individuals invest social energy into forming and maintaining cross-sex, heterosexual friendships in organizations. Informed by previous literature, this study explores the intersect between interpersonal communication and organizational communication. Apart from Hall (2018), no other scholars have tested the 2017 CBB theory. Therefore, the present study's goal is to provide a foundational inquiry into the theory's usability by applying the core concept of social energy expenditure and by specifically testing theorem 5b from principle 5 (i.e., the principle of human energy investment). The testing of CBB, as a new theory, adds a valuable contribution to the field of communication.

**KEYWORDS:** Communicate Bond Belong, Cross-Sex, Friendships, Organizations, Social Energy, Workplace

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STUDY OF SOCIAL ENERGY EXPENDITURE IN CROSS-SEX, HETEROSEXUAL  
ORGANIZATIONAL FRIENDSHIPS

KATHRYN C. GREEN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

School of Communication

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2018

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CREATING SUSTAINABLE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTS: AN EXPLORATORY  
STUDY OF SOCIAL ENERGY EXPENDITURE IN CROSS-SEX, HETEROSEXUAL  
ORGANIZATIONAL FRIENDSHIPS

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K. C. G.

## CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
CONTENTS	ii
TABLES	v
FIGURES	vi
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Importance of this Study	3
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	5
Friendship Communication	5
Characteristics of Friendships	6
Voluntary	6
Ideal friends	6
Expectations	7
Friendship dialectics	7
Satisfaction	9
Cross-sex Friendships	9
Workplace friendships	10
The Language of Exchange	11
Social exchange	12
Reciprocity	13
Energy investment	14

Communicate Bond Belong Theory	15
Hypotheses and Research Questions	16
Summary of Literature	17
CHAPTER III: METHOD	18
Participants	18
Sampling	18
Demographics	18
Data Collection	19
Survey Instrument	19
Survey Distribution	20
Analysis Procedure	21
Summary	22
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS	24
Energy Investment in Cross-Sex and Same-Sex Friendships	24
Forming and Maintaining Friendships	25
Social Energy to Form Friendships	26
Social Energy to Maintain Friendships	27
Bivariate Correlations	28
Forming Friendships	28
Organizational position	28
Age	29
Maintaining Friendships	29
Organizational position	29



Age	29
Male and Female Friendships	29
Frequency and Proportion Counts	30
Summary of Results	32
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION	34
Theoretical Implications	34
Practical Implications	36
Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research	36
Conclusion	39
REFERENCES	41
APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE	52
APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL	59

## TABLES

Table	Page
1. Energy Investment in Friendships	25
2. Organizational Position and Social Energy to Form	27
3. Organizational Position and Social Energy to Maintain	28

## FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Mean Level of Agreement for Maintaining Multiple Friendships	25

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Friendships matter. As youth transition from childhood to adolescence, they “begin to look to friends, rather than parents, for companionship, intimacy, and emotional support” (Hill & Swenson, 2014, p. 99). Similarly, the social support friendships provide is imperative to role identity in aging adults (Siebert, Mutran, & Reitzes, 1999). Friendships are impactful relationships in the earlier and later stages of life, and they remain just as important throughout middle adulthood as well (Furman, 1998; Marion, Laursen, Zettergren, & Bergman, 2013; Yager, 1997). It is no stretch, then, that considering friendships and their communication patterns in the organizational context is a rich avenue for exploration. This chapter and thesis apply communication bond belong theory (Hall & Davis, 2017) in investigating how individuals form and maintain cross-sex, heterosexual, friendships in organizations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The nature of working in organizations and, by extension, relating with others has changed as more technology is incorporated into the workplace (e.g., email, texting, video chat) because organizations have greater access to employees’ lives beyond work hours and into personal time (Clark, 2002; Jacobs & Yudken, 2003). Not only can organizations more easily access their employees outside of work, but employees are spending a greater number of their hours working (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, & Ganesh, 2011). Member accessibility and an increase of hours spent at work affects relationships between organizational members. Along with these changing facets of organizational life, the number of full-time female employees has also increased in recent years (Cheney et al., 2011). The combination of increased working hours and a rise in full-time female workers (Kuhn & Lozano, 2008) has important implications for relational communication in the workplace. With a greater mix of males and females in the

workplace, the romantic relationship potential in organizations also increases, and the fear of sexual harassment claims alone is enough of a reason to discourage workplace romance (Fusilier & Penrod, 2015; Mainiero & Jones, 2013).

The need to better understand cross-sex, heterosexual friendships occupies a specific niche in organizations' relational spectrum. Since relationships play important, constitutive roles in the organizational process (Sias, 2006), there must be at least a minimal amount of sociability between organizational members. Members of the organization and the systems of relationships they create are the locus of organizing (Contractor & Grant, 1996), so placing some emphasis on fostering healthy communication environments is in the organization's best interest. Conversely, however, too much emphasis on relations between members may also be detrimental. This overemphasis or preoccupation with relationships at work could result in inappropriate social interactions detracting from workplace productivity and even in sexual harassment, which has numerous negative outcomes such as increased stress, increased absenteeism, and decreased job productivity (Dougherty & Goldstein Hode, 2016; Lindenberg & Reese, 1996; Mainiero & Jones, 2013; Riger, 1991). Although working in an organizational context may provoke feelings akin to family or friendship between members, the fundamental use of work space is for contributing to that organization (Arnett, 2006). The organization, Arnett explains, is not designed to meet every individual's needs for self-fulfillment, but it should elevate ideas, creativity, and productivity as the focus of organizational life. Given that neither too little nor too much sociability is ideal, the present study aims to address the middle ground with a targeted approach toward building sustainable patterns of communication between cross-sex, heterosexual friendships, benefiting both individuals and, ultimately, the organization itself.

### **Importance of this Study**

If people generally have less leisure time and spend more of their time at work, then understanding healthy, sustainable communication environments is a paramount goal for relational and organizational communication scholars alike. This study's unique contribution comes with its narrowed focus on exploring healthy, functional communication environments in organizations by analyzing the degree to which individuals are willing to form and maintain platonic cross-sex, heterosexual workplace friendships.

The goal of the present study is to use theory to develop a baseline understanding of individuals' willingness to form and maintain cross-sex, heterosexual friendships in organizations. To do this, the present research utilizes CBB theory's (Hall & Davis, 2017) concept of *social energy* to explain why individuals' willingness to invest their time and resources into forming and maintaining friendships may vary based on biological sex (i.e., male and female), as well as other factors like organizational position and age. Although Hall and Davis (2017) have used the term "social energy," there has not yet been a clear conceptual definition of social energy. A reasonable definition might be: energy expended in interactions. Social energy is derived from stimulating social interactions with others (see Davis, 1997), and when an individual's social energy is "depleted," they will likely seek to limit further social interactions (Hall & Davis, 2017). To define a cross-sex friendship, the present study uses Werking's (1997) conceptualization that a cross-sex friendship upholds characteristics such as voluntariness and cooperativeness while reflecting a non-romantic alliance between cross-sex individuals. Ultimately, this study could be the catalyst for continued research building and establishing CBB's theoretical framework within the communication discipline.

Practical implications of this research apply to organizational training. As new employees are socialized into the organization, the training provided to them and the existing relations between organizational members provide models for how they should behave and communicate with others in the organization. With a better understanding of how individuals perceive and invest their social energy allocation into forming and maintaining friendships, organizational trainers could develop training interventions addressing specific skills to improve the sustainability of relational communication between cross-sex co-workers to promote healthy friendships in organizations overall.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Friendship Communication**

“From the days of the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers until now, throughout cultures, friends have been recognized as important sources of affection and enjoyment, understanding and support, companionship and counsel” (Blieszner & Adams, 1992, p. 28). Aristotle provides a philosophical examination of friendship in Books VIII and IX of *Nicomachean Ethics* wherein he links friendship to virtue and says there are different types of friendships: friendships based on utility, friendships based on pleasure, and friendships based on the pursuit of good (Pascarella, 2015). Friendship characteristics also vary based on sex differences (Aries & Johnson, 1983; Banta & Heatherington, 1963; Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hoza, 1987; Cohen, D’Heurle, & Widmark-Petersson, 1980; Eder & Hallinan, 1978; Rotenberg, 1986), which impacts individuals’ motivations for engaging in both occasional and permanent friendships (Zeggelink, 1993). In some cases, people maintain their friendships established in early life consistently over time (Matthews, 1986). Matthews explains that other friendships, however, develop as individuals grow through developmental life stages. Blieszner and Adams (1992) outline the empirical research highlighting friendships as primary relationships, the processes of friendship forming and relational maintenance, and they investigate friendship quality. In Blieszner and Adams’ history of friendship research, they delineate six trends in the literature summarizing and providing future direction for friendship research: (a) lifespan approach to friendship; (b) friendship as a primary focus; (c) multidisciplinary perspectives; (d) friendships as relationships; (e) quality of friend relations; (f) and development of research methods used to study friendship (Blieszner & Adams, 1992).



