How Facebook Friendship Transforms the Superior-Subordinate Relationship: A View from Relational Dialectics Theory

Hellenga

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This thesis project explores how Facebook friendship transforms the relationship between superior-subordinate dyads in the workplace through the lens of relational dialectics theory. A convenience sample of five superior-subordinate dyads (N=10) was used. Criteria for participation included: the superior must be full time and must be the subordinate’s direct superior, the subordinate must work at least part time, both must have worked in the organization for at least three months, and the two must be friends on Facebook who communicate at least weekly through the site. This study utilizes qualitative, face-to-face, in-depth participant interviews. The interview questions are open-ended in order to garner specific examples from participants regarding the presence of dialectical tensions. Two relational dialectics are strongest in the sample: autonomy/connectedness and openness/closedness. Participants use a variety of deliberate communication techniques to manage these tensions. Conclusions are drawn through coding of participant interviews regarding relational dialectics and communication management techniques present in the data.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The experience of communication in our lives is changing in profound ways and at a rapid pace. These changes can be attributed in part to the increasing prevalence of social networking sites (SNSs) (Agrawal & Mital, 2009; Mohanty et al., 2010). Although the use of social media has been on the rise for the past decade, the turning point can be marked by the creation of Facebook by Harvard alumnus, Mark Zuckerberg, in 2003. Facebook has taken over the social scene and currently has more users than any other SNS on the web (Facebook, 2012).

This explosion of social media has affected multiple areas of people’s lives, including workplace roles and relationships. Sites such as Facebook provide virtual forums in which workers may form friendships that complement or in some cases replace traditional mediums in which friendship communication occurs (e.g., face-to-face meetings, phone, email, etc.). Social media use in the workplace supports a human resources approach to organizing which says work is an appropriate place for friendships among coworkers, between superiors and subordinates, and between clients and employees (Feeley, Hwang, & Barnett, 2008). Extensive research shows that work environments benefit from the development of these friendships in the form of higher job satisfaction and improved morale among others (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Feeley, Hwang, & Barnett, 2008; Gordon & Hartman, 2009).

Social networking is a generally new phenomenon for our relational lives and it has been most consistently used in non-work friendship development. Thus, communication researchers have mainly explored social media use in interpersonal contexts outside of the workplace. Understanding social media’s effects in individuals’
work lives is still evolving and a lack of information exists about how it contributes to workplace friendship communication. This lack of research is particularly evident in superior-subordinate relationships. Such relational dyads are marked by complexity as individuals manage task and social goals simultaneously and balance numerous communicative tensions (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). Social media presents a unique challenge to superiors and subordinates in navigating this unique relationship.

The goal of this thesis is to explore superior-subordinate relational communication within the context of social networking. This study focuses on how superiors and subordinates interact as Facebook friends to better understand superior-subordinate friendships via social media. Baxter and Montgomery’s relational dialectics theory (RDT) will be utilized as a framework from which to analyze, understand, and interpret the results of this study (Montgomery & Baxter, 1998). Regarding the management of communicative tensions that exist within all types of interpersonal relationships, relational dialectics highlights any opposing tensions and/or goals that exist within the superior-subordinate dyads. RDT can explore and explain tensions being experienced by superior-subordinate dyads who are also Facebook friends. The rest of this chapter provides a brief summary of relevant literatures, which will be elaborated upon in chapter two.

Social Networking Sites

The social phenomenon of SNS “friendship” is becoming increasingly apparent in the workplace (Anonymous, 2007; Agrawal & Mital, 2009; Mohanty et al., 2010). “Friendship” represents the basic unit of connection on SNSs. When two people “friend” each other on a SNS, they are privy to a multitude of each other’s information including
photos, basic biographical information, and posts from friends among others. There also is a great debate ensuing about SNSs’ (specifically Facebook’s) appropriateness in the workplace. Concerns exist about whether using SNSs at work reduces employee professionalism, productivity, and efficiency. However, SNS proponents argue that use of social networking can enhance relationships, innovation, and workplace morale (Bennet, Owers, Pitt, & Tucker, 2009). Although this debate continues it is increasingly clear that SNSs’ usage in the workplace will continue and will affect workplace relationships in the coming decades. Thus, it is crucial that communication researchers better understand the implications of social network communication as it contributes to organizational relationships.

Because social media is a new media, research has only developed a rudimentary understanding of the ways in which it shapes the human experience of relating (Bennet, Owers, Pitt, & Tucker, 2010). Research regarding SNSs in the workplace tends to focus on the following subtopics: SNSs and law; SNSs and friendship between superiors and subordinates and its appropriateness; SNSs and human resource decision making; and SNSs and organizational assimilation (Clark & Roberts, 2010; Davison, Maraist, & Bing, 2011; Levine, 2011). Current popular sources focus mostly on SNS etiquette and appropriateness in the workplace (Agrawal & Mital, 2009; Anonymous, 2007; Middleton, 2008). What remains underexplored in the literature is how workplace friendships develop via social media sites such as Facebook, particularly in superior-subordinate dyads. A starting point for such research begins with understanding the possible benefits and negative consequences regarding Facebook friendship between superior and subordinates.
This thesis focuses on superior-subordinate dyads because they are characterized by dialectical tensions and the management of multiple competing goals (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). Examining superior-subordinate workplace friendships through Facebook interactions may provide useful insights into how SNSs expand highly relational and/or social elements into the superior-subordinate relationship. The utilization of Facebook friendship as a unique communication context is ideal because of the widespread change it is inducing in all aspects of our lives. Studying Facebook may provide helpful advice on how online superior-subordinate relationships should be managed in this new relational ecosystem. RDT as a framework for workplace friendships is highly indicative of the many positive and negative outcomes possible in superior-subordinate relationships in a variety of contexts.

Workplace Friendships

Research across many fields has consistently demonstrated the benefits of friendships in our personal and professional lives (Rawlins, 1992). Organizational communication research has taken friendship scholarship a step further with its in-depth explorations of friendships that develop at work, and the implications of such relationships on personal and organizational goals. Although relationships between superiors and subordinates do not necessarily include friendship as an expectation, the context of Facebook friendship introduces highly social and casual elements not naturally present in the traditional superior-subordinate relationship. It is arguable that Facebook friendship indicates some level of workplace friendship developing between superior-subordinate dyads—one which blurs traditional boundaries.
Workplace friendships have become an increasingly studied topic in the area of organizational communication. One consistency in the literature are peer friendship functions: mentoring; information exchange; power, control and influence; and social support (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Sias, 2009). Individual factors (such as personality) contextual aspects (such as organizational climate), and communication behaviors are particularly influential to peer friendships (Markiewicz, Devine, & Kausilas, 1999). The literature also shows that workplace friendships result in largely positive effects for organizations: heightened employee motivation, professional satisfaction, organizational commitment, citizenship behaviors, as well as reduced stress and low turnover are all identified outcomes (Feeley, Hwang, & Barnett, 2008; Morrison, 2004; Raile et al., 2008).

**Superior-Subordinate Relationships**

Organizational communication literature has defined superior-subordinate relationships as those in which one person hold direct and formal authority over the other (Sias, 2009). This crucial relationship shapes the experience of almost every organizational member, as nearly all employees in an organization have a superior, and many have subordinates. Although superiors and subordinates may be friendly with one another, they may not communicate in intimate settings where actual friendships develop (e.g., outside of normal working hours in informal locations). SNSs such as Facebook, give superiors and subordinates a uniquely social venue in which to develop non-work aspects of their relationship. What remains unknown is whether Facebook friendship creates greater workplace bonds and/or complicates the existing work relationship between superiors and subordinates because of blurred work-life boundaries.
One characteristic distinguishing superior-subordinate relationships from other workplace relationships is power. A by-product of organizational hierarchies, the unequal power distribution between superiors and subordinates is the defining factor which makes these relationships rich with communicative complexities. Critical organizational communication theorists have authored much of the research in this area, citing power, dominance, and influence as primary factors in superior-subordinate relationships (see Mumby, 2001, for a review). This line of scholarship suggests that superiors and subordinates function together in the workplace, but the playing field is unequal as superiors tend to display more power, control, and formal authority/status than those they supervise. Communication then, is the process by which power and control is conveyed within organizational hierarchy (Sias, 2009).

At first glance, past considerations of superior-subordinate relationships and power appear to be unidirectional and downward, as superiors communicate mandates, directions, feedback, and other types of organizational discourse to subordinates. This perspective is especially visible in classical management theories but is also present in more contemporary views of organizing. For instance, although human resources approaches advocate for more egalitarian superior-subordinate relationships (e.g., greater participation in decision-making and teamwork), and most organizations today adopt this philosophy, the reality of many such organizations is a fairly fixed hierarchical structure—one that places superiors in higher levels of power and status than subordinates (Miller, 2011). This system influences communication dynamics between superiors and subordinates in ways that play out in their interpersonal communication (Sias, 2009). What remains unknown is how power is discursively enacted within the context of SNSs,
particularly the purposefully friendship-oriented medium of Facebook, and how power within the workplace may affect Facebook friendships.

**Relational Dialectics Theory**

A crucial connection between communication theory and the superior-subordinate relationship lies in relational dialectics theory (RDT) (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). RDT posits that interpersonal relationship dynamics consist of inherent tensions or dialectics which are both created and managed by communication. While initial studies using RDT focused on romantic partners, Baxter and colleagues have extended RDT into workplace friendships (Baxter & Bridge, 1992). This study explored six dialectical tensions generally present among blended work friendships: *Autonomy and Connectedness* reflects the desire to have ties and connections with others versus the need to separate yourself as a unique individual. *Favoritism and Impartiality* reflects the desire to be treated fairly and impartially versus the desire to be seen and known as “special.” *Openness and Closedness* reflects the desire to be open and divulge information versus the desire to be exclusive and private. *Novelty and Predictability* reflects the desire for the relationship to be predictable versus the desire for it to be original and new. *Instrumentality and Affection* reflects the desire for affection to be genuine versus the desire for affection to be motivated by benefits and perceived advantages of the relationship. *Equality and Inequality* reflects the desire to be considered as equals versus the desire to develop levels of superiority (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). With all tensions, the poles coexist simultaneously.

The results for Bridge and Baxter’s study (1992) provide ample evidence for four of six dialectical tensions existing within these blended relationships: impartiality-
favoritism, judgment-acceptance, autonomy-connection, and equality/inequality. What remains understudied is whether these dialectical tensions are also present in superior-subordinate relationships, particularly with the added dimension of Facebook friendship. Facebook friendship provides a distinctly communicative context in which to explore whether and how such tensions exist. Research was conducted with the base assumption that incompatible demands exist in blended friendships and merit scholarly exploration and analysis.

This thesis explores the ways in which Facebook friendships shape and transform the superior-subordinate relationship. This chapter provided a rationale for the thesis and a brief overview of extant research. Chapter two provides a review of the literature regarding superior-subordinate communication, workplace friendships, and RDT. Chapter three describes the methods chosen for this study as well as rationale for those methodological decisions.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this literature review is to expand upon the research concepts introduced in chapter one and situate the research questions within the scholarship. Chapter two provides an in-depth discussion of the following topics: social networking sites (SNSs), workplace friendships, superior-subordinate relationships, and relational dialectics. The chapter concludes with a brief summary, and a preview of chapter three.