## Characteristics of Friendships

To explore some of the fundamental communicative characteristics of friendships, the following section outlines the voluntary nature of friendships, ideal friendships, friendship expectations, friendship quality, and satisfaction in friendships.

**Voluntary** Rawlins' (1992) *Friendship Matters* was instrumental in describing friend relationships as a unique facet of interpersonal communication research. Prior to Rawlins, however, Palisi and Ransford (1987) and Wiseman (1986) explored the "terms and conditions" of friendship. Since all friendships are voluntary relationships (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012), there is a pressing need to better understand friends' perceptions and behavioral expectations, both for the individuals and for the collective pair. Friendships serve specific purposes and function in unique ways. As Wiseman (1986) notes, individuals are not contractually obligated to maintain friendships, in contrast to a marriage which has a legal obligation, so understanding the conditions for sustainable friendships is a worthwhile endeavor for interpersonal scholars. Palisi and Ransford (1987) further explicate this by positing, "Friends do not feel duty-bound to relate, they are not excessively dependent on one another, and they are not coerced into the relationship" (p. 245). Since friendships are voluntary relationships, it is important to consider the underlying values and motivations contributing to friendships formation.

**Ideal friends** Along with the voluntary dimension of friendships, Cocking, Van den Hoven, and Timmermans (2012) discuss ideal friendship companions. Perhaps individuals adopt a *friend of best fit* attitude as they decide which friendships are most worthy of their energy investment. Cocking et al. (2012) state, "It is upon the appreciation of one another's virtue that we have the kind of intimacy, deep affection, trust, loyalty, and so on that is found in such friendships" (p. 180). When friends appreciate each other's shared virtues, the friendship is

supported beyond surface level appreciation or admiration to a level of shared values and mutual respect for worldviews. More virtuous friendships, ultimately, provide an opportunity for reflection and to better learn about one's self (Cocking et al., 2012).

**Expectations** Individuals inevitably, either consciously or subconsciously, develop expectations for how they think and want their friend to behave (Hall, 2011, 2012, 2014; Wiseman, 1986). According to Hall (2012), friendship expectations are comprised of one's cognitive conceptualizations of how individuals would like their friends to act, as well as the characteristics one would like their friends to possess. The combination of these expectations coalesces into friendship terms and conditions, a standard by which individuals judge current and future friends (Fehr, 1996; Hall, Larson, & Watts, 2011). Individuals develop scripts which are sequences of communication messages or behaviors designed to carry out plans (Dillard, 2008). It follows that individuals rely on such scripts to form patterned communication in their friendships. Based on previous friendship experience, the people involved, the context, and a variety of other factors, individuals maintain an enduring friendship standard to better recognize behaviors and messages constituting friendship communication (Hall, 2012). Wiseman (1986), however, posits that individuals must gradually begin to change their behavior to meet their friend's expectations if they are to create a lasting bond with this friend.

**Friendship dialectics** The process of building and maintaining friendships is important, and understanding the impact of quality relationships on one's personal and social well-being can raise one's consciousness about the need to create healthy sustainable relationships overall. Rawlins (1992) emphasizes the utility and richness of considering the communicative effects of friendship from a dialectical perspective. He identifies four interactional dialectics indicative of the communicative challenges and contradictory demands of friendship throughout life. The first

dialectic describes the patterns of interdependence in a friendship, as well as the freedom to act independently from the dyad. The dialectic of judgment and acceptance describes the recurring dilemmas in a friendship between providing objective feedback for a friend's thoughts and actions versus giving unconditional and unyielding support. Next, the dialectic of expressiveness and protectiveness states that there are opposing tendencies to speak openly with friends about one's own private thoughts and feelings, with a simultaneous need to refrain from self-disclosure to preserve friendship boundaries to avoid burdening one's friend. Finally, the dialectic of affection and instrumentality articulates the tension arising in a friendship between caring for the friend for the sake of the friend (end-in-itself) and caring for the friend in order to get something (means-to-an-end) (Rawlins, 1992). Rawlins' dialectic of affection and instrumentality is key to the present study of workplace relationships moving from instrumentality to higher affective states.

Additionally, Bridge and Baxter (1992) identified five dialectical tensions individuals specifically experience in their workplace friendships. The first tension is *equality and inequality*, and this alludes to tensions arising from organizational constraints and expectations of inequality (e.g., hierarchy). Second, the *impartiality and favoritism* details objective organizational treatment of employees and friendships' expectations of support. The *openness and closedness* tension refers to expectations of honest communication between friends, as well as expectations of confidentiality for private information. *Autonomy and connection* explains the potential benefits from frequent contact between workplace friendships; excessive connection may jeopardize the friendship, however, so there is still a need for autonomy. Finally, the *judgment and acceptance* tension refers to the organizational necessity for critical evaluation and the expectation for mutual affirmation among friends.

**Satisfaction** Maintaining satisfying friend relationships contributes to an individual's overall well-being as it is part of living a satisfied life (Buote et al., 2007; Demir & Weitekamp, 2007; Heller, Watson, & Ilies, 2004; Wilson, Harris, & Vazire, 2015). Despite the importance of maintaining satisfying friendships, Wilson et al. (2015) note the minimal, albeit growing, body of research in this area. Previous studies tend to compare friends with other types of personal relationships, making it challenging to identify the specific role friendship satisfaction plays in overall life satisfaction (Wilson et al., 2015).

### **Cross-sex Friendships**

Cross-sex friendship is a well-studied area of social research (Griffin & Sparks, 1990; Hays, 1985; Messman, Canary, & Hause, 2000; Monsour, 1992, 1997). As previously mentioned, Werking (1997) defines a cross-sex friendship as upholding characteristics such as voluntariness and cooperativeness while reflecting a non-romantic alliance between cross-sex individuals. Although the history of research on cross-sex friendships is minimal, the scholarly investigation of cross-sex friendships has expanded to include multiple contexts in which the relationships occur (e.g., Afifi & Burgoon, 2000; Hall et al., 2011; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Messman et al., 2000; Rawlins, 1982). Over the course of the lifespan, cross-sex friendships are less common than same-sex friendships (Monsour, 2002), so the research has been thin given that the cross-sex friendship itself is somewhat novel (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012). Messman et al. (2000) discuss the complexities of sexuality arising when heterosexual cross-sex friends present their relationship as platonic to others because there is a widespread social suspicion of sexual interactions in cross-sex friendships (see also Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012; O'Meara, 1989; Rawlins, 1992). Cupach and Metts (1991) suggest this suspicion is not unfounded since cross-sex friends do face sexuality in their relationship. Socially and societally, there seems to be

significant overlap between romantic relationships and cross-sex friendships, indicating the need for more social science research delineating the two, as well as investigating the possible significant consistency in relationship satisfaction for both types of close interpersonal relationships.

**Workplace friendships** Since most people spend a significant amount of time at work, interpersonal relationships between co-workers naturally develop (Chen, Mao, & Hsieh, 2012; Dickie, 2009; Nielsen, Jex, & Adams, 2000; Trefalt, 2012). Workplace friendships are defined as “non-exclusive workplace relations that involve mutual trust, commitment, reciprocal liking and shared interests or values” (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002, p. 218). These relationships are associated with various work-related outcomes such as job involvement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Riordan & Griffeth, 1995). Derrida (1997) examined the politics of friendship and posits that true friendship is an impossible ideal due to the inherently political nature of interpersonal relationships; he contests that humans cannot really be friends and that what exists are merely a series of acquaintanceships. This political nature of friendships is especially evident among workplace friends, and the difficult nature of developing and maintaining friends in a context rife with political dynamics makes the study of workplace friends even more important (Sias, 2006; Sias & Cahill, 1998). Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey and Paul (1997) suggest that individuals’ competitive and self-serving style in the organizational context contribute to these office politics. Berman et al. (2002) looked directly at organizational policies and strategies used by managers either to promote or discourage friendship in their organizations, as well as the relational and organizational consequences such friendships might have, which is especially relevant given the present study’s scope. Their study found that, overwhelmingly, senior managers felt that workplace friendships improved communication and

helped employees get their jobs done; however, there were concerns that friendships in the workplace led to more gossip and romances (Berman et al., 2002).