Social Networking Sites

Because social media is a relatively new media in the world of communication, researchers have only developed a rudimentary understanding of the ways in which it shapes the human experience of relating (Bennet, Owes, Pitt, & Tucker, 2010). As identified in chapter one, the extant literature regarding social networking use in the workplace has been explored to a limited degree mainly addressing use appropriateness and etiquette, influence of use on employee screening and recruitment, and newcomer assimilation/relationship development (Clark & Roberts, 2010; Davison et al., 2011; Levine, 2011). With the increasing use of social networking for workplace functions, the phenomenon of SNS “friendship” is becoming more and more prevalent among peer coworkers and superiors and subordinates (Agrawal & Mital, 2009; Anonymous, 2007; Mohanty et al., 2010). Because of its increased popularity in the workplace, it is crucial that the researchers develop a greater understanding of what the social networking communication landscape means to organizations and member dynamics. This section will address SNS usage habits, the influence of use on workplace relationships, and extensions of this literature into the specific SNS context of Facebook interactions.
Usage Habits

The most popular of all SNSs is Facebook (Facebook, 2012). The site has grown from a Harvard University only site to the most popular SNS in the world, greatly outpacing competitors such as MySpace and Friendster. Its popularity has spurred the creation of other SNSs such as LinkedIn which focuses on professional networking and Google Plus which imitates Facebook in most ways. Facebook has more than 750 million users worldwide and remains the most dominant SNS on the internet (Facebook, 2012).

Facebook creates a unique relational and communicative ecosystem for relationships of almost every type. Being a member on Facebook provides members with two core functions: expressing yourself and connecting with others. Personal profiles are rich with customization options allowing members to create an extensive personal biography (jobs, family members, likes, dislikes, political affiliation, religious affiliation, life stories, etc.), personal photos uploaded by members and “friends”, among many other options. Connecting with others begins with the essential unit of Facebook connection; the “friendship”. Members can “friend” each other on Facebook by finding other members’ profiles and “adding them as a friend”. If both members agree on Facebook friendship, the connection and sharing options are ample. Friends have multiple private and public messaging/posting options, can upload photos of one another, can share videos, web links, music and other multimedia with friends via the public and private communication channels available. Depending on levels of security between friends, a multitude of personal information about each other is available including the photos, personal biography, and various public interactions with other friends.
As Facebook created an interconnected social sphere via the internet, the rules about online communicating began to shift as well. The etiquette surrounding Facebook and other SNS usage is still largely in its developmental stages. Popular press articles have attempted to assess the conflicts between social networking behaviors and workplace standards of professionalism. Books and articles written on the topic discuss how the informal style of social networking etiquette competes with, and possibly undermines, professionalism standards. Facebook and other SNS usage is further divided by a generational gap. Although people age 40 plus are the most rapidly growing segment of Facebook’s membership, individuals between the ages of 18-35 represent that most active users of the site, particularly in the 20-something age group (Facebook 2012). Usage patterns may make a difference in the effectiveness of workplace communication, particularly in organizations where multiple generations coexist. Thus, it is important for communication scholars to learn more about SNS usage in the workplace and its effects on relational dynamics.

Facebook and other SNSs not only present an opportunity for increased social connections, but also a unique opportunity for self-expression and identity creation through creating one’s own profile. Research has shown that African Americans communicate about themselves differently on Facebook than Caucasians and Asians (DeAndrea, Shaw, & Levine, 2010). Research has also examined the reasoning used by college students when expressing themselves on Facebook. Eluchette and Karl (2010) discovered that college students used Facebook purposefully, to manage impressions of themselves and influence Facebook friends’ perceptions. Results showed that students make intentional decisions to use their Facebook profiles to portray a desired self-image.
For example, students who thought of themselves as wild, partiers, etc., were likely to post information on their profiles that supported this self-image. This was also true for students who perceived themselves as hardworking. It has also been found that college students use Facebook for a variety of activities including socialization, widening personal perspectives, and sharing of opinions (Agrawal & Mital, 2009).

By studying Facebook friendships in superior-subordinate dyads, this thesis project provides an opportunity to explore usage patterns and impression management tactics within workplace settings. Next, this chapter considers issues of Facebook use for relational dynamics in organizations.

**Ethical Issues for Workplace Relationships**

Facebook and other SNSs have enhanced the social world and added new dimensions to the global human network; they have also caused substantial concern and controversy. Studies show that Facebook use involves many ethical dilemmas which may not be easily visible to Facebook members. Much of the criticism of SNSs in general focuses on the lack of privacy and available, easy-to-use privacy controls for users (Clark & Roberts, 2010; Davison, Maraist, & Bing, 2011; Levine, 2011). Research concludes that although many users are knowledgeable about Facebook privacy options and some utilize them, their understanding of the controls is somewhat skewed. Also important, the privacy concerns are often attributed to others’ experiences rather than the self. Participants also perceived that the benefits of Facebook usage are far outweigh the possible negative consequences (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009). According to Light and McGrath (2010), raising awareness of potential ethical problems and creating
codes of ethical conduct can go a long way toward helping Facebook users make more educated decisions regarding their social networking communication.

Another aspect of privacy concerns involves the availability of personal user information and the ways in which organizations use this data. For instance, some companies require prospective employees to provide Facebook passwords to organizations so that employers can screen for potential problems with new hires. Researchers also conclude that the law has significantly failed to keep pace with recent technological developments and requires intense reform (Levine, 2011). One possible outcome of this study is to increase knowledge about how privacy issues affect superior-subordinate Facebook friendships, a context in which users willingly become connected with the purpose to share personal and professional information.

The purpose of this study is to explore superior-subordinate Facebook friendship interactions and understand the ways Facebook communication shapes and potentially transforms superior-subordinate relationships. I focus on superior-subordinate dyads because they are rich with dialectical tensions and the management of multiple competing goals (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). Examining superior-subordinate workplace friendships in Facebook interactions may provide useful insights into how SNSs expand highly relational and/or social elements of the superior-subordinate relationship.

Research overwhelmingly suggests that modern workplaces must adapt and leverage the use of SNSs (Bennett et al., 2010; Middleton, 2008; Mohanty et al., 2010). Employers have responded to Facebook use in the workplace in a number of ways, ranging from banning employees from using Facebook to utilizing it as a central tool for internal and external business communication (Bennett et al., 2010; Middleton, 2008;
Mohanty et al., 2010). It is clear that Facebook communication will continue to dominate the modern workplace and, as such, organizational communication scholars must better understand its implications on the friendships developed online among employees. The next section considers the extant literature regarding workplace friendships.

**Workplace Friendships**

As organizational cultures grapple with shifting norms surrounding the traditional ideas of professionalism, the interactions in workplace friendships have become increasingly relevant for exploration by communication researchers. Communication research has highlighted the many benefits associated with workplace friendships (Rawlins, 1992; Sias, 2009). Workplace friendships serve various crucial functions in organizational performance and personal/professional development. This section explores the developmental communication processes of friendships at work.

**Developmental Processes of Workplace Friendships**

Several researchers have attempted to identify the various stages of workplace friendship development that are experienced by its participants (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Gordon & Hartman, 2009; Henderson & Argyle, 1986; Johnson et al., 2003; Markiewicz, Devine & Kausilas, 1999). The most widely accepted model belongs to organizational communication researcher Patricia M. Sias and her colleagues. As a leader in organizational relationship research, she has outlined the following three essential transitions that take place in workplace friendship development (Sias & Cahill, 1998):

- Transition 1: *Acquaintance to Friend* (primarily caused by close proximity, duration of working hours, and socializing outside of the organization).
• Transition 2: *Friend to Close Friend* (caused primarily by the sharing of appropriately personal details of work and personal life problems).

• Transition 3: *Close Friend to “Almost Best” Friend* (associated with life events, sharing of problems, and passage of time).

These transitional stages are also not static and experiencing all phases is not required. Although one might progress through all stages in order, the speed at which the stages are experienced depends upon many factors and many friendships do not evolve past certain levels.

A second factor regarding the development of workplace friendships is the gender composition of these relationships. Research shows that friendships develop in various ways and at varying speeds according to the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the relationships, as well as the specific gendered pairs of the homogeneous relationships (Sias, Smith, & Avdeyeva, 2003). For instance, the friendship between two female coworkers who share multiple similarities (e.g., mothers of young children, primary family earners, and middle-aged managers) may develop at a more rapid rate than two female peers who are dissimilar. Shared experiences and backgrounds help move friendships along the relational continuum.

The research literature also shows that workplace friendships serve a variety of functions in an attempt to meet individuals’ personal and professional goals (Gordon & Hartman, 2009). Organizational communication researchers have established categories regarding how workplace friendships uniquely fill particular functions. Gordon and Hartman (2009) have identified three workplace friendship purpose categories of information peers, collegial peers, and special peers. The categories are ordered from
least relational to most relational with varying degrees of information sharing (Sias, 2009). *Information peers* are essentially acquaintances that share little or no relational friendship qualities, but interact for the purpose of obtaining organizationally pertinent information as one’s role would require. *Collegial peers* describe workplace friendships that cover the area between informational peers and special peers. These collegial workplace friendship types share moderate to high relational ties while also reaping the benefits of organizationally pertinent information exchange. Finally, *special peers* are the types of friendships that experience intimate relational disclosure and high information exchange. The following hypothetical example of two workplace friends provides a description of each stage and how the friendship progresses:

Rachel and Katherine began working together as graduate assistants in May of 2005. They worked many hours together, and at first they communicated mostly to achieve work objectives and accomplish tasks (information peers). As time passed, Rachel and Katherine began to discuss their personal lives and aspects of work unrelated to tasks. They started to discover and enjoy each other’s personalities (collegial peers). They considered themselves “work friends”. As the months passed, Rachel and Katherine revealed more about themselves to each other and created deeper friendship ties. They spent time together outside of work, called and texted with each other and even had inside jokes. They would consider themselves new best friends (special peers).

This thesis extends the developmental stages and peer types literature into a new context of workplace friendships that use social media for relational communication.

**Communication Behaviors of Workplace Friends**

Communication figures prominently into the development and sustenance of workplace friendships. Among the behaviors explored in workplace friendship literature are disclosure, open communication, and affinity-seeking (Sias, 2009). Affinity-seeking behaviors—communication behaviors that seek matched levels of affinity (similarity) in another person -- along with communicative openness, demonstrate a unique perspective
on workplace friendships (Gordon & Hartman, 2009; Miller, 2011). For example, Gordon and Hartmann (2009) conducted a study regarding types of workplace friendship (informational peers, collegial peers, and special peers) and the presence of affinity-seeking strategies and open communication behaviors. Results showed that collegial peers utilize affinity-seeking strategies more frequently than information peers, but in similar amount as special peers. The same was true for communication openness. In other words, once workplace friendships have obtained the level of collegial peers (or an essentially stable friendship), people continue to utilize those same strategies to maintain and develop the relationship which may later develop into special peer relationships.

Studies also explore the role of gender communication in same-sex and cross-sex workplace friendships (Markiewicz, Devine, & Kausilas, 1999; Sias, Smith, & Avdeyeva, 2003). Regarding the development of workplace friendships, research shows that the gender compositions entails unique communication characteristics for each composition: male-male, female-female, and female-male. For instance, women consider talking about personal life events as more important to friendship development with other women, not men. In addition, men consider talking about work problems as important to becoming friends with other men (Markiewicz, Devine, & Kausilas, 1999; Sias, Smith, & Avdeyeva, 2003).

Same-sex and cross-sex friendships differ in other fundamental ways as well. Same-sex friendships develop contextual workplace factors such as chatting at the water cooler or eating lunch together, matter considerably less to the closeness of the friendship. In cross-sex friendships, these contextual factors retain their importance during friendship development (Sias, Smith, & Avdeyeva, 2003). For instance, it is
generally acceptable that a same-sex friendship pair, as their closeness increases, have lunch together just the two of them. In order for a cross-sex friendship to flourish to that level it depends upon the happenstance of appropriate circumstances. Purposefully taking a lunch together may be perceived as unacceptable or suspicious. Same-sex friendship pairs are free to create their own contexts but cross-sex friendship pairs take a more passive role, allowing the availability of appropriate context to dictate relational development.

Outcomes of Workplace Friendships

Communication research suggests that workplace friendships develop in a curvilinear manner where communication behaviors are beneficial to the friendship until a certain point and then exhibit diminishing returns (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Johnson et al., 2003; Morrison, 2004; Raile et al., 2003; Sias & Cahill, 1998). For instance, a coworker may become overly dependent on a workplace friend for social support to the degree that the coworker’s needs become burdensome on the friend. Eventually, the friendship may end because relational dependency is too great and productivity suffers. This research suggests that the ideal workplace friendship, existing in the middle of the curvilinear arc, renders the most compelling organizational benefits. This conjecture has been reviewed throughout the organizational communication scholars through the exploration of organizational and personal outcomes associated with workplace friendships. Research has covered such topics as workplace friendships and job satisfaction, turnover intentions, bureaucracy, and organizational commitment.

Research suggests that the prevalence and strength of workplace friendships is highly related to job satisfaction (Morrison, 2004; Raile et al., 2008). More detailed
research on workplace friendships and job satisfaction shows that workplace friendship network centrality affects job satisfaction (Raile, et al., 2008). Findings show that the degree of closeness of workplace friendship, over any other factor, is the highest predictor of job satisfaction.

Regarding workplace friendship and its relationship to turnover intent and leave-taking, research has revealed many positive outcomes. Research shows that the amount and individual strength of workplace friendships decreases employees’ self-reported turnover intentions. In a study of friendship network analysis, results show the following: (a) Centrality in one’s peer network does not predict employee turnover; (b) Centrality in one’s friendship out-degree network significantly predicted turnover and explained almost 20% of the unique variance; (c) Friendship networks predicted more of the variance in turnover than did peer networks and; (d) Greater relational closeness to others in the social network does not predict employee turnover (Feeley, Hwang, & Barnett, 2008).

Organizational communication research has also considered the relationship between bureaucracy and workplace friendship. Bureaucracy has been operationally defined as hierarchical, highly rigid, formal, and impersonal (Mao, Chen & Hsieh, 2009). Studies have shown an interesting, paradoxical, negative relationship between the two variables of bureaucracy and workplace friendship pervasiveness. Mao, Chen, and Hsieh (2009) found that when bureaucracy is present in the workplace, workplace friendship frequency decreases and vice versa. It could be interpreted that bureaucracy and workplace friendship are factors continually influencing one another. Strong bureaucracy
indicates decreased friendships whereas decreased friendships contribute to a more bureaucratic environment.

Taken as a whole, organizational communication research makes a compelling case for further exploration of workplace friendships. The literature regarding the developmental processes, communication behaviors, gender composition, and organizational outcomes of workplace friendships provide a strong research foundation for this thesis. This study extends the research of workplace friendships by exploring how workers, specifically superior-subordinate dyads, use Facebook to create, shape, and maintain workplace friendships.

**Superior-Subordinate Relationships**

Extant research shows that superior-subordinate work relationships are a site for rich communicative exchange, as individuals manage multiple and, at times, competing goals (Fix & Sias, 2006; Jablin, 1979; Lee, 1998; Lee & Jablin, 1995; Level & Johnson, 1978). The existing literature demonstrates that superior-subordinate communication is unique from other types of workplace communication (e.g., peer and/or client-employee). The communication that occurs in these dyads results in important individual and organizational outcomes. Numerous factors influence superior-subordinate relational development: ability/job performance, superior ability/job performance, employee personality traits, superior personality traits, similarity and dissimilarity (attitudinal, personality, cognitive style, demographic), and communication. Relational outcomes of superior-subordinate communication range from employee adjustment factors and performance to superior effectiveness (see Sias, 2009 for a review). Several communication processes figure prominently in the formation of such outcomes. The
next section considers maintenance communication behaviors, open communication versus distortive communication, and superior-subordinate relational quality.

**Maintenance Communication Behaviors**

Maintenance communication has been broadly defined by communication scholars as the communication behaviors that are strategically enacted to maintain a desirable superior-subordinate relationship (Jaesub, 1998). For example, informal communication rules (Henderson & Argyle, 1986) guide a number of message tactics and strategies (Kaplan, 1976, 1978; Lee, 1998; Lee & Jablin, 1995; Waldon, 1991).

Politeness is one visible maintenance communication strategy. Politeness can be used both positively and negatively in workplace communication. Research defines communicative politeness used positively in the superior-subordinate relationship as politeness for the purpose of politeness that is unapologetic. Contrastingly, negative politeness is that which disempowers its enactors, deferring communicative power through politeness. Research has established valuable insights regarding the usage of positive and negative politeness between superiors and subordinates. Specifically, relatively low power speakers (subordinates) utilize higher levels of both positive and negative politeness when speaking with superiors (Morand, 2000). In addition, use of positive and negative politeness by subordinates when communicating with superiors is highly dependent on situation and can have important workplace impacts. For instance, a subordinate may be more likely to engage in both positive and negative politeness tactics when a superior will reward good workplace behavior.

Waldron (1991) has identified four essential communicative maintenance tactic types for superior-subordinate dyads: personal, contractual, regulative, and directive as
follows: (a) **Personal** – the informal interaction used to build and maintain friendship ties; (b) **Contractual** – subordinate conformity to role requirements, superior expectations, and general communication conventions (e.g., politeness); (c) **Regulative** – tactics that maintain the relationship by regulating contacts with the superior; (d) **Direct** – negotiation of the terms of the relationship and explicit discussion of perceived relational injustices (Waldron, 1991).

This research asserts that high quality superior-subordinate relationships (those addressing both task and relational goals in equally high amounts) result in higher amounts of personal, contractual, and directive tactical usage. Conversely, low quality relationships score the highest in regulative communication, tactics that can stymie superior-subordinate relationship development.

**Openness and Distortion**

An important part of superior-subordinate communication is the quality and quantity of information exchanged. Throughout much of organizational communication scholarship, openness—a willingness and receptiveness to communicate—is synonymous with productive and satisfying workplace relationships (Jablin, 1979). Research has characterized degrees of openness in superior-subordinate relationships as related to many positive organizational outcomes (Burke & Wilcox, 1969). The degree of openness in the relationship has a notable linear relationship with job satisfaction for both superiors and subordinates. As relational openness increases so does job satisfaction, and vice versa. In contrast to the positive effects of openness of superior-subordinate communications, there are also negative consequences associated with openness. The results of a literature review by Eisenberg, Goodall & Tretheway (2010) suggests that
openness can be used for unethical purposes (e.g., promoting disclosure that leads to negative repercussions) and can hinder strategic ambiguity useful to workplace innovation. Level and Johnson (1978) argue that subordinates may demonstrate openness through distortion, purposefully omitting or altering messages in ways that are more palatable to superiors.

**Relational Quality**

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) is another area of scholarship in which superior-subordinate communication and relational development figure prominently. LMX tells us that leaders (superiors) and followers (subordinates) develop varying degrees of relationship quality based on their dyadic interactions. Overall, LMX provides a compelling case for understanding friendships between superiors and subordinates in order to improve organizational outcomes. Researchers separate subordinates into two groups regarding high quality (in-group) and low quality (out-group) relationships, with each group experiencing different types of outcomes related to LMX (Fix & Sias, 2006).

In the workplace, person-centered communication (communication that values meeting relational goals as well as or above task goals) has been related to high quality LMX relationships and greater employee job satisfaction as well as heightened leader accomplishment (Fix & Sias, 2006). Non person-centered communication contributes to low quality LMX relationships which result in negative outcomes (e.g., reduced job satisfaction for superiors and subordinates, and lower morale) (Northouse, 2010).

**Power**

The unequal power distribution between superiors and subordinates is a defining factor which makes these relationships rich with communication tensions. Critical
organizational communication theorists have authored much of the research in this area, citing power, dominance, and influence as the sources of organizational experiences (Mumby, 2001). Power in superior-subordinate relationships creates an unlevel playing field which members manage through communication. At first glance, power in the superior-subordinate relationship may appear to be unidirectional, a characteristic a superior holds over a subordinate. Early management theories adhered to this dynamic. As the human resources organizational model gained popularity, the role of power in the superior-subordinate relationship changed as well. Recent organizational communication scholarship views power as multi-directional, moving both downward (from superior to subordinate) and upward (from subordinate to superior) via a variety of communication strategies (Mumby, 2001).

Leader member exchange (LMX), mentioned in the previous section, effectively encapsulates the idea of multi-directional power in the superior-subordinate relationship. Researchers have used this theory to quantify the power dynamic through communicative exchanges between superiors and subordinates. Power is uniquely enacted through communication by superiors and subordinates. One way LMX observes this enactment is by exploring the quality level of this relationship. High and low quality LMX superior-subordinate relationships are characterized by the types of communication strategies most frequently enacted (Northouse, 2010). High quality superior-subordinate relationships display communication patterns that attempt to minimize this power distance, whereas low quality superior-subordinate relationships display communication patterns that attempt to enhance power distance in the dyad (Northouse, 2010).
In sum, workplace friendships and superior-subordinate relationships are composed of and influenced by multiple factors in which communication processes are central. These relationships have important outcomes for individuals and organizations. What remains unknown is how the development of superior-subordinate relationships occur within the relational ecosystem of Facebook. The following research question was created to explore this topic:

RQ1: What dialectical tensions exist for superior-subordinate Facebook friends?

**Relational Dialectics Theory**

Relational dialectics theory (RDT) articulates the framework for understanding the various competing communicative tensions experienced by those in a variety of relationships. As discussed in chapter one, RDT applies to many human relationships such as romantic relationships, family relationships, and friendships (Baxter, 1990, 2004; Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The concept of relational dialectics has been interpreted by scholars as “a knot of contradictions in personal relationships or an unceasing interplay between contrary or opposing tendencies.” (Griffin, 2011). Relational dialectics reflect the communication-based tension that exists between two competing goals intrapersonally and interpersonally within the relationship. Essentially each person experiencing the tension has two polarized discourses with themselves as well as in the relationship. Relationships and individuals give voice to multiple viewpoints both internally and within relationships through the following dialectics. (Christensen, Zorn & Ganesh, 2011)

*Autonomy and Connectedness:* The desire to have ties and connections with others versus the need to separate yourself as a unique individual. *Favoritism and*
Impartiality: The desire to be treated fairly and impartially versus the desire to be seen and known as special. Openness and Closedness: The desire to be open and divulge information versus the desire to be exclusive and private. Novelty and Predictability: The desire for the relationship to be regimented versus the desire for it to be original and new. Instrumentality and Affection: The desire for affection to be genuine versus the desire for affection to be motivated by benefits and perceived advantages of the relationship. Equality and Inequality: The desire to be considered as equals versus the desire to display levels of superiority (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

The six dialectical tensions listed were solidified through one research project by Bridge & Baxter (1992) regarding workplace friendships. This study served as critical point of reference for the proposed thesis. Bridge and Baxter’s study *Blended Relationships: Friends as Work Associates* (1992), paved the way for researching the various tensions managed between friends in the workplace (or "blended relationships" as the study refers to them). Bridge and Baxter used RDT to understand the various communicative tensions and goals that were being managed by dyads occupying the role of both friend and colleague. It focused on which dialectical tensions existed for these blended relationships as well as how they were managed. The study was conducted with the assumption that incompatible demands exist in blended friendships and these contradictions merit scholarly analysis. Results provided ample evidence for four of the six dialectical tensions: impartiality-favoritism, judgment-acceptance, autonomy-connection, and equality-inequality. This research provides support for the use of RDT to gain a deeper understanding of workplace friendships.
Communication research also supports the existence of relational dialectics throughout the various levels of friendship progression (Johnson et al., 2003). Research participants have identified turning points in friendship levels as defined by RDT. Relational dialectics have also been evidenced throughout usage of the Korean SNS, Cyworld (Kim & Yun, 2008). Relational dialectics that are present in workplace friendships (blended relationships), friendship progression, and SNSs will serve as a framework from which to analyze the results of this study. Because Facebook arguably adds elements of sociability, casualness, and friendliness to any relationship, Facebook friendship as a relational ecosystem creates a situation in which superiors and subordinates are also managing the role of friends. What remains unknown is whether superior-subordinate Facebook friend dyads have similar experiences as the blended friendships that were explored in Bridge and Baxter’s (1992) study. Thus, a second research question guided this thesis:

RQ2: Which communication management techniques do superior-subordinate Facebook friends use to manage these dialectical tensions?