Although research on *same*-sex friendships is common (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Reisman, 1990), scholars are turning their attention toward *cross*-sex friendships (Akbulut & Weger, 2015; Guerrero & Chavez, 2005). Some communication and social psychology scholars have explored the specifics of cross-sex, heterosexual friendships in a workplace context (Fritz, 1997; McBride & Bergen, 2015; Riordan & Griffeth, 1995; Sias, Smith, & Avdeyeva, 2003). In general, workplace friendship differs from acquaintanceship. It is also different from workplace romances in two important ways: “Romance involves a relationship between two individuals from which others ordinarily are excluded, and romance is also more intense than friendship (involving, for example, passionate affection or enduring commitments)” (Berman et al., 2002, p. 218). Workplace friendships are decidedly different than other types of workplace relationships, so they merit scholars’ attention.

### **The Language of Exchange**

The present study contributes the term *language of exchange*, referring to the patterns of communication dealing with the exchange of tangible and intangible personal resources. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) argued that most behaviors within our interpersonal relationships are motivated by personal gain and that individuals make decisions based on projections of the rewards and costs associated with certain behaviors. Given that individuals commonly speak in transactional ways to accumulate personal benefits, trade services, or accomplish tasks, especially in organizational settings, exchange pervades social interactions and everyday talk. Within the context of workplace friendships, it is necessary to consider how concepts like social exchange, reciprocity, and energy investment shape communication between friends.

**Social exchange** The language of exchange and reciprocity are at the heart of social energy and investment of personal resources. Social exchange theory (SET) stems from several fields such as psychology, sociology, economics, and business (Blau, 1964). Social exchange theory is broad, and the communication discipline primarily uses the theory to explain perceived costs and benefits associated with specific relationships. Blau (1964) explained social exchange is based on the expectation of reciprocity to guide individual transactions of both tangible and intangible resources. Social exchange theory seems to be a natural platform for answering questions about why cross-sex, heterosexual individuals form and maintain organizational friendships. However, social exchange theory takes an *individualistic* approach to understanding the accumulation and allocation of personal resources. The theory indicates individuals will enact past behaviors that have been successful in gaining benefits while avoiding those behaviors that were too costly (Emerson, 1976). This focus on the individual rather than on the interplay between two or more interactants in the exchange pose a fundamental problem for using social exchange theory as a framework for understanding communication where the minimum unit of analysis is the dyad.

The language of social exchange and personal transaction pervades everyday communication and lends some insight, given the current study's scope: "Social exchange theory is one of the most influential paradigms for understanding workplace behavior" (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 874). Since the language of exchange is so pervasive and inherently connects with workplace communication, social exchange helps inform the ideas of investing and allocating personal resources. Although social exchange theory is undoubtedly a useful framework, it is somewhat surprising that the core ideas comprising SET have yet to be adequately articulated and integrated (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Cropanzano and Mitchell

explain that social exchange theory's *fundamental* constructs have yet to be fully identified through the testing of critical theoretical variables, leaving the formulations of SET as ambiguous. As a theory with well-defined theoretical components that are more readily accessible for testing, Hall and Davis' (2017) communicate bond belong theory subsumes the concepts of reciprocity and social exchange, therefore, making it the present study's theoretical driving force.

**Reciprocity** The language of reciprocal exchange is engrained in societies, relationships, and organizations. Cialdini (2009) states that reciprocation is accompanied by obligation and it permeates exchanges of every kind: "It may well be that a developed system of indebtedness flowing from the rule of reciprocation is a unique property of human culture" (Cialdini, 2009, p. 19). O'Connell (1984) provides key terminology for assessing the perceived importance of reciprocal behavior in friendships. One of O'Connell's most intriguing concepts is the *assumption of eventual balance*. This refers to the logic of generalized exchange in that, typically, no precise terms for exchange are overtly laid out. Additionally, O'Connell describes the *norm of noninstrumental concern*, which, "emphasizes the importance of the social relationship while de-emphasizing that of goods or services in question" (p. 342). In this case, an act of friendship requires the expression of an altruistic orientation. The author goes on to note that this norm is elicited both in friendship and kinship; however, it seems more crucial to correct an imbalanced exchange between friends, "since the bond is weaker and the potential for exploitation that much greater" (p. 342).

Based on an economic model, *exchange theory* (Stafford, 2008) views a friendship, in and of itself, as based upon a cost-benefit analysis wherein individuals seek the behaviors providing the most benefits with the least amount of costs. Depending on the relationship's



strength, the amount of energy both members contribute toward maintaining the close friendship, and many other factors, the benefits may or may not outweigh the costs of such a relationship.

O'Connell (1984) offers an effective explanation of these concerns:

By establishing a commitment to nonexploitative exchange practices and a concern for the relationship, exchange partners deepen their relationship and interpret imbalance as a gesture of concern for the well-being of friends and relatives. The net result is a one-sided giving without dissatisfaction and weakened ties. (p. 343)

Ultimately, if the friendship's foundation is rooted in a healthy understanding of reciprocity, then friends maintain an assumption of eventual balance (O'Connell, 1984), without either person feeling like the costs associated with being in the friendship are outweighing the benefits.

**Energy investment** The optimal degree of friendship sustainability depends on the individuals, but it also relies on some element of giving and taking; therefore, the concepts of reciprocity and social exchange feed directly into personal investments of social energy. Given that the present study focuses particularly on cross-sex organizational friendships, the investment of social energy is of paramount importance. Research comparing cross-sex and same-sex friendships suggests that heterosexual, cross-sex friendships may be more challenging than same-sex friendships (Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Ledbetter, & Lin, 2007; Monsour, Harris, Kurzweil, & Beard, 1994; O'Meara, 1989; Werking, 1997). Although all friendships require social energy, cross-sex friendships may be more challenging than same-sex friendships because they are rife with difficulties like jealousy, sexual tension, and outside judgment of the relationship (Arnold, 1995). Same-sex friendships do not face these same challenges because the nature of the friendships does not provoke sexual tension or require justification of the friendship's boundaries (Egland, Spitzberg, & Zormeier, 1996). Despite these difficulties, cross-

sex friendships offer emotional outlets, as well as cross-sex insights and higher levels of disclosure, intimacy, and trust (Duck, Rutt, Hurst, & Strejc, 1991; Reis, 1998). Since the stakes are high for cross-sex friendships (i.e., sexual tension and judgment by others), it follows that they would likely require more social energy to form and maintain. Thus, this study utilizes the concept, *social energy expenditure*, from the newly established communicate bond belong theory (Hall & Davis, 2017) to explore cross-sex organizational friendships.

### **Communicate Bond Belong Theory**

Hall and Davis' (2017) communicate bond belong theory (CBB) ties evolutionary theory and human relationships. "Three defining characteristics of a relationship (i.e., stability, individuation, and interdependence) allow humans to effectively and efficiently regulate social, emotional, and material investments in another person in relation to future returns on that investment" (Hall & Davis, 2017, p. 25). Communicate bond belong theory seeks to explain when and why individuals engage in different types of social interactions. The theory helps explain how pursuing friendships, especially in the workplace, would serve to benefit individual needs, as well as to create *future* potential benefits by investing time and energy into the relationship. The term "investing" is paramount in understanding individuals' motivations for forming and maintaining their workplace relationships. To more closely consider a specific type of workplace relationship, the current study focuses on the cross-sex, heterosexual friendship.

CBB theory asserts that individuals expend energy in every social interaction. This idea of *social energy* originates from Davis (1997), who explains that people's ability to maximize their investments of social energy into relationships that have a high likelihood of reciprocal behavior ultimately serves their adaptive nature as humans. Strategically investing social energy into others will serve an individual's biological need to engage in behavior that is advantageous

to survival, while conserving social energy in the case of avoiding costly, energy-intensive relationships also serves the same function (Davis, 1997). The workplace is a prime example to understand this idea of investing and conserving social energy in relationships. Specifically, workplace friendships between cross-sex, heterosexual coworkers provide a particular communication context for unpacking individuals' motivations behind forming and maintaining these relationships. Since the element of sexual attraction makes cross-sex, heterosexual relationships both beneficial and burdensome (Bleske-Rechek et al., 2012), these types of relationships are excellent for studying Hall and Davis' (2017) principles of energy investment and energy conservation. Thus, CBB theory and its idea of social energy expenditure offer a unique lens for defining what it is about cross-sex, heterosexual workplace friendships that make them a viable source for investing social energy in the workplace, given that individuals could choose, instead, to invest in same-sex workplace friendships or seek cross-sex romantic relationships outside the workplace.

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

Apart from Hall (2018), no other scholars have yet tested the 2017 CBB theory. Thus, the present study will test CBB theory's theorem 5b, which states, "because of humans' finite energy resources, at any given moment in time, there is a limit to the number of relationships an individual can claim and maintain" (Hall & Davis, 2017, p. 24). Theorem 5b comes from principle 5 (the principle of human energy investment) in CBB theory. To extend CBB theory, the following hypotheses are posited:

H1: Individuals will strategically invest their social energy in a fewer number of cross-sex, heterosexual friendships than same-sex friendships in the organization.

H2: Individuals will report that cross-sex, heterosexual friendships take more social energy to *form* than to *maintain*.

To better understand how cross-sex, heterosexual workplace relationships form and how they are maintained over time, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: What relationships in the organization take more social energy to form?

RQ2: What relationships in the organization take more social energy to maintain?

RQ3<sub>a</sub>: What variables are associated with the amount of social energy people are willing to invest in *forming* cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships?

RQ3<sub>b</sub>: What variables are associated with the amount of social energy people are willing to invest in *maintaining* cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships?

RQ4: How do organizational members learn which behaviors are acceptable for cross-sex, heterosexual organizational coworkers to display?

RQ5: What communicative behaviors contribute to the sustainability of cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships?

### **Summary of Literature**

The previous literature review first provided a brief history of friendship communication literature and the characteristics of friendships, which set the foundation for the present study and showed the importance of friendship research in the communication discipline. Next, the discussion of cross-sex friendships and friendships in the workplace established this study's specific context. Then, the literature regarding social exchange and energy investment led into the explanation of Hall and Davis' (2017) CBB theory as a framework for studying social energy expended in forming and maintaining cross-sex, heterosexual workplace friendships. Lastly, the researcher posited hypotheses and proposed research questions.

## CHAPTER III: METHOD

The previous chapter provided the context for the present study through the literature review and outlined this study's hypotheses and research questions. This chapter provides a description of the present study's methodology. Additionally, this chapter provides information about the study's sampling method, a description of the participants, and data collection procedures.

### **Participants**

#### **Sampling**

Participants for this study were from a mid-sized public Midwestern university. Criterion sampling was utilized to ensure participants were over the age of 18, in order to provide consent, and could recall their own experience or recall having observed others' cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships. Some student participants, at their instructor's discretion, received extra credit in their communication course for completing the survey. Non-student participants did not receive compensation. All respondents gave informed consent, were assured that their survey answers would remain anonymous, and were notified that they could stop the survey at any time.

#### **Demographics**

Out of the 470 participants who began the survey, 364 completed the questionnaire. For the open-ended responses analyzed to answer RQ4, only 196 of the 364 who completed the survey answered this question. Additionally, only 215 of the 364 answered the question analyzed for RQ5. There were 228 participants who indicated their age ( $M = 23.05$ ,  $SD = 6.65$ ), and the age range was 18 to 53. The sample was 69.4% ( $n = 326$ ) female, 25.7% ( $n = 121$ ) male, and 4.9% ( $n = 23$ ) chose not to disclose their biological sex. Of those surveyed, 59.4% ( $n = 279$ )

were entry-level employees (i.e., they had supervisors and peers, but no subordinates), 27.9% ( $n = 131$ ) mid-level employees (i.e., had supervisors, peers, and few subordinates), 7.4% ( $n = 35$ ) supervisor-level employees (i.e., had supervisors, peers, and several subordinates), 0.9% ( $n = 4$ ) upper-level management (i.e., had no supervisors, peers were possible, had mostly subordinates), and 4.4% ( $n = 21$ ) did not disclose their organizational position. For employment status, 5.5% ( $n = 26$ ) of participants were “Not employed, not looking for work,” 7.4% ( $n = 35$ ) were “Not employed, looking for work,” 24.5% ( $n = 115$ ) were “Employed, working 1-20 hours per week,” 9.4% ( $n = 44$ ) were “Employed, working 21-39 hours per week,” 5.5% ( $n = 26$ ) were “Employed, working 40 or more hours per week,” and 47.7% ( $n = 224$ ) did not indicate their employment status. The most frequent level of education completed by participants was High School or GED equivalent at 24.5% ( $n = 115$ ), followed by associate degree (12.6%,  $n = 59$ ), bachelor degree (10.6%,  $n = 50$ ), master degree (4.5%,  $n = 21$ ), and doctorate degree (0.4%,  $n = 2$ ) with 47.4% ( $n = 223$ ) of participants choosing not to disclose the highest level of education they completed. Most participants (43.6%,  $n = 205$ ) indicated their sexual orientation as heterosexual, followed by bisexual (5.3%,  $n = 25$ ), homosexual (1.7%,  $n = 8$ ), and 48.4% ( $n = 227$ ) of the participants preferred not to disclose. Additional categories were later added to reflect the participants indicating their sexual orientation as pansexual (0.4%,  $n = 2$ ), asexual (0.2%,  $n = 1$ ), and those who were unsure about their sexual orientation (0.4%,  $n = 2$ ).

## **Data Collection**

### **Survey Instrument**

The online survey questionnaire consisted of 42 total items, 28 Likert-type, 8 open-ended, and 6 demographic questions (see Appendix A). The survey began with two preliminary demographic questions to indicate participants’ biological sex as well as their position within

their organization. Following the initial demographic questions, participants answered a series of prompts about forming and maintaining friendships with females and males in organizations compared to friendships outside of the organization. Respondents rated amount of social energy it takes them to form or to maintain organizational friendships (compared to friendships outside of the organization) with males and females on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*extremely less*) to 7 (*extremely more*). Next, participants responded to items on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*no social energy*) to 5 (*an extreme amount of social energy*) about their willingness to invest social energy into forming and maintaining organizational friendships with males and females of three different organizational levels (*subordinate*, *peer*, and *supervisor*). Based on the participant's response to a preliminary demographic question about organizational position (either entry-level, mid-level, supervisor-level, or upper-level management), they would not be asked to respond to prompts that would be irrelevant to them; for example, if they selected an entry-level position, they would not be exposed to prompts asking them to rate their sentiment toward forming or maintaining a friendship with a subordinate. The final set of 7-point Likert-type prompts ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and discussed the transition from a platonic organizational friendship to a romantic friendship, as well as how many cross-sex, heterosexual and same-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships participants feel they could maintain at one time. The survey concluded with eight open-ended response questions and four final demographic questions.

### **Survey Distribution**

Participants for this study were invited to take part in the research via an online communication research portal. A university-wide listserv was also utilized to email all students, faculty, and staff an invitation to participate in the study. Additionally, the researcher posted the

invitation for participants to Facebook and LinkedIn social media platforms. The survey was conducted online through Qualtrics (an online survey platform), and individual participant information was not linked to the completion of the survey. This system was not set up to collect participant IP addresses, making participation anonymous. Identifying information collected for some participants' extra credit purposes was not associated with any participant responses.

### **Analysis Procedure**

To test H1, the averages of the 7-point Likert-type items 21-30, on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), were ranked in descending order. The second hypothesis was tested using survey items three and five comprised of 7-point Likert-type summative response scales, ranging from 1 (*extremely less*) to 7 (*extremely more*), as well as the summative response scales of survey items four and six. Meyers, Gamst, and Guarino (2017) state that a summative response scale allows researchers to add the ratings of a set of items typically on 5-point and 7-point scales and then divide that sum by the total number to obtain an individual's mean on that set of items, allowing the summative scale to be used as an interval measurement. "The vast majority of research published in the behavioral and social sciences over the past half century or more has used summative response scales as though they met interval properties" (Meyers et al., 2017, p. 14).