Chapter two presented a review of literature regarding workplace friendships, superior-subordinate relationships, RDT, and social network communication. By synthesizing this critical knowledge, two research questions were developed to guide this thesis project. Chapter three will explain the methodology used to answer the proposed research questions.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter two reviewed the current literature which informed this thesis: workplace friendships, superior-subordinate relationships, social networking sites (SNSs), and relational dialectics theory (RDT). Chapter three describes the methodology used to explore the research questions identified in chapter two. This study used qualitative, in-depth, face-to-face interviews with the members of five superior-subordinate dyads to explore how Facebook friendship may transform the superior-subordinate relationship. This chapter first provides a rationale for utilizing this qualitative perspective. Then, the chapter will elaborate on participant recruitment efforts, data collection techniques, and analysis methodology.

Qualitative Approach

This study used a grounded approach employing constant-comparative analysis to identify emergent themes and categories regarding the dialectical tensions managed in superior-subordinate Facebook interactions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study because it is ideal for exploring communication complexities of organizational life, such as in this thesis (Glaser, Zamanou, & Hacker, 1987; Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). The use of qualitative research methods is consistent with past RDT scholarship goals—to capture depth of relational dynamics in multifaceted organizational contexts (Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2003). The grounded approach enables researchers to build new theory, or, in the case
this thesis, add to existing theory from data collected regarding the lived experience of study participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

**Participants and Procedures**

A convenience sample of five superior-subordinate dyads (10 people total) was used to draw initial conclusions about superior-subordinate friendship communication via Facebook interaction. Participants worked in the southwest Michigan area, all of whom worked either part-time or full-time and were between the ages of 18 and 80. Each dyad consisted of one superior—a person in a managerial position—who held direct, formal authority over the subordinate member of the dyad. Each dyad worked in the same organizational unit and had worked there for at least 30 days.

Participants worked in industries such as small business, facilities management, entertainment, and retail, among others. Organizational tenure ranged from six months to 15 years. Ages ranged from 22 to 56 and came from a variety of backgrounds. Organizations were based in mid-sized cities and small towns. Organization size ranged from offices of less than five people into the hundreds. Some participant dyads had been friends or acquaintances before being employed together while for some the employment experience marked their first meeting. Participant dyad friendships/working relationships ranged from as short as three months to as long as three years.

Participants reflected a range of Facebook use and technical understanding. While Facebook communication among dyads was somewhat limited, time spent viewing each other’s pages, posts, and other information was weekly for many and monthly for some. Knowledge of Facebook features and communication options also varied greatly. Some participants were novice social networkers while others were highly proficient. Note that
all participant names used in this study are pseudonyms and industry titles are purposefully vague to protect the anonymity of participants. This variety of participant backgrounds and behaviors contributed to a rich portrayal of the role of Facebook and the superior-subordinate relationship.

All participants were friends on Facebook and used Facebook to communicate regularly with one another. Study criteria ensured that participants had an established superior-subordinate structure in the workplace, considered each other friends, and used Facebook as a part of their friendship communication. Persons who are members of the author’s personal network (friends, acquaintances, etc.) were contacted as the author had direct knowledge of their Facebook friendships with superiors/subordinates.

Recruitment

After obtaining institutional review board approval for the study (Appendix A), the author recruited participant dyads by using the following steps. First, she reached out to peers, friends, and acquaintances via email or in face-to-face meetings (Appendix B, Appendix C). In each context, the author explained the project, provided informational materials, and invited people to learn more about potential participation. Interested individuals contacted the author via email to learn more about possible involvement (Appendix D). Those who decided to participate provided the author with contact for their superiors or subordinates accordingly. The author emailed the person’s superior or subordinate to explain the study, provided the project’s informational handout and informed consent document, and invited the superior or subordinate to become involved (Appendix E). After gaining agreement by both the subordinate and superior, the author emailed each person to set up separate interviews (Appendix F). After interview times
were agreed upon, the author sent reminder emails to the participants two to three days before interviews occurred (Appendix G).

**Data Collection**

The author conducted individual interviews to collect data drawn from participants' point of view; gaining insight into obligations, motivations, constraints, emotions, and experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Interview methodology was selected for several reasons. First, interviews prompt vivid, first-hand accounts from participants conveyed in their own words without being filtered by the researcher (Chesbro & Borisoff, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Second, researchers can guide responses to highlight communication processes and subtleties useful to making sense of organizational communication phenomena (Kleinman et al., 1994). Third, when interviewees give personal accounts it affords researchers the opportunity to explore participant explanations, offering improved depth and breadth of information and sensemaking (Ahlkvist, 2001).

Each participant was involved in an approximately 60-minute, face-to-face, interview with the researcher. The interviews were conducted individually with participants to encourage the most honest and complete information from each member of the dyad, without the presence of the other member of the dyad. Separate interviews also reduced the potential threat of negative repercussions for providing candid responses, a matter of particular concern for subordinates who directly report to their superior. According to protocol, the author requested that study participants not discuss their interviews with others and the study author took steps to keep data private (e.g., disguising names and identifying features, creating codes for participant names, and
secure data storage). All interviews were audio recorded and data were transcribed by the author. Interview text consisted of 65 single-spaced pages.

The interview guide (Appendix H) consisted of 12 open-ended questions drawing on the scholarship regarding superior-subordinate workplace friendships, RDT, and relationship development in computer mediated forums. The interview guide was designed to gain background information about the participants and superior-subordinate relationship. Questions solicited participant narratives about their workplace friendship with the other member of the superior-subordinate dyad, the role of Facebook in the relationship, and communicative tensions experienced. During the interview, an internet connected device was provided by the researcher. Before the interviews began, the participant was asked to access their Facebook profile and navigate to their friendship page between the superior and subordinate. This page contains all of the shared interactions between the dyad on one web page. Participants were given time to look over the page to refresh their memory regarding Facebook interactions with the other member of their dyad. Participants also had the opportunity to refer back to their friendship page with their superior/subordinate to garner examples for interview enhancement. The solicited narratives required participants to describe specific, memorable, and dynamic communication experiences.

**Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed in dyad pairs with constant comparative methods to identify, describe, reduce, and connect prominent themes that emerged from in the interview data. To yield existing dialectical themes, analyzing all dyad as pairs was the most sensible option. Using constant comparative methods, the researcher derived theoretical constructs
from qualitative data through an ongoing process of comparing different pieces of data for similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This study used *Blended Relationships: Friends as Work Associates* (Bridge & Baxter, 1992) as a theoretical guidepost for analysis. In the Bridge & Baxter study, a number of relational dialectics and their management techniques were derived from data expressed by friends/work associates. As such, when analyzing this data the pertinent themes regarding dialectical tensions and their management techniques identified in the Bridge & Baxter (1992) served as the primary search criteria in this study’s data as well. Themes and categories were established and described based on multiple reviews of the data. Analysis was complete when themes became saturated and review yielded no new meanings.

Following data transcription, the author analyzed all transcripts using word processing software (Microsoft Word) to identify and describe major categories and themes as well as draw connections. The author wrote analytic memos throughout the stages of analysis, which are described below.

Stage one is *open coding*, the most basic and free form of the qualitative coding phases (Strauss, 1987). During this stage, the author used Owens’ (1984) guidelines for thematic analyses consisting of recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. *Recurrence* refers to the amount of times meaning is repeated despite language variations. *Repetition* is the repeated use of certain words or locutions. *Forcefulness* refers to the intensity with which themes are communicated (Turner & Krizek, 2006). After reviewing the data multiple times with these criteria, the author identified initial thematic codes and created a codebook guide for future analysis. During this phase the study author also documented
side notes made during her interviews and her personal reflections of the data during transcription and initial coding.

Stage two is integration and dimensionalization. This step refines and elaborates on the initial codes created in open coding. After a thorough review of the initial codes, a new set of codes whose purpose is to make connections between categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 1995) was created. This step is also known as the first sub-stage, or axial coding. Through making these new categories, dimensionalization can take place.

Dimensionalization involves the identification of properties of categories and constructs (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The categorical codes were reviewed for overarching themes and properties that could contribute to the next stage of analysis.

Stage three is theoretical saturation, in which the researcher takes the categorical and dimensionalized codes and compares them against existing theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The goal is to find a theory that explains the thematic and dimensionalized codes appropriately. A theory may not exist that describes the results of the study, or a theory will only partially explain the study’s results. This is the stage in which results are compared against existing theoretical concepts.

The fourth and final stage of analysis is the construction of interpretive claims (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; 2008). This final portion of the coding process refines the conclusions developed in earlier stages and creates an overarching interpretive storyline. This storyline consists of new arguments related to theory and supported study data. The storyline is then integrated into the final reporting of data and analysis.

This chapter explained the methodology used in this research study with the purpose to explore and draw conclusions on how the Facebook friendship shapes and
potentially transforms the superior-subordinate relationship. Participants were recruited using the snowball method and were recruited one dyad member at a time. Participant interviews were coordinated and after data was collected it was transcribed. After transcription, data was analyzed separately, and then in dyad pairs. Analysis was unique for in this study because of the dyadic level of analysis. Codes and themes were determined for the dyadic interactions taken together. After analysis, emergent themes were understood in light of the relevant organizational communication literature. The results and interpretations of this analysis is reported in chapter four.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Chapter three described the methodology used to explore the research questions presented in chapter two. By employing a grounded approach (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), this study used qualitative research techniques of personal interviews with five superior-subordinate dyads to explore how Facebook friendship shapes and potentially transforms the superior-subordinate relationship. Research questions focused on drawing out any dialectical tensions that might be present regarding the dyad’s working relationship and friendship as well as how their Facebook friendship is a part of their relational dynamics. Specifically, this study explored the following:

RQ1: What dialectical tensions exist in the superior-subordinate relationship that participates in Facebook friendship?

RQ2: What communication management techniques do superior-subordinate Facebook friends use to manage these dialectical tensions?

Background for Analytic Themes

In following with extant research on blended relationships—people experiencing elements of friendship who also work together—the current project sought to identify core dialectical tensions. The following five tensions have been reported in this literature (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Galanes, 2009; Jameson, 2004; Rawlins; 1989, 1992):

- **Equality vs. Inequality**: the tensions between caring about someone as an equal partner in the relationship, with the friendship being an end in itself (e.g.,
befriending them for the sake of positive relationships at work) versus caring about someone as a means to an end (such as when a subordinate makes an extra effort to befriend a superior to pursue advancement opportunities).

- **Impartiality vs. Favoritism:** the tensions between the expectation for fair treatment of all, regardless of job position or status in an organization versus the expectation of favoritism and support that comes naturally with friendship.

- **Openness vs. Closedness:** The tensions between the need to be open and expressive in a friendship versus the need to be strategic and/or closed about communication due to work roles.

- **Autonomy vs. Connectedness:** The tensions between the freedom to choose independence/autonomy in the friendship versus the freedom to choose dependence/connectedness in the friendship.

- **Judgment vs. Acceptance:** The tensions between the accepting nature indicative of friendships versus the criteria/judgments necessary for maintenance of friendship.

In Bridge and Baxter's study *Blended Friendships: Friends as Work Associates* (1992), three communication strategies were used repeatedly in attempt to manage the dialectical tensions: selection, separation, and integration. These strategies are defined in context as:

- **Selection:** This strategy involves “taking sides". To manage the ambiguity, blended friends employing this strategy privilege one portion of the tension over the other, as in focus on the work relationship at the demise of the friendship, or vice versa.
• **Separation:** In this strategy, instead of choosing one of the poles to the exclusion of the other, blended friends compartmentalize the work and friend-based areas of their relationship. For example, while at work they do not act as friends or talk about friend-related activities, and while being social they do not bring up work-related topics.

• **Integration:** Integration is the strategy that seeks to simultaneously fulfill both poles of a given dialectic through one of two channels: by being intentionally ambiguous about the competing demands, and/or cognitively reframing the tensions as to reduce or remove completely the perception of pole competition. For example, if two coworkers have a very close friendship, and they work very well together they may insist that “the friendship has helped them be better workers” whether that is accurate or not.