To answer RQ1 and RQ2, descriptive statistics supplying information about the sample (Keyton, 2011) were ranked according to the highest mean, providing sufficient evidence to answer those research questions. To answer RQ3<sub>a</sub> and RQ3<sub>b</sub>, Pearson product-moment correlations were computed to assess what variables were significantly associated with the amount of social energy people were willing to invest in *forming* and *maintaining* cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships. Correlations between organizational position and age of



the participants and their willingness to invest social energy into *forming* and *maintaining* friendships would show both the positive/negative nature of statistical relationships as well as their strength (e.g., weak, moderate, strong). Although organizational position is a nominal variable, the categories were organized in an ordinal fashion, thereby allowing for correlations with the scale variables. To answer this research question, the researcher used survey items 7-18, which were 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*no social energy*) to 5 (*an extreme amount of social energy*). The summative scale for *forming* male friendships consisted of survey items 7, 9, and 11 (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.73$ ), and the scale for *forming* female friendships consisted of survey items 8, 10, and 12 (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.71$ ). The summative scale for *maintaining* male friendships consisted of survey items 13, 15, and 17 (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.72$ ), and the scale for *maintaining* female friendships consisted of survey items 14, 16, and 18 (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.72$ ). A reliability coefficient of 0.70 or higher is considered acceptable in most exploratory social science research (Lance, Butts, & Michels, 2006; Nunnally, 1978).

Finally, to answer RQ4 and RQ5, the researcher performed frequency and proportions counts of the open-ended responses. Following the instructions for coding qualitative data provided by Strauss and Corbin (1998), the researcher unitized open-ended responses to create themes. Then, based on the themes, categories were developed. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), axial coding is "creating a new set of codes whose purpose is to make connections between categories" (p. 252). Some participants mentioned more than one example in their responses, so each example was treated as its own unit and assigned to the proper category.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a description of the methodology used in this study. The chapter also discussed the sampling method, as well as demographic information about the study's

participants. The data collection procedures then described the survey instrument and distribution of the survey. Finally, the analysis procedure section outlines how to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The previous chapter explained the study's participants, the survey questionnaire and distribution, and the process for analysis. This chapter presents the results of the study. First, the results of the data analysis provided answers to this study's research questions and evidence to support H1. The second hypothesis, however, was not supported. Finally, the results described in this chapter include descriptive statistics ranked in descending order by means, the results of Pearson product-moment correlations, as well as frequency and proportions counts for the open-ended questions.

### **Energy Investment in Cross-Sex and Same-Sex Friendships**

The first hypothesis states, "Individuals will strategically invest their social energy in a fewer number of cross-sex, heterosexual friendships than same-sex friendships in the organization." The means for energy investment in cross-sex and same-sex friendships are ranked below (see Table 1). Additionally, a visual representation of mean level of agreement for maintaining multiple friendships is included below (see Figure 1). The items on these scales ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) on participants' perception that they felt they could maintain only one, two, three, four, or five or more friendships at a time. Therefore, a higher mean indicates more agreement with each item. The majority of participants (70% of the sample,  $n = 213$ ) indicated that they could maintain five or more same-sex friendships ( $M = 5.08$ ,  $SD = 1.87$ ). On the other hand, fewer (65%,  $n = 202$ ) agreed that they could maintain five or more cross-sex friendships ( $M = 4.90$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ ). Given that the average for maintaining five or more same-sex friendships was higher than the average for maintaining five or more cross-sex friendships and that there was a higher proportion of slight, moderate, and strong agreement, the hypothesis was supported.

Table 1

*Energy Investment in Friendships*

Rank	Cross-Sex Friendships				Same-Sex Friendships			
	Number of Friendships	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	Number of Friendships	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
1	Two	5.10	1.78	306	Five+	5.08	1.87	307
2	Three	5.00	1.76	308	Three	4.88	1.95	307
3	Five+	4.90	1.79	306	Two	4.86	2.00	306
4	Four	4.75	1.83	309	Four	4.74	1.96	305
5	One	2.35	1.62	309	One	2.34	1.66	303

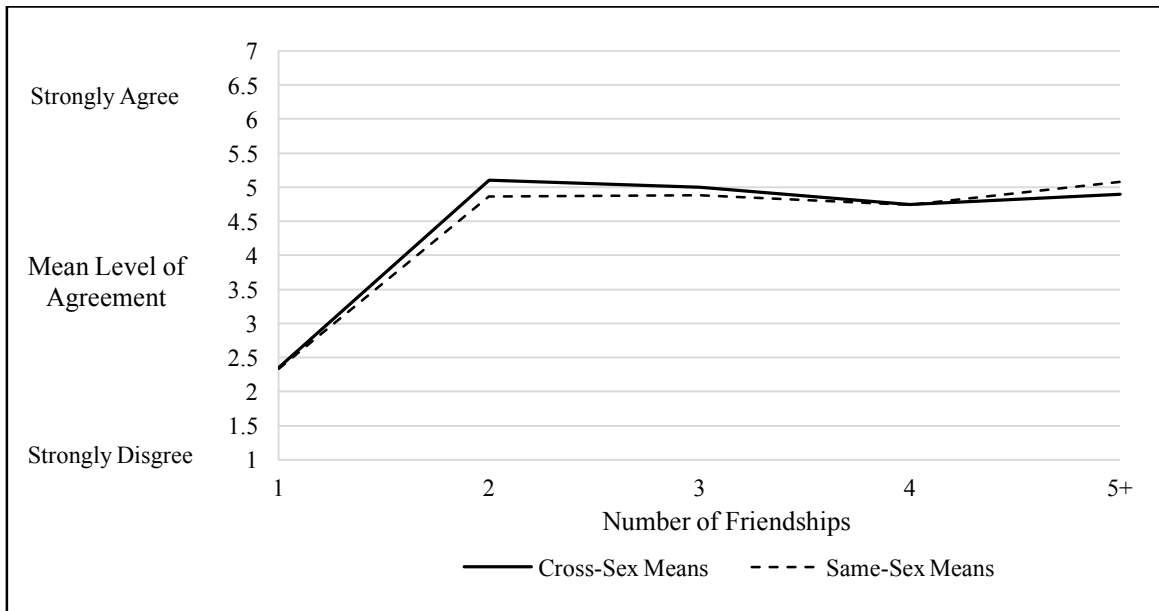


Figure 1. Mean Level of Agreement for Maintaining Multiple Friendships

### Forming and Maintaining Friendships

The second hypothesis states, “Individuals will report that cross-sex, heterosexual friendships take more social energy to *form* than to *maintain*.” The items on these scales ranged from 1 (*extremely less*) to 7 (*extremely more*) on participants’ perception on the amount of social energy it takes to form and maintain friendships with males and females. The individual items (female-form, male-form, female-maintain, male-maintain) were collapsed to better indicate

forming and maintaining altogether. Overall, participants reported that it took more social energy to maintain ( $M = 4.02, SD = 0.85$ ) organizational friendships than to form ( $M = 3.94, SD = 0.76$ ) organizational friendships. Therefore, H2 was not supported.

### **Social Energy to Form Friendships**

Research Question One asks what relationships in the organization take more social energy to form. To answer this research question, the researcher utilized participants' responses to items 7-12 on the survey questionnaire; these were the 5-point Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*no social energy*) to 5 (*an extreme amount of social energy*). Participants rated their perceptions of using social energy to invest in forming friendships with male subordinates, female subordinates, male peers, female peers, male supervisors, and female supervisors. Again, participants were not asked to respond to prompts that were irrelevant to them; therefore, the sample size was larger for rating perceptions of peer and supervisor friendships since most participants did not have any subordinates and were not exposed to those options.