Finally, Bridge and Baxter (1992) identified five contributing factors that may affect the presence of tensions and the ways in which they are managed. These factors were considered when relevant to the data analysis of the present study. The contributing factors are formalization, work group cohesion, status-equality, closeness and dual-role tension, defined as:

• **Formalization:** Refers to the formality of a given organizational culture. Formality is exemplified by the idea of valuing peoples’ work roles more than valuing people more holistically, as unique individuals with personal characteristics beyond work roles.

• **Work-Group Cohesion:** Indicates the closeness, effectiveness, and camaraderie experienced by work-groups.
• **Status-Equality**: Portrays how organizational/hierarchical status effects the experience of dialectical tensions and how they are managed. For example, two peer coworkers who share the same position will likely experience different tensions than a superior and a subordinate.

• **Closeness**: Refers to the relational closeness that the two people being studied experience. This also refers to the level of friendship that they experience (informational peers, special peers, etc.).

• **Dual-Role Tension**: Indicates how pronounced the tension between the friend role and the organizational role are, or how at odds they are with one another.

These previously found tensions, management strategies, and factors were used as a framework for exploring which dialectical tensions exist between superiors and subordinates with the added dimension of Facebook friendship. The next section of this chapter will identify and describe the most prominent dialectical tensions, the communication strategies that participants used to address these tensions, and contributing factors. Illustrative quotes and examples taken from dyad interviews will be used to support study themes.

**Major Dialectical Themes**

Dialectical tensions can be characterized as the in between, or the gray area of communication between two communicative/relational goals. Likewise, defining each pole of the dialectic separately generates better understanding of the tension itself. The six tensions identified by Bridge & Baxter’s (1992) blended friendship study are equality/inequality, impartiality/favoritism, openness/closedness, autonomy/connectedness, judgment/acceptance, and instrumentality/affection. While all
of the six dialectical tensions appear at least once in the current study’s data, autonomy/connectedness and openness/closedness were the most dominant tensions. These tensions and associated communicative management techniques will be described and analyzed. Overall, study findings show that blended friendship tensions endure within the Facebook context. Further, Facebook provides a new channel with unique implications for strategic management of relational work/friend tensions. These findings are discussed next.

**Autonomy/Connectedness: Emergence of the Efficient Friendship**

Recall that this dialectical tension represents the oppositional forces of choosing independence/autonomy from the friendship and choosing dependence/connectedness from the friendship (Rawlins, 1989). The essence of all relationships is captured in the autonomy/connectedness dialectic because all relationships are an ongoing negotiation of tension between being one independent entity and two closely connected people. Rawlins (1989) defines this contradiction as:

> The freedom to be independent is the liberty to pursue one’s life and individual interests without the friend’s interference or help. In contrast, the freedom to be dependent is the privilege of calling on or relying on one’s friend in times of need. Both liberties engender choices for self and other (p. 16).

Participant data from the current study shows a clear presence of the autonomy/connectedness dialectic articulated by Rawlins and others (Gibbs, 2009; Jameson, 2004; Sethi, 2000). For instance, study participants simultaneously yearned for more connection with their superiors or subordinates while also maintaining a certain level of autonomy. They desired connectedness or relational intimacy with the other person in the dyad while simultaneously needed freedom to be their own persons separate
from the blended relationship. This need for independence was most visible when participants discussed workplace friendship and time management. They wanted to maintain the friendship (connectedness) while at the same time do so when it was convenient and accessible to themselves rather than the other party (autonomy). Facebook is an attractive solution to managing the autonomy/connectedness dialectic.

The following quote represents this view:

"It’s neat because it [Facebook friendship] allows you to continue to communicate without having the pressure of I have to call you, and like oh we need to meet up and we can’t meet up therefore we can’t communicate with each other. It’s very easy to do it with Facebook. (Clara: subordinate in entertainment industry)"

Study findings show that the ability to increase closeness between a superior and subordinate and do so on one’s own time had little, if any, presence pre-Facebook and other SNSs. Facebook requires limited or no face time that takes lengthy time and effort. Alongside their face to face friendships, participants agreed that Facebook was a great way to keep in touch without the amount of effort normally required.

The enhanced immediacy of relational communication via Facebook had important implications for these participants. Research has identified four essential communicative maintenance tactic types for superior-subordinate dyads: personal, contractual, regulative, and direct as follows: (a) Personal – The informal interaction used to build and maintain friendship ties; (b) Contractual – Subordinate conformity to role requirements, superior expectations, and general communication conventions (e.g., politeness); (c) Regulative – Tactics that maintain the relationship by regulating contacts with the superior; (d) Directive – Direct negotiation of the terms of the relationship and explicit discussion of perceived relational injustices (Waldron, 1991). Waldon’s (1991)
research shows that the most effective superior-subordinate relationships are rich in all four types of communication maintenance tactic types. Results of this study show that Facebook friendship allows superiors and subordinates to enhance the often elusive personal maintenance tactic, without the large investment of time or energies usually required.

This new relational ecosystem provided by Facebook, has created the opportunity for superior/subordinate participants to develop a different kind of relationship. The ability to receive up to minute updates about their personal lives, opinions, discussions, families, and experiences, without having to invest the time or energy traditionally required, has created a new age friendship for these participants, the “efficient friendship”. The following quote illustrates this perspective:

I think that Facebook has made a difference in mine and my subordinate’s relationship because it [Facebook] gives you more access to their life and you know that you would not have had that access were you not their friend on Facebook. Um, and it’s immediate. There’s immediacy… It’s easier to do it because the immediacy is there and yeah, um, that’s the biggest difference I think. I am able to share a part, and a lot of her life that I never would be able to or have the time to if it wasn’t for Facebook. (John: superior in entertainment industry)

In addition to the time management issue which reveals a need for enhanced time management to maintain dyadic connections and individual autonomy, participants’ comments indicated a second subtheme related to the autonomy-connected tension. They frequently noted that Facebook enabled them to navigate the need to be independent in their work and friend roles while at the same time explicitly showing their shared desire for mutual friendship. All of the superior-subordinate dyads in the sample expressed a desire for connectedness with their superiors and subordinates, noting that knowing more about each other’s personal lives was a positive experience that enhanced the relationship
(connectedness). This subtheme enhances organizational communication findings regarding the importance and benefits of workplace friendship, particularly between superior and subordinate. Research has characterized degrees of openness in superior-subordinate relationships as related to many positive organizational outcomes (Burke & Wilcox, 1969). Workplace friendships also boast many positive outcomes for organizational members (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Johnson et al., 2003; Morrison, 2004; Raile et al., 2003; Sias & Cahill, 1998). Two subordinates specifically commented on the positive elements of being well-connected to one’s superior.

But overall I think it [adding your boss on Facebook] it’s been a good thing and I would recommend it just for the fact that you two get to know each other in this extra way that’s not always possible all the time through just regular face-to-face communication. (Clara: subordinate in entertainment industry)

I actually think it [Facebook friendship] might have made us closer a little bit. Just because we get to go through each other’s photos and keep up with each other. And like I’ve said multiple times, getting to see who each other are. Seeing things about her life and vice versa brought us closer and strengthened our relationship with each other. (Mark: subordinate in retail)

On the other end of the spectrum, participants also indirectly expressed value towards having control over their free time and achieving these relational goals with their superior/subordinate. They used Facebook strategically, seeking limited effort to achieve maximum impact. Facebook allowed participants to remain close and have control over their time and effort invested in the friendship. Extant literature regarding SNS use in the workplace has explored, to a limited degree, use appropriateness and etiquette, influence of use on employee screening and recruitment, and newcomer assimilation/relationship development (Clark & Roberts, 2010; Davison et al., 2011; Levine, 2011). Therefore, this research’s contribution to the literature, regarding maintaining friendship efficiently, is
unique. With increasing use of SNS for workplace functions, the phenomenon of SNS “friendship” is becoming more prevalent among peer coworkers and superiors and subordinates. (Agrawal & Mital, 2009; Anonymous, 2007; Mohanty et al., 2010).

Participants noted that social networking added an element of efficiency to friendship maintenance where the participants could dictate content and frequency of contact. The following quote illustrates this view:

The difference between in-person friendships and Facebook friendship is that you have to actually take the time to spend with them and talk to me or do something with them. Where Facebook doesn’t invade my time, it’s whenever I feel like taking a look at it. (Veronica: subordinate in small business)

Autonomy/connectedness is a dialectical tension that has been historically reported in the superior-subordinate literature (Baxter, 2004; Rawlins, 1983; Swidler, 1980) and findings from this project show the tension again in superior-subordinate relationships when functioning in mediated communication contexts such as Facebook.

However, Facebook appears to enable participants to manage this dialectic better than ever before, reducing the impact of its tension. Facebook friendship as a context for organizational relationship building is transforming barriers between superior-subordinate and peer coworkers by reducing temporal restraints and enhancing the amount and quality of autobiographic information being shared for participants. When used in an appropriately formalized work setting, Facebook friendship seems to enhance personal and work relationships between superiors and subordinates in this study with minimal effort from all parties.

When confronted with the autonomy/connectedness tension, participants in this study reported using all three negotiation strategies (selection, separation, and
integration). Participants used separation and selection sparingly due in part to the intimate nature of the Facebook friendship. Many participants reported that they waited until their personal criteria for traditional work friendship was fulfilled before adding the superior/subordinate as a Facebook friend. Their behaviors aligned with the previous literature which describes separation as being used to compartmentalize the work and friend roles of the relationship, and selection as “taking sides” or starkly privileging one aspect of the blended relationship to the exclusion of the other. Examples below show participants’ perceptions of these communication strategies.

**Separation:** I mean we are pretty good at keeping the workplace separate from our friendship. I mean we know when we have to be professional and when we can be friends and stuff like that so no there’s never really been a conflict with that stuff. (Mark: subordinate in retail)

**Selection:** Well we’re friends on Facebook so I get to see pictures of (my superior’s) children because I really enjoy seeing those... that’s why we’re friends on Facebook but otherwise than that we don’t spend any time outside of work with each other. We just work together basically that’s what we do. (Veronica: subordinate in small business)

**Integration:** I think that our Facebook friendship has made us a closer team and made us a lot closer and we work very well together. I think that it’s usually the case we get a lot of stuff done and when people come in they feel good because we’re on good terms with each other. And if there is like a bad relationships there, it is easy to spot that and it might give those people a bad vibe of the [our organization]. We always make sure to keep things at a professional level if there are people involved we’re not screaming our heads off or blasting music or anything. Being friends on Facebook has made us very close friendship-wise and it has made us closer as a superior and subordinate and had a great impact on our job performance overall. (Emma: subordinate in facilities management)

Facebook appears to heighten participants' ability to achieve integration by contributing to the cognitive reframing process. Cognitive reframing is the process by which one breaks existing mental schemas and replaces them with others that cause the experience of any situation to become more pleasing, tolerable, or positive (Ellis &
Grieger, 1977). By actively participating in the Facebook friendship, participants in this study were able to reduce the tension between a desire to be close with their superior/subordinate while at the same time retain autonomy in the relationship. For instance, dyads were able to create and sustain high levels of connectedness by chatting on Facebook messenger, writing on each other’s walls, “liking” statuses, photos, posts and other comments, and browsing photos and videos the users have posted. This sharing occurred on participants’ own time and by their own choice, thus engendering a heightened level of autonomy. For example, a subordinate or superior could log on to Facebook at any time to view new photos, posts, updates and other artifacts shared by users. Because of Facebook friendship, participants were able to enjoy high levels of autonomy and connectedness simultaneously. Across dyads, Facebook friendship acted as the bridge of this gap, as reported in the following participant exemplar:

I think that Facebook has made a difference in mine and my subordinate’s relationship because it [Facebook] gives you more access to their life and you know that you would not have had that access were you not their friend on Facebook. Um, and it’s immediate, there’s immediacy… It’s easier to do it because the immediacy is there and yeah, um, that’s the biggest different I think. I am able to share a part, and a lot of her life that I never would be able to or have the time to if it wasn’t for Facebook. (John: superior in entertainment industry)

In summary, the emergence of the autonomy-connectedness theme in this study supported the literature reported in chapter two. Like past research on blended friendships (Baxter & Bridge, 1992) superiors and subordinates experienced tension between a desire for connection versus a desire to remain independent. The added factor of Facebook friendship altered this relational context by helping participant dyads bridge the gap between work and friend roles and thereby managing the tension more effectively.
Facebook facilitated communication management techniques (selection, separation, and integration) to meet the needs of the autonomy-connectedness dialectic for participants. Facebook friendship in this study enabled the participants to relate in a new, convenient, and user-friendly context for integration. Facebook presented a unique context for the "efficient friendship" in which superiors and subordinates are not required to participate in as much traditional face time to enjoy mutually satisfying relationships.

**Openness/Closedness: Shared Understanding of Separation Boundaries**

Another dialectical tension present in the data is openness/closedness. Because of the role-centric nature of the superior-subordinate relationship, appropriate levels of personal and professional revelation are constantly changing, and vary greatly from organization to organization. In the context of blended friendships, the openness/closedness dialectic can be understood as the tension between the need to be open and expressive in a friendship and the need to be strategic and/or closed about communication due to work roles (Rawlins, 1992). Because of this formal position or job status in organizations, people may use some strategic or closed communication to avoid revealing information that may be considered inappropriate or too personal for the workplace (Eisenberg, Goodall & Tretheway, 2010; Level and Johnson, 1978). Such filtering enables employees to maintain privacy as well as establish work/life boundaries (Baxter, 1990, 2004; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Bridge & Baxter, 1992). The following quotes are some representations of the openness-closedness dialectic in the study.

I would stay I’m still struggling in a sense. And I found myself this past weekend like I wanted to stay and talk with her and I wanted to be a little more personal and then I was like “I’m her boss”. And then that stopped me for a minute, but not
for too long because I eventually went on with my story and I decided to trust her. (Melissa: superior in facility management)

I do have restrictions on Facebook, but not on my boss because she is not one of them. She is on who is privy to all of my information because I trust her. I know she’s not going to like blab or anything about my personal status. I consider her one of my very close friends and I know I shouldn’t hide anything from one of my close friends or anything. I keep things private because I’m like trying to get a job after college. (Emma: subordinate in facility management)

Overall I think that for the most part even when I’m looking at overall if I accept the friend request from one of the [subordinates], it is because we have a bond that I can trust what they are posting too. I can be selective. And I never ask to be their friend. And if they do initiate it I look at it from a perspective like do we have a friendship outside of work as well? So if I have you know more of a relationship where I talk to them more on a personal level too and I know that they’re comfortable with seeing my stuff and back and forth too then I will accept their friend request. It’s not like I’m friends with everybody at work. (Nancy: superior in organizational programming)

These quotes demonstrate that while participants desire a transparent relationship with their bosses or employees, they understand the importance of placing boundaries on this friendship in order to preserve both work and personal relationships. They purposefully use privacy settings or other filters provided by Facebook to enforce desirable boundaries. This relates to the literature in that with proper boundary-setting, Facebook friendship among coworkers and superiors and subordinate can far outweigh the potential disadvantages (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009).

Alternatively, people also have a need to reveal things about themselves and build relationships with their coworkers, subordinates, and superiors. Many of the participants in this study talked about their comfort with transparency both at work and in personal life. To these participants, sharing meant authenticity, and they expected their superiors and subordinates to accept them as such. Parallel to the existing organizational communication research, this theme enhances the conclusion that impression
management on SNSs is deliberate, and provides a way to show one’s genuine self to the world, including superiors and subordinates (Eluchette and Karl, 2010). Several participant comments illustrate this view:

Um I just don’t really care. I just mean my Facebook. I know how to separate my professional life from my personal life. Who cares these are my Facebook pictures this is my life this is what I do and I don’t really care who sees it like it doesn’t mean I’m doing these things at work. It just gives people an inside into who I am, what I do, that sort of thing. And you can take it or leave it. (Mark; subordinate in retail)

What I do on my own time is my own time. You know it’s kind of like, I don’t know, I have my friends and this and that, you know it’s just like you go to work, you make your money and you come home, you know that’s just the kind of person that I am. I’m very fine being completely by myself and not people knowing what’s going on in my world. Not that I have anything to hide I just like to be more on the private side. (Veronica: subordinate in small business)

I mean once you’re my friend on Facebook I mean it’s kind of like real life, I don’t, like, hold a whole lot back. I feel comfortable with it and I know there is a lot of stuff with Facebook privacy but you need to just choose who you want to be friends with wisely. (Clara: subordinate in entertainment industry)

What is the result of such transparency in workplace friendships? According to communication scholarship, sharing personal and/or non-work related information helps develop positive rapport with others and can contribute to a cohesive, supportive work environment (Sias, 2009). Participants provided examples that support past research findings. For instance, one subordinate in the study noted that if he had never known about some of his subordinate’s special interests outside of work by looking on her Facebook profile, he would have never known they had those things in common. When the subordinate found out this information it spurred a conversation, which deepened their connection, which enhanced their connection.
A subtheme in the openness/closedness dialectic is the degree of comfort participants experienced in revealing their authentic selves to their superior or subordinate. Data revealed that some participants struggled and were uncertain about managing the dialectic. Others showed confidence in their management techniques. Why did the participants show differences in confidence levels with their management techniques? A few factors may be relevant here. One possible explanation is the perception of the relationship from each member of the dyad. If both participants understand and are comfortable with the management techniques, then there is no problem. The problem may lie in the dissonance among perception of the relationship between dyad members. For instance, dyads who were struggling with the management techniques possibly perceived the relationship differently. If the subordinate was extremely willing to share personal information and the subordinate was not, there may be a disconnect among understanding of boundaries, and therefore, tension regarding what is acceptable. The quotes below exemplify these varied perspectives regarding management techniques:

**Struggling with Management:** I would stay I’m still struggling in a sense. And I found myself this past weekend like I wanted to stay and talk with her and I wanted to be a little more personal and then I was like “I’m her boss”. And then that stopped me for a minute, but not for too long because I eventually went on with my story and I decided to trust her. (Melissa: superior in facility management)

**Confident in Management:** Um I just don’t really care. I just mean my Facebook. I know how to separate my professional life from my personal life. Who cares these are my Facebook pictures this is my life this is what I do and I don’t really care who sees it like it doesn’t mean I’m doing these things at work. It just gives people an inside into who I am, what I do, that sort of thing. And you can take it or leave it. (Mark: subordinate in retail)

Although participants used all three communication management strategies to
navigate the openness/closedness dialectic, the most frequently utilized strategy was separation. Recall that the separation strategy does not force participants to choose one of the poles of the tension to the exclusion of the other, but rather compartmentalize the work and friend areas of their relationship. For example, while at work they do not act as friends or talk about friend-related activities, and while being social they do not bring up work-related topics (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). Separation enables both parties in the relationship to maintain defined roles, enabling them to choose when to be open and when to be closed or private. The following quotes are exemplars of participants’ opinions

You know it’s just you go to work to make your money and then you come home. That's just the kind of person that I am. (Veronica: subordinate in small business)

It is actually very seamless. There really isn’t a dividing line or anything like that. We understand our jobs and responsibilities [at work] and we just go with the flow. The friendship never really gets in the way. (Emma: subordinate in facility management)

Um I just don’t really care. I just mean my Facebook. I know how to separate my professional life from my personal life. Who cares these are my Facebook pictures this is my life this is what I do and I don’t really care who sees it like it doesn’t mean I’m doing these things at work. It just gives people an inside into who I am, what I do, that sort of thing. And you can take it or leave it. (Mark: subordinate in retail)

Participants in this study were very forthright about using separation of work and personal lives as the best way, in fact the expected way to handle the blurring of friendship/work lines that is enhanced by Facebook friendship. In contrast to the autonomy/connectedness tension, the openness/closedness tension appeared to best managed by participants separating work from personal life. Participants reported that indeed, separation is the clear expectation for managing the tensions that Facebook
friendship can create in the superior-subordinate dyad. Participants were unable to report where this expectation originated, which points to a possibly intrinsic acceptance of norms.

In summary, the open/closedness dialectic represented the ongoing tensions dyads experienced between sharing themselves with one another and being more private. This tension is particularly pronounced in the superior-subordinate relationship because of competing needs between organizational goals and personal goals. The most used communication management strategy in managing openness/closedness was separation which allowed dyad members to separate their work lives and personal lives, ideally without compromising one or the other.

The next section of this chapter considers the additional factors that contributed to the conclusions and dialectical tensions within these dyads. Specifically, contributing environmental, contextual and relational factors cited by Bridge & Baxter’s (1992) study are compared to the contributing factors present in this study.

**Contributing Factors**

The dialectical tensions that were most evident in the sample, autonomy/connectedness and openness/closedness existed within an organizational environment consisting of numerous contributing factors. These factors contributed to how the superior-subordinate relationship is developed and maintained (Baxter, 2004; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For instance, Bridge & Baxter (1992) referenced several organizational factors that contribute to the experience of dialectical tensions in the blended friendships. These factors include:
• **Formalization** refers to the formality of organizational culture. Formality can be reduced to the idea of valuing peoples’ work roles more than valuing people as individuals.

• **Work-Group Cohesion** refers to the closeness, effectiveness, and camaraderie experienced by work-groups.

• **Status-Equality** refers to how organizational/hierarchical status effects the experience of dialectical tensions and how they are managed. For example two peer co-workers who share the same position will likely experience different tensions than a superior and a subordinate as was revealed in this study.

• **Closeness** refers to the relational closeness that the two people experience. This also refers to the level of friendship that they experience (informational peers, special peers, etc.).

• **Dual-Role Tension** refers to how pronounced the tension between the friend role and the organizational roles are.

Although all of these contextual factors are present in the data, formalization and closeness are most prominent. For participants, formalization was recognized as a factor present in their organizational culture that they observed in others’ communication and/or experienced themselves in work relationships. For example, one subordinate learned of the lack of formalization in his work culture when he interviewed for the job with his now superior. The questions, dress and attitude were very casual. Another superior learned by watching her higher superior in the organization the amount of formalization that was necessary for this position. In this position she was managing the first impressions of a large organization, and, thus, higher levels of formality and
professionalism were expected of her work. When describing their respective workplace cultures participants used words such as “strict” to describe formal settings whereas less formal settings were described as ones in which traditional superior-subordinate status roles “didn't really apply” to them. Overall, participants recognized the influence of organizational culture formality on workplace relationships and their communication behaviors within in their blended friendship reflected organizational culture expectations.

The following quotes are representations of how formalization functioned within the superior-subordinate Facebook friendship:

My relationship with my subordinate, just what I said in general, Facebook brings us closer together, keeps it closer, keeps us in contact constantly. It makes our relationship less of this boss and subordinate type formal thing. We can get to know each other on that other level. We are more of friends this way. (Melissa: superior in facility management)

I guess in this position it’s not as strict you know, subordinate-manager type situation, so you know it’s a small office. We’re friends/coworkers. It just all kind of blends together. (James: superior in small business)

Um, our relationship really isn’t as much subordinate-superior as it is friend and co-worker. I feel very comfortable around her, like I said she is a stitch. She’s probably of all the people I work with she is probably my favorite. (John: superior in entertainment industry)

Data suggested that most of the organizations represented in this study are ones described by participants as less formal in nature. It appears that such settings may be more accepting of subordinates and superiors participating in Facebook friendships. Perhaps the use of Facebook friendships helps perpetuate informal, personal relationships in these workplaces. The research literature shows that such settings reduce status differences between superiors and subordinates in ways that can promote more
participation in decision making by employees, more positive rapport between superiors and subordinates, and greater workgroup cohesion (Sias, 2009).