The descriptive information showed that participants perceived female peer friendships took slightly more social energy to form than the other friendship types ( $M = 3.51, SD = 0.73$ ). Following female peer friendships, participants were willing to invest social energy into forming friendships with female supervisors, female subordinates, male supervisors, male peers, and male subordinates (see Table 2). To further investigate the cross-sex perception of forming friendships, the researcher filtered responses to see how females viewed forming friendships with males and vice versa. Females reported that friendships with male peers took more social energy to form ( $M = 3.20, SD = 0.63$ ) than male supervisors ( $M = 3.17, SD = 0.90$ ) and male subordinates ( $M = 2.93, SD = 0.75$ ). Male participants perceived friendships with female

supervisors took more social energy to form ( $M = 3.51, SD = 0.93$ ) than female subordinates ( $M = 3.49, SD = 0.82$ ) and female peers ( $M = 3.46, SD = 0.84$ ).

Table 2

*Organizational Position and Social Energy to Form*

Rank	Type of Relationship	Mean	SD	N
1	Female Peer	3.51	0.73	348
2	Female Supervisor	3.50	0.86	349
3	Female Subordinate	3.33	0.80	136
4	Male Supervisor	3.24	0.92	349
5	Male Peer	3.21	0.66	349
6	Male Subordinate	3.04	0.79	136

**Social Energy to Maintain Friendships**

Research Question Two asks what relationships in the organization take more social energy to maintain. To answer this research question, the researcher utilized participants' responses to items 13-18 on the survey questionnaire; these were 5-point Likert-type items ranging from 1 (*no social energy*) to 5 (*an extreme amount of social energy*). Similar to the first research question, participants also rated their perceptions of using social energy to invest in maintaining friendships with male subordinates, female subordinates, male peers, female peers, male supervisors, and female supervisors. Descriptive statistics showed participants were most willing to invest social energy into maintaining friendships with female supervisors ( $M = 3.50, SD = 0.88$ ). After female supervisors, participants were most willing to invest in female peer friendships ( $M = 3.46, SD = 0.77$ ). Following female peer friendships, participants were willing to invest in friendships with male supervisors, male peers, female subordinates, and male subordinates (see Table 3). Further analysis examining female and male respondents separately elucidated the participants' perceptions of maintaining cross-sex friendships. Females reported that friendships with male supervisors took the most social energy to maintain ( $M = 3.23, SD =$

0.84), followed by male peers ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) and male subordinates ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ). Males participants also perceived that maintaining friendships with female supervisors took the most amount of social energy ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ), followed by female peer friendships ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) and female subordinate friendships ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ).

Table 3

*Organizational Position and Social Energy to Maintain*

Rank	Type of Relationship	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
1	Female Supervisor	3.50	0.88	330
2	Female Peer	3.46	0.77	329
3	Male Supervisor	3.29	0.88	329
4	Male Peer	3.18	0.72	330
5	Female Subordinate	3.16	0.84	126
6	Male Subordinate	2.98	0.83	126

### Bivariate Correlations

#### Forming Friendships

The first part of Research Question Three asks what variables are associated with the amount of social energy people are willing to invest in forming cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships. To answer this research question, Pearson correlations assessed whether organizational position and age were correlated with the willingness to invest social energy into forming organizational friendships.

**Organizational position** The first Pearson correlation assessed the relationship between organizational position and forming male friendships. There was no statistically significant correlation between the two variables,  $r(134) = .15$ ,  $p = .09$ . There was also no statistically significant correlation between organizational position and forming female friendships,  $r(134) = .08$ ,  $p = .36$ .

**Age** The second Pearson correlation assessed the relationship between participants' age and willingness to form male friendships. There was a statistically significant negative correlation between the two variables,  $r(81) = -.35, p < 0.01$ . There was also a statistically significant negative correlation between the participants' age and willingness to form female friendships,  $r(81) = -.35, p < 0.01$ .

### **Maintaining Friendships**

The second part of research question three asks what variables are associated with the amount of social energy people are willing to invest in maintaining cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships. Pearson correlations assessed whether organizational position and age were correlated with the willingness to invest social energy into maintaining organizational friendships.

**Organizational position** The third Pearson correlation assessed the relationship between organizational position and maintaining male friendships. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between the two variables,  $r(123) = .19, p < 0.05$ . There was no statistically significant correlation between organizational position and maintaining female friendships,  $r(123) = .06, p = 0.53$ , though it clearly approached statistical significance.

**Age** The final Pearson correlation assessed the relationship between age and maintaining male friendships. There was a statistically significant negative correlation between the two variables,  $r(81) = -.29, p < 0.01$ . There was also a statistically significant negative correlation between age and willingness to maintain female friendships,  $r(80) = -.33, p < 0.01$ .

### **Male and Female Friendships**

There was a statistically significant positive correlation between *forming* male friendships and *forming* female friendships,  $r(134) = .59, p < 0.01$ . There was a statistically robust positive



correlation between *maintaining* male friendships and *maintaining* female friendships,  $r(122) = .70, p < 0.01$ .

### Frequency and Proportion Counts

Research Question Four asks how organizational members learn which behaviors are acceptable for cross-sex, heterosexual coworkers to display in the organization. Based on participants' responses, the researcher developed six main categories: *formal training/orientation*, *handbook/manual*, *observing others*, *common sense*, *no/unclear explicit rules*, and *uncategorizable*. In participants' responses, several themes were apparent from the beginning. After checking for themes from the first 85 responses, the researcher identified overarching categories. The units were then coded into one or more of the six categories ( $N = 207$ ).

Overall, the researcher coded participants' responses into 207 total units and grouped responses in six different categories; some responses fell into multiple categories. Out of participants' responses, 44.44% ( $n = 92$ ) indicated they learned appropriate behaviors to display in the organization by *observing others*. The *observing others* category included responses about learning from social norms of the organization (e.g., "by watching others and seeing what is appropriate"; "by examples set from supervisors"; "trial and error or just being told not to do something"). The second most frequent response was *common sense* (16.43%,  $n = 34$ ). *Common sense* was evident as its own theme early in the coding process. Participants stated that most people should already know how to act appropriately in cross-sex, heterosexual friendships (e.g., "basic common sense and human decency"; "people should just know what is acceptable and what's not"; "everyone just has an understanding between what is 'wrong' and what is 'right,' common sense really"). Next, the *no/unclear explicit rules* category, which included responses

mentioning the rules in their organization were blurry or not present at all (e.g., “the place I work for is individually owned, so it isn’t corporate and the rules can get blurry”), made up 15.94% of responses ( $n = 33$ ). Then, the *uncategorizable* category encompassed responses that either did not answer the question or provided irrelevant information (e.g., “we are an office of mostly women; this isn’t something we focus on”; “seek forgiveness instead of asking for permission”) accounted for 12.56% of responses ( $n = 26$ ). The least frequently mentioned ways of learning appropriate organizational behavior for cross-sex, heterosexual coworkers to display were through *formal training/orientation* (7.73%,  $n = 16$ ) and through a *handbook/manual* (2.90%,  $n = 6$ ).

Research Question Five asks what communicative behaviors contribute to the sustainability (i.e., ability to last) of cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships. Based on participants’ responses, the researcher developed six categories to group units with similar themes ( $N = 245$ ), and some responses fell within multiple categories: *amiable qualities*, *communication*, *clear boundaries*, *mutual interests*, *regular interactions*, and *uncategorizable*.

In identifying behaviors contributing friendships’ sustainability, 41.22% of responses ( $n = 101$ ) fell within the *amiable qualities* category. Since participants identified numerous personal characteristics that were the reason the friendship could be sustainable (e.g., trustworthiness, honesty, caring, respectfulness, understanding, and positivity), all of these personal qualities were subsumed into the same category. The fact that many participants identified specific qualities about their friend as hallmarks for contributing to a sustainable friendship appears to echo Hall’s (2012) research about friends developing friendship expectations for the characteristics and qualities they want their friends to possess. Apart from qualities about the friend, 19.18% ( $n = 47$ ) mentioned communication overall helps contribute to

sustainability, thus the category was called *communication*. The next most frequent category at 14.29% ( $n = 35$ ) mentioned establishing clear boundaries as contributing to friendship sustainability. The *clear boundaries* category included stipulations about no physical touching, appropriate joking, and no romantic pressure (e.g., “being able to keep things at a friendship level, only”; “the formation of clear set boundaries fully understood by both partners”; “no physical contact”). *Mutual interests* made up 13.06% of the responses ( $n = 32$ ). This category included responses discussing sharing personal and professional interests, having a similar work ethic, and having common interests that would give friends a variety of things to talk about apart from just work-related topics. Another category was *regular interactions*, which made up 8.57% of responses ( $n = 21$ ), and included themes related to having frequent, shared contact inside and outside of the workplace or working similar shifts. This is consistent with research on propinquity and interpersonal attraction (Segal, 1974). Lastly, *uncategorizable* encompassed 3.67% ( $n = 9$ ). Responses such as, “guys don’t need constant reassurance that a friendship exists,” fell into this category because they did not answer the question.