The other major factor present in the data is closeness of the dyad. Participants routinely commented on their feelings of intimacy with the other person in the dyad. Those interviewed talked about feeling close to their superior or subordinate as both coworkers and as friends. As a whole, dyads enjoyed all levels of friendships as cited by organizational communication literature, and also experienced all of the transitions as presented by the literature as well. Gordon and Hartman (2009) have identified three workplace friendship purpose categories of information peers, collegial peers, and special peers. The types of friendships present and the transition points are described in the following quotations:

Um, it actually, she [my subordinate] probably knows just as much if not more than a lot of my other friends because of the amount of time you know we are here you know and I don’t know it’s sometimes it’s good to have somebody as a sounding board for other complaints. I have things I wouldn’t necessarily tell anybody else, you know I can complain about her friends (laughter) it works really well. (James: superior in small business)

Honestly I would consider [my superior] a closer friend in the sense that I work here like a lot and I think she understands me a little better. Like the toll it takes on me with the people and the time and the pressure she understands a little bit more than my friends would. Friends that I don’t work with know that my job takes a toll on me. But they don’t really understand how much. But she knows what I mean when I’m here and I say I’ve got to get out of here I’m exhausted, that’s exactly what it’s like because she’s worked here too so she knows. I would think of her as a little bit closer in that respect since we spend so much time together. (Emma: subordinate in facility management)

I really enjoy being around her [my subordinate] and she’s a very intelligent young lady too so it’s nice to be able to carry on a conversation with somebody from a different generation that I don’t feel uncomfortable around, she and I are far enough apart in age that she would be daughterly like to me. But I don’t consider her a daughter-type figure, it’s more like the crazy awesome sister or cousin I never had. (John: superior in entertainment industry)
Um, I mean Facebook-wise, I would consider her [my superior] on any other close friend I would relate to on Facebook. I treat her just the same as any other close friend it's kind of um, kind of a blurred line between her being my boss and being a friend because we both have such a good relationship with each other. I mean she is really a close friend on Facebook and outside of work, and I treat her pretty closely to how I treat other friends outside of work. (Mark: subordinate in retail)

Facebook plays a viable role in the development and success of these workplace friendships between superiors and subordinates. Some superiors and subordinates cited that information they garnered about one another using Facebook led to enhanced workplace discussions about commonalities, and thus accelerated closeness in workplace friendships that might not have otherwise been obtained. Many participants explicitly stated that the Facebook friendship had made them closer and a better team because of the commonalities they have discovered and nurtured through the use of Facebook friendship.

Taken as a whole, the openness/closedness dialectic and organizational formality were overlapping. The comments of the participants indicated that the degree of closeness in the dyad related to the level of formality in the organization and/or the relationship. Closer relationships existed in informal workplaces and vice versa. For example, the same superior in small business who said that their organizational structure “wasn’t really that way” (strict superior-subordinate roles), also testified to the fact he could tell his subordinate “things most of my friends don’t even know” (see previous quotes regarding formalization and closeness). This same example preludes another conclusion; the closeness in the dyad seemed to reduce the intensity of dual-role tensions.
In short, the closer the dyad’s relationship the less difficulty participants reported with managing the dual roles as friends and superiors/subordinates.

Overall, the dialectical tensions of autonomy/connectedness and openness/closedness, combined with the formalization and dyad closeness factors in which they were situated, paints a vibrant picture of how the Facebook friendship changed the way participants related in the workplace. Further research may indicate a similar trend for the majority.

Chapter four reviewed the major themes drawn from data analysis. Results concluded that autonomy/connectedness and openness/closedness were the two strongest dialectical tensions among participants. The parallels between previous research and this study demonstrate the applicability of relational dialectics to understand interpersonal relationship development, an approach that transcends specific communication context. Even with the profound emergence of social media influencing how people relate to one another, those mediated relationships are still characterized by traditional relational tensions and communication strategies. However, what is unique about the Facebook context is its remarkable media richness mixed with its unmatched accessibility. This context also served as the bridge between autonomy and connectedness for participants, which perhaps speaks to its popularity.

Participants drew upon communication management strategies and employed them in a new way in the Facebook context. Contextual factors that affected results most profoundly were the levels of closeness experienced by the dyad and formalization of the organizational culture. Chapter five will summarize major conclusions of the project, address study limitations, and provide future directions for research. This thesis
concludes with practical strategies for superiors and subordinates who engage in workplace Facebook friendships.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

While exploring the relational dialectics and communication strategies at work in this sample, many other communication based themes arose that deserve mention. This chapter will consider ideas for future research based on the themes presented in chapter four. This chapter will specifically address the following topic areas: strategic communication channel choices in social media, social media facilitated peer progression, and the possible influence of sex composition of blended friendship dyads. Chapter five considers practical applications of this thesis' research findings for superiors and subordinates. The chapter concludes with comments on extensions for communication theory and limitations.

Theoretical Extensions

Four theoretical landscapes acted as the basis for this research: Relational dialectics, superior-subordinate relationships, workplace friendships and social media communication. This new information about Facebook friendship as a beneficial relationship context for organizations contributes to all of these areas.

Relational dialectics theory (RDT) asserts that relationships can be defined by the communication between them, and also that these relationships can be defined by the tension existing between two polar wants/needs/desires in the relationship as expressed through communication, or the dialectical tension (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). This study’s findings bolster RDT in that the same tensions that have been reported for decades are still salient in the new social media paradigm. Apart from enhancing the already successful theory, social media has provided a new context for relating, which changes
how these tensions are managed. The immediacy of interaction on Facebook and other SNSs, combined with the novel richness of this online media, provide for new tension management techniques, particularly of autonomy/connectedness in this study. As more superiors and subordinates become friends on Facebook, they may also experience enhanced tension management. Facebook friendship allows superiors and subordinates, and all users in general to stay highly connected, with less investment of time and energy for both parties, creating what can be called “the efficient friendship”.

Extant research shows that superior-subordinate relationships are a site for rich communicative exchanges, as individuals manage multiple and, at times, competing goals (Fix & Sias, 2006; Jablin, 1979; Lee, 1998; Lee & Jablin, 1995; Level & Johnson, 1978). The existing literature demonstrates that superior-subordinate communication is unique from other types of workplace communication (e.g., peer or client-employee). The communication that occurs in these dyads results in important individual and organizational outcomes. Since current theories ascertain the importance of a successful superior-subordinate relationship in the workplace, these findings about how social media can enhance this relationship are imperative. Great superior-subordinate communication involves trust over time (Scott, 1983). This research shows that Facebook relationships between superiors and subordinates can enhance feelings of closeness, trust, rapport and teamwork. As organizations seek to improve their superior-subordinate relationships, providing employees with the proper tools to leverage the power social media, could be a logical next step.

As organizational cultures grapple with shifting norms surrounding the traditional ideas of professionalism, the interactions in workplace friendships have become
increasingly relevant for exploration by communication researchers. Communication research has highlighted the many benefits associated with workplace friendships (Rawlins, 1992; Sias, 2009). Workplace friendships serve various crucial functions in organizational performance and individual personal/professional development. Since friendships in the workplace play such an important role in the overall success of an organization (see Sias, 2009 for a review) the increased camaraderie between superiors and subordinates that is facilitated by Facebook friendship in this study, leave yet another case for why social media relationships in the workplace may contribute to organizational success.

The extant literature regarding SNS use in the workplace has explored, to a limited degree, use appropriateness and etiquette, influence of use on employee screening and recruitment, and newcomer assimilation/relationship development (Clark & Roberts, 2010; Davison et al., 2011; Levine, 2011). With increasing use of social networking for workplace functions, the phenomenon of SNS “friendship” is becoming more prevalent among peer coworkers and superiors and subordinates. (Anonymous, 2007; Agrawal & Mital, 2009; Mohanty et al., 2010) Because of its increased presence in the workplace, it is crucial that communication researchers develop an enhanced understanding of what the social network communication landscape means to organizations and member dynamics. This research provides a new understanding of how social media alters workplace interactions. The results of this study show how the new context of Facebook friendship changes the experience of friendship in the workplace, and when used appropriately, can enhance organizational success via the success of its individual members.
Taken as a whole, the results of this thesis have bolstered and enhanced theories in relational dialectics, superior-subordinate communication, workplace friendships and social media communication. To encapsulate the theoretical extensions, successful Facebook friendships between superiors and subordinates allowed for increasingly successful and trust-based relationships in the superior-subordinate relationship, enhanced workplace friendships that increased productivity and camaraderie, was a new channel for managing the relational dialectics traditionally present in the superior-subordinate dyad, and a new benefit of social media use beyond its initial social aims for participants in this study.

**Practical Applications**

These findings also offer possibilities for application to organizational contexts in which superior-subordinate Facebook friendships exist. The first practical application is in regards to sharing and privacy. When asked about their level of privacy settings on their Facebook accounts, many participants admitted that they were highly uneducated about what privacy settings were available and particularly, how to use them. Participants also reported feelings that Facebook security’s rapid pace of change and limited education makes it very difficult for them to keep up and maintain vigilance about managing their impressions in a way that meets their expectations. This finding suggests implications for human resource policy development and practice. By providing guidance to organizational members in the area of social media, organizational leaders can direct how members represent themselves and the organization on social platforms, instead of simply ignoring the issue. By having an organizational member keep pulse on social media privacy advancements and keeping information accessible to employees could be
very beneficial. Branding expectations could also be set so that if an organizational member’s social media account associates them with the organization, they must follow certain privacy requirements, etc. At very least, organizations could empower their employees to be knowledgeable about social media securities and how to operate them. Two ways this could be enacted is by providing short trainings regarding how to use social media privacy controls or having a team member be charged with being the expert of social media, including employee usage and available user controls.

Another practical application involves training employees about social media communication etiquette, commonly referred to as netiquette. There is still widespread debate about what constitutes proper netiquette in organizations, especially in regards to social media use. Some organizations ignore or minimize the existence of Facebook communication between employees while others may assert directives for employees not to be Facebook friends. This study’s findings show that Facebook friendships may have a variety of positive contributions to the workplace. This research suggests that a third approach may be best. Instead of providing strict directives or ignoring social media’s effects on the workplace, organizations should provide guidelines/suggestions for employee usage of social media. For example an organization might wish to provide the following guideline/suggestions for employee usage of social media:

- If an employee connects themselves to the organization’s page in any way, we ask that you do not speak of your work experiences in any way that is not positive.
- Feel free to use social media to connect with your coworkers and learn about their lives outside of work. We support your choice to connect or not connect with your superiors, subordinates, and coworkers.
If employers actively address the issues with social media in the workplace, they have created an environment where increased closeness and workplace trust could potentially be enhanced.

**Limitations**

As in every research project, there are limitations that may affect results. Because of the exploratory and qualitative nature of this study, a relatively small sample size was used consisting of five superior-subordinate dyads and/or ten total participants. This may have limited the ability to draw widespread conclusions regarding social media friendships between superiors and subordinates, but it did provide a substantial look into the state of the issue. Future research may wish to gather this information with a large sample size, and possibly in a quantitative manner to garner information about large-scale trends on the issue. Because this study is the first to review relational dialectics in the superior-subordinate Facebook friendship, it is important to note that the assertions and conclusions made apply only to the ten people/five dyads that participated in this study. Further research may confirm that trends in these relationships are indicative of many, but only future projects will be able to assert this with an acceptable level of confidence.

A contributing factor to the results of this study that was not reported in Bridge & Baxter’s (1992) study on blended relationships regards employee intentions in their positions. In Western culture, a career job, or one with more long-term potential and in one’s own field is considered colloquially referred to as a “real job”. Part-time, temporary, or underappreciated fields are devalued by culture. Although not explicitly asked of the participants, it is arguable that at least some of the employees interviewed are not in “real jobs” as defined by Western culture. Intentions for long-term job
satisfaction and stability may have affected the dialectical tensions experienced by dyads in this study.