### **Summary of Results**

This investigation provided evidence for the hypotheses and research questions. There was evidence to support H1; however, H2 was not supported. For research questions one and two, results indicated that organizational friendships with female peers took slightly more social energy to form, and friendships with female supervisors took slightly more social energy to maintain. To provide more insight for cross-sex perceptions, the researcher filtered responses by male and female participants. The results indicated that females perceived that male peer friendships took the most social energy to form, and males perceived that female supervisor friendships took the most social energy to form. Female participants perceived that friendships with

male supervisors took the most social energy to maintain, and males perceived that friendships with female supervisors took the most social energy to maintain. For research question three, the researcher investigated correlations between organizational position and age on both the amount of social energy invested in *forming* friendships and in *maintaining* friendships. The correlations included all participant responses (i.e., the researcher did not select cases). Results showed that there was no statistically significant correlation between social energy invested in *forming* friendships and organizational position. There were, however, statistically significant negative correlations on *forming* friendships and age, regardless of the biological sex of the target (i.e., the target was male or female). Similarly, age had significant negative correlations with *maintaining* friendships, regardless of the biological sex of the target. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between participants' organizational position and *maintaining* friendships with male targets, but there was no significant correlation between organizational position and energy invested in *maintaining* female target friendships. Finally, the open-ended responses for research questions four and five yielded some rich insights into individuals' perceptions of how organizations address cross-sex, heterosexual friendships, as well as communicative behaviors contributing to the sustainability of these friendships over time.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Friendships are important relationships, and cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships are especially worthy of scholarly investigation. This thesis utilized Hall and Davis' (2017) concept of social energy expenditure from CBB theory to investigate how individuals perceive their allocation of social energy into forming and maintaining friendships. The results of this research indicate that individuals perceive they invest different levels of social energy into forming their organizational friendships than in maintaining them and that factors such as organizational position and age impact these levels of social energy investment as well. Social energy investment also varies between cross-sex and same-sex friendships. These results have both theoretical and practical implications. However, the present study has several limitations that should be overcome in future research.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The two hypotheses posited in the present study tested theorem 5b from communicate bond belong theory (Hall & Davis, 2017). The first hypothesis was supported but only minimally. From the perspective of CBB theory, there may be an optimal range in number of friendships individuals feel they can invest energy in at a time. As Hall and Davis (2017) discuss, humans have a finite amount of energy to invest in social relationships at any given time; it would seem that, in order to conserve social energy, individuals would rather invest in a fewer number of organizational friendships (regardless of the cross-sex or same-sex nature) because it would be more advantageous for their own energy conservation. The findings of this study showed, however, that individual's highest agreement was with maintaining two friendships, then fell slightly in the three to four friendship range, and then peaked slightly again at the range of five or more friendships (see Figure 1). Conversely, CBB theory may also explain these

results in that a higher number of friendships may actually be easier to maintain over time because the amount of social energy could be spread cursorily across all of the friendships, which would mean that no one friendship would require a higher or extreme amount of intensive relational maintenance.

Since the second hypothesis was not supported, this initial test is in direct opposition to Hall and Davis' (2017) CBB theory. The theory states that once the relationship's foundation is created, it may take less energy to maintain, yielding a more favorable cost-benefit exchange (Hall & Davis, 2017). Although the second hypothesis was not supported, there was not a large difference between the two means, so the difference could have been due to the specific sample. The findings for both hypotheses indicate a need for more clear conceptualizations and testing in the future.

Organizational friendships are different than other types of social friendships in that they are bound by guidelines (either expressed or implied) that shape individuals' willingness to expend social energy into forming and maintaining these friendships. Based on the present study's findings, it is clear that the intersect of organizational and interpersonal communication will continue to be a viable avenue to further extend CBB theory. Since CBB theory had not been applied to organizational relationships, this study provides the foundation for extending the theory into these specific contexts within the communication discipline. The present study also provides an initial scale for future researchers developing a reliable and valid measure of social energy expenditure. Not only does the present study set the foundation for future tests of CBB theory's specific theoretical components, but it also offers a proposition, further limiting the scope of theorem 5b: "Social energy expenditure may vary depending on cross-sex or same-sex relationships."

## **Practical Implications**

Practical implications of this research apply to organizational training. Since participants identified *clear boundaries* as one of the communicative behaviors contributing to the sustainability of cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships, part of organizations' duty to their employees is to help articulate those parameters. When asked how they learn appropriate behaviors to display in the organization, approximately 10% of respondents said they learned from a handbook, manual, or explicit organizational training, while, 80% of responses indicated that they learn by observing other organizational member's behavior, that people should use common sense and "just know" how to act appropriately with their cross-sex workplace friends, or that there were none or unclear explicit rules. From the perspective of social energy expenditure (Hall & Davis, 2017), it would seem that individuals are expending more energy trying to navigate unclear organizational boundaries with their cross-sex friends than they would in same-sex friendships; therefore, more clearly defined parameters about organizational behavior may benefit the organization as well as its individual members. Some potential organizational modifications might include: (a) updating knowledge and skills about appropriate communication environments between cross-sex coworkers and (b) discussing the importance of sustainability for organizational friendships.

## **Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research**

This study approached the data with multiple methods (i.e., quantitative and qualitative), which was one of the study's strengths. The use of both methods offered more insight into individuals' perceptions of their willingness to invest social energy in friendship types across organizational positions. Additionally, the qualitative portion reflected how the organization might function to perpetuate relational norms since new employees learn how to behave in their

cross-sex friendships by observing other organizational members' friendships. On the other hand, organizations' may give members clear guidelines for cross-sex workplace friendships in the case of explicit trainings or employee manuals. If the present study is replicated, however, separating the quantitative and qualitative survey questions may help reduce participant fatigue. The questionnaire started with the quantitative scale items, and 364 out of 470 participants completed those questions. When participants reached the open-ended questions at the end of the survey, the completion rate dropped significantly. For the open-ended responses analyzed to answer RQ4, only 196 out of the 364 participants answered this question, and only 215 out of 364 responded to the question analyzed for RQ5.

The primary weakness is that this study is limited to heterosexual, cross-sex friendships. The present study's goal was to first target individuals' perceptions of social energy expenditure in the context of cross-sex friendships, which are known to have tensions and other barriers surrounding the friendship (Arnold, 1995). Since the present study targeted individuals' *perceptions*, homosexuals, along with those with other gender identities besides the binary male-female dichotomy, could contribute to this area of research because they have observed cross-sex friendships in the workplace and could offer insight. However, future research may want to target individuals' *experiences* in their own friendships. In this way, homosexuals' responses could be compared with heterosexuals' responses to see how investing social energy might vary across additional relationship types.

The last scale of the questionnaire that measured the number of cross-sex and same-sex friendships individuals were willing to invest energy to maintain was another limitation. Participants saw the options (ranging from only one to five or more) all at the same time, which could have caused them to disagree with the first prompts because they already felt they could



maintain a higher number of friendships at a time. Knowing how many options there were in total could have altered participants' responses. In the future, introducing each question one at a time could help participants reflect on each prompt individually.

Given that this study found significant negative correlations between age and willingness to form and maintain friendships, regardless of the biological sex of the target friendship, future research will want to explore the nature of this result. It could be that as age increases, one's organizational position also tends to rise, and a social energy perspective may say that individuals who are older and well-established in the organizational hierarchy may not feel the need to invest their energy to form or maintain friendships with organizational members at lower ranks in the hierarchy. Future research should aim to provide more empirical evidence and clarity in this area. Additionally, future research should clarify the significant positive correlation between forming male friendships and forming female friendships, and the significant positive correlations between maintaining male friendships and maintaining female friendships.

Communicate bond belong theory (Hall & Davis, 2017) has significant heuristic value, and the implications of the present study lead to many future avenues of research. In designing future studies, scholars may consider providing participants with a definition of social energy, so they can work from the same definition. Additionally, future studies may find literature in relational investments particularly useful. Future studies should also continue developing a valid and reliable measure of social energy expenditure and should begin testing other principles of CBB apart from principle 5 (the principle of human energy management). Specifically designing a measure that better distinguishes the difference between forming and maintaining types of relational energy will allow future scholars to better test differences and go beyond ranking the means as well as more directly test this aspect of CBB theory. Other studies may also want to

target specific types of organizations (e.g., educational institutions, voluntary organizations, or government organizations) to see how individuals invest energy into forming and maintaining friendships given different organizational parameters. Specifically defining the parameters of acceptable behaviors between cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friends, termed a *zone of acceptable behavior*, would also fill a necessary gap in the organizational communication literature. Given that only 10% of respondents learned appropriate behaviors to display in their cross-sex organizational friendships directly from their organization (e.g., trainings, manuals, or handbooks), as previously stated, it would seem that organizations may want to invest some of their energy into articulating clearly defined parameters for cross-sex friendships, especially if the organization has any history of dysfunctional organizational relations (e.g., sexual harassment allegations or high turnover rates). Outlining this range of behaviors will better equip organizations with the information they need to train and integrate new employees into their organizations with the goal, ultimately, of creating healthy, functional workplace environments.

### **Conclusion**

As a test of communicate bond belong theory (Hall & Davis, 2017), this study conceptualized a way to measure social energy expenditure by dividing energy investment into the amount of energy to form friendships and the amount of energy to maintain friendships. Given that strife and numerous concerns accompany the existence of cross-sex friendships (Arnold, 1995), this may cause individuals to carefully consider the allocation of their social energy and personal resources; accordingly, relational types may continue to be a viable avenue for exploring the concepts of CBB theory. Factors like age and organizational position affect, in various degrees, an individual's willingness to form and maintain cross-sex friendships with other organizational members. The present study is simply a cornerstone for exploring the

potential impacts of CBB theory in the communication discipline. The present study was an exploratory investigation to identify potential areas for improvement to create healthy and functional workplace environments, and Hall and Davis (2017) state that, “to accomplish the distal or end goal of forming lasting relationships, CBB theory proposes that individuals are motivated to engage in communicative behaviors that form and strengthen relationships” (p. 2). In the era of movements such as #MeToo recognizing the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace, defining the variables that contribute to sustainable relationships between males and females in working environments is an absolute necessity.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Which of the following would you identify as your biological sex?
  - a. Female
  - b. Male
  - c. Prefer not to disclose
  
2. How would you categorize your organizational position?
  - a. Entry-level (supervisors and peers, no subordinates)
  - b. Mid-level (supervisors, peers, and few subordinates)
  - c. Supervisor/manager (supervisors, peers, and several subordinates)
  - d. Upper-management/CEO/owner/president (no supervisors, peers possible, mostly subordinates)

Please answer the following questions about forming and maintaining friendships with females and males in organizations compared to friendships outside of the organization.

3. How much social energy do *female* organizational friendships take to *form*?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Less	Moderately Less	Slightly Less	Neither Less nor More	Slightly More	Moderately More	Extremely More

4. How much social energy do *female* organizational friendships take to *maintain*?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Less	Moderately Less	Slightly Less	Neither Less nor More	Slightly More	Moderately More	Extremely More

5. How much social energy do *male* organizational friendships take to *form*?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Less	Moderately Less	Slightly Less	Neither Less nor More	Slightly More	Moderately More	Extremely More

6. How much social energy do *male* organizational friendships take to *maintain*?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Less	Moderately Less	Slightly Less	Neither Less nor More	Slightly More	Moderately More	Extremely More

Please answer the following questions about *forming* cross-sex, heterosexual relationships in organizations.

7. To *form* a friendship with my *male subordinate*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

8. To *form* a friendship with my *female subordinate*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

9. To *form* a friendship with my *male peer*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

10. To *form* a friendship with my *female peer*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

11. To *form* a friendship with my *male supervisor*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

12. To *form* a friendship with my *female supervisor*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy



Please answer the following questions about *maintaining* cross-sex, heterosexual relationships in organizations.

13. To *maintain* a friendship with my *male subordinate*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

14. To *maintain* a friendship with my *female subordinate*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

15. To *maintain* a friendship with my *male peer*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

16. To *maintain* a friendship with my *female peer*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

17. To *maintain* a friendship with my *male supervisor*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

18. To *maintain* a friendship with my *female supervisor*, I am willing to invest:

1	2	3	4	5
No social energy	Very little social energy	A moderate amount of social energy	A considerable amount of social energy	An extreme amount of social energy

Please respond to the following prompts.

19. **Males** are more likely than females to initiate the transition from platonic organizational friendship to a romantic relationship.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

20. **Females** are more likely than males to initiate the transition from platonic organizational friendship to a romantic relationship.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

21. I feel like I can maintain **only one cross-sex**, heterosexual organizational friendship at a time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

22. I feel like I can maintain **two cross-sex**, heterosexual organizational friendships at a time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

23. I feel like I can maintain **three cross-sex**, heterosexual organizational friendships at a time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

24. I feel like I can maintain **four cross-sex**, heterosexual organizational friendships at a time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

25. I feel like I can maintain **five or more cross-sex**, heterosexual organizational friendships at a time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

26. I feel like I can maintain **only one same-sex**, heterosexual organizational friendship at a time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

27. I feel like I can maintain **two same-sex**, heterosexual organizational friendships at a time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

28. I feel like I can maintain **three same-sex**, heterosexual organizational friendships at a time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

29. I feel like I can maintain **four same-sex**, heterosexual organizational friendships at a time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

30. I feel like I can maintain **five or more same-sex**, heterosexual organizational friendships at a time.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

31. What behaviors contribute to the sustainability (ability to last) of cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships?

32. What motivates you to invest **time** into **forming** your cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships?

33. What motivates you to invest **social energy** into **forming** your cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships?

34. What motivates you to invest **time** into **maintaining** your cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships?

35. What motivates you to invest **social energy** into **maintaining** your cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships?

36. What guidelines does your organization **explicitly** state about cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships?

37. What boundaries are **implied** within your organization about cross-sex, heterosexual organizational friendships?

38. How do members in your organization learn which behaviors are acceptable for cross-sex, heterosexual organizational members to display in the organization and which are not?

### **Demographic Questions**

1. What is your age?
2. What is your highest level of education achieved?
  - a. High school diploma or equivalent
  - b. Associate's degree
  - c. Bachelor's degree
  - d. Master's degree
  - e. Doctorate degree
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Which of the following would you identify as your sexual orientation?
  - a. Bisexual
  - b. Heterosexual
  - c. Homosexual
  - d. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Prefer not to disclose
  
4. Which of the following categories best describes your employment status?
  - a. Not employed, NOT looking for work
  - b. Not employed, looking for work
  - c. Employed, working 1-20 hours per week
  - d. Employed, working 21-39 hours per week
  - e. Employed, working 40 or more hours per week
  - f. Retired
  - g. Disabled, not able to work

## APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear participant,

I am a graduate student under the direction of Dr. Daniel Cochece Davis in the School of Communication. I am conducting a research study to understand how cross-sex, heterosexual friendships function in the workplace.

Your participation will involve completing an online questionnaire regarding the aforementioned topic. The survey should take about 15-20 minutes. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age and be able to recall and describe a cross-sex heterosexual workplace friendship. If you know of anyone else who meets the requirements and might be interested in this study, please feel free to forward it to them.

As a participant, you should experience minimal risks beyond those experienced in everyday life. You may have some psychological discomfort if you have previous negative experiences associated with a cross-sex, heterosexual workplace friendship. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may skip or refuse to answer any questions, and if you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time there will be no penalty. Your responses are anonymous. We will not track IP addresses, and any information that might allow someone to identify you will not be disclosed. Individual responses will be reported in aggregate form. Some direct quotes from open-ended responses may be used; however, individual participants will not be linked with responses.

Please direct any questions and/or comments to Dr. Daniel Cochece Davis (d\*\*\*\*\*@ilstu.edu) or myself. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at (309) 438-2529 or through e-mail at rec@ilstu.edu.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Cordelia Green  
Graduate Student, School of Communication  
Illinois State University  
k\*\*\*\*\*@ilstu.edu