Aside from the sample size and “real job” status, three unintentional trends emerged regarding participant demographics. Almost every participant in this study characterized their workplace place as less socialized than the norm. Although this may be an unintentional trend in participant demographics, it also may be indicative of the fact that superiors and subordinates share Facebook relationships. It is arguable that in order for social media relationships between superiors and subordinates to be acceptable, the workplace must already be less formalized.

The second trend in participant demographics was sex composition. Four of the five participant dyads were mixed-sex, with the fifth consisting of two females. Two of these mixed-sex dyads consisted of female superiors and the other two consisted of male superiors, providing for an equal balance. Extensive research on mixed-sex workplace friendships (including superior and subordinate relationships) notes that mixed-sex dyads enjoy different types of workplace friendships than do same-sex dyads, and are often more limited in their ability to become close friends because of societal norms regarding mixed-sex friendships. Future research may wish to address the differences between Facebook friendships between superior-subordinate dyads with the added factor of dyad sex composition.

The final trend in this data set was the generally positive disposition regarding Facebook friendships in the workplace by the participants. Popular media has long cited the controversy regarding appropriateness of Facebook and other social media friendships
in the superior-subordinate workplace relationship (Anonymous, 2009; Bennett, et. al.; 2010). Thus, this largely positive disposition reported by participants is somewhat surprising. The probable source of this trend is due to the scope of this study. This thesis aimed to explore only those superiors and subordinates who were already Facebook friends and had been so for at least 30 days. Participants were also required to report base levels of Facebook use. Due to the scope of this project, participants would be expected to have an at least minimally positive disposition of Facebook friendship in the workplace since they are currently participating in at least one.

Future Research Directions

This study provided formative research findings regarding superior-subordinate relationship development via Facebook friendship communication that could be usefully extended in future research. One area that may be fruitful for communication scholars is in the area of media richness. Media richness scholarship classifies all communication channels from face-to-face communication to text messaging as having a certain amount of “leaness” or “richness” depending on the amount of communication cues available and the ambiguity of the task (Galbraith, 1977). For example, an employee may choose to speak face-to-face with her boss about an important and controversial issue rather than send a text message or email because face-to-face interaction can provide better vocal, tonal, contextual, and physical cues. In contrast, a manager may text an employee with a quick, straightforward question rather than take the time and effort to ask the same question face-to-face.

Findings from this study suggest that Facebook and other social media avenues offer rich and lean communication channel characteristics that afford superiors and
subordinates control over how much to share, when to share, and how to respond. Differing from email, blogging, and other internet based communications, Facebook offers some qualities of traditional rich media (e.g., interactivity between users and immediacy for those who are almost always logged on to Facebook) and many other real time interactions. In addition, Facebook provides users with extensive customization and personalization options. Everything from romantic relationships status, to location, to favorite films, to pictures just taken on vacation, to videos of a new baby born just a few hours before, social media is hardly comparable to older technologies such as email. Facebook offers a highly relational context associated with face-to-face interactions, yet combines this relational focus with the speed, convenience and access of leaner media.

Another avenue for further research regarding media richness, regards strategic communication channel choices by participants. In order to provide context behind participant Facebook communication choices in this study, the following question was asked: “How does your communication with your boss [employee] compare to other forms of communication that you use in the workplace with him/her? (e.g., email, face-to-face)” Participant answers were saturated with deliberate, strategic choices of communication medium, based on the type of message that was to be conveyed. These assertions regarding participant Facebook communication as a rich/lean media channel could very well be indicative of further research interest. Further research in this area should explore strategic communication medium choices that superiors, subordinates, and coworkers make on Facebook. For example, future studies could explore strategic communication medium choices on Facebook since there are many variable private and public channels available via social media.
The second major area that could be explored in future research is how superior-subordinate relationships progress from information to special peers via Facebook communication. Recall from chapter two the progression of workplace friendship as follows: *Information peers* are essentially acquaintances that share little or no relational friendship qualities but interact for the purpose of obtaining organizationally pertinent information as one’s role may require. *Collegial peers* describe workplace friendships that cover the area between informational peers and special peers. These collegial friendship types share moderate to high relational ties while also reaping the benefits of organizationally pertinent information exchange. Finally, *special peers* are the types of friendship experiencing intimate relational disclosure and high information exchange (Sias, 2009). This thesis' findings suggest that Facebook communication facilitates the development of superior-subordinate relationships by providing members with a rich variety of personal information and artifacts (family photos, blog posts, musical tastes, interests, political views, etc.) For example, participants mentioned that their Facebook connection was either a positive or a neutral experience with their superior or subordinate. Many participants acknowledged that using Facebook served to enhance their overall workplace friendship with their bosses or employees and may have even sped up their workplace friendship trajectory to become more intimate friends.

The final area of consideration for future research is exploring the contribution or influence of sex composition in the superior-subordinate friendship dyads. Study findings show that mixed-sex, superior-subordinate dyads may have different Facebook communication and a restricted friendship trajectory available to them due to societal norms. Communication research confirms that sex composition of superior-subordinate
and even coworker dyads affects the blended friendship progression (Bridge & Baxter, 1992). It is important to note that all of the dyads in the sample were mixed-sex except for one which was comprised of two females. The four mixed-sex dyads were equally distributed power distributions with two dyads consisting of a male superior and two dyads consisting of a female superior. Although no direct reference to sex composition tension was made, it was easily observable in study analyses that the mixed-sex dyads progressed slower and less far in the blended friendship trajectory. There were also some statements regarding awkwardness among the dyads which could be associated with the mixed-sex nature of the dyad. Future research could explore how sex composition of superior-subordinate dyads effects Facebook interactions and friendship trajectory.

In summary, this research project added to the research literature in areas of superior-subordinate relationships, workplace friendships, relational dialectics, and social media communication. This chapter reviewed future research directions, practical application for organization, theoretical extensions, and limitations. This study suggests that organizations should leverage the potential positive aspects of social media in the workplace by providing suggestions/guidelines for relating. Future research should explore Facebook communication between superiors and subordinates pertaining to media richness and sex composition of the dyad as variables. Conclusions of this research have also provided an informational basis from which future research on superior-subordinate/workplace communication with the additional factor of social media may proceed.
REFERENCES


Appendix A

Informed Consent Document

Western Michigan University
School of Communication

Principal Investigator: Dr. Julie Apker
Student Investigator: Raquel Hellenga
Title of Study: An Exploration of Facebook Friendships between Superior-Subordinate Dyads through a relational dialectics Lens.

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "An Exploration of Facebook Friendships between Superior-Subordinate Dyads through a relational dialectics Lens." This project will serve as Raquel Hellenga's thesis for the requirements of the Master of Arts in Organizational Communication. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

The aim of this study is to explore how Facebook ‘friendship’ between boss and subordinate, when added to face-to-face relationship communication, transforms the friendship.

Who can participate in this study?

If you meet all of the listed criteria below, you are eligible to participate in this study.

a) You and your superior/subordinate both live in the Greater Kalamazoo area.
b) If the superior, you must work full-time.
c) You are between the ages of 18 and 80.
d) Both the superior and subordinate have worked together, in the same physical office location, for at least 30 days.
e) The superior and subordinate are “friends” on the popular social networking website Facebook (www.Facebook.com)
f) You and your superior/subordinate have been “friends” on Facebook for at least 30 days
g) You and your superior/subordinate both use Facebook at least once weekly to communicate with each other.

Participants who do not meet the above criteria will be excluded from the study.

Where will this study take place?

Interviews will take place at a time and place convenient to participants. The interview will occur in a quiet location that offers privacy.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?

The time commitment involves solely the approximately 60 minute, in-person interview with the student researcher.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

You will be asked to answer questions about your Facebook ‘friendship’ and overall relationship with your superior or subordinate in a one time, face-to-face, individual interview. Each in-person interview will be audio recorded and the interviews will be transcribed. From these transcripts the student researcher will use standard research protocol for identifying recurring themes across participant interviews.

What information is being measured during the study?

This section will describe the measurements that we are going to take during your participation in the study. Each in-person interview will be audio recorded and the interviews will be transcribed. From these transcripts the student researcher will use standard research protocol for identifying recurring themes across participant interviews. Specifically, researchers are looking for the changes that Facebook friendship between superiors and subordinates may or may not cause.
What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. For instance, the questions posed may cause discomfort. If that occurs, the interview will stop, and the researcher will give the subject the phone number for WMU counseling services.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

There are several potential benefits from participating in this study. Superiors and subordinates may have the potential to understand how the Facebook ‘friendship’ with their boss or employee plays into the relationship. You may also have new realizations about this relationship by conscientiously reflecting on it. The information gathered will be used to write a research report and may be presented at professional meetings. The information may help superiors and subordinates in the workplace better understand how the existence of a Facebook ‘friendship’ transforms their workplace relationships in new ways.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

There are absolutely no costs associated with participating in this study. The one time, 60-minute interview commitment is the only thing required.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

There is absolutely no compensation of any kind for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

All information and responses in connection with this study will remain confidential. Only the student investigator; Raquel Hellenga and the principal investigator; Dr. Julie Apker are eligible to accessing the data. Neither your name nor any identifying information will be used in the reports of the study, even though interviews will be conducted in person, there will be no other individual present during the interview. The only recording made will be an audio tape. Audio tapes will be destroyed after all transcriptions have been done to minimize risks.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You have the right to withdraw from participation anytime without any problems prior to completion of data collection. You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent if you are unavailable to schedule participation or it is discovered that you do not meet all of the inclusionary criteria. An estimated ten people will participate in this study, five superiors and five of their subordinates.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Raquel Hellenga at 269-612-0246 or raquel.n.hellenga@wmich.edu or the mentor investigator Dr. Julie Apker at 269-352-8156 or julie.apker@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subject Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant’s signature Date
Appendix B
Primary Participant Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Raquel Hellenga and I am a graduate student from Western Michigan University. I would like to invite you to participate in a research project about Facebook Communication between Superiors and Subordinates in the workplace. This pilot study looks at how the Facebook relationship between superiors and subordinates may transform the boss-worker relationship. This recruitment is open to those who are currently ‘Facebook friends’ with their immediate boss or immediate subordinate on Facebook. Participants’ information will be kept confidential. If you would like to learn more about this study, please contact me at raquel.n.hellenga@wmich.edu or by phone 269-612-0246.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview with me to discuss the relationship with your boss or employee and its relation to the Facebook friendship. There will only be one interview session, which would take up approximately 60 minutes. Signing the consent document is how potential participants agree to become official participants.

Before deciding whether or not you would like to participate, you will have an opportunity to read a consent document and ask questions. Please keep in mind that participation is strictly voluntary and that refusal to participate will not negatively affect you in any way.

If you are interested in learning more about participating, I will ask you to read the informed consent document provided and sign if you agree to participate. You will not be able to participate in the study if you do not complete the consent form. If you are interested in learning how the data is interpreted, and any other details pertaining to this study please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your consideration.
Appendix C
Informational Handout

Are you Facebook friends with your boss or employee?

Be part of an exciting new thesis study by Raquel Hellenga

Participate in a 60 minute interview and invite your supervisor or employee to participate in a separate interview. Be part of a new exploration in communication research!

Contact me by (end date) to learn more.

269-612-0246 or raquel.n.hellenga@wmich.edu
Appendix D

Email Response Script to Primary Participant

**Description:** The primary participant (superior or subordinate who is a graduate student at WMU) will contact student investigator via email after an in-class presentation with the PowerPoint informational handout explaining the study (see Appendix A). The student investigator will respond with the following email script once the email to learn more about the study has been received. The goal of this email is to gain the contact information of the primary participant’s subordinate or superior (the secondary participant).

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Hello _____,

Thank you for contacting me to learn more about my study on how Facebook friendship transforms the superior-subordinate relationship. Please thoroughly read both the recruitment script and the informed consent document. After reviewing this document please respond to me via e-mail regarding your decision on participation. Please feel free to contact me either by phone or e-mail at raquel.n.hellenga@wmich.edu or (269) 612-0246. Please respond with a decision by (response due date).

Also, in order for you to qualify for participation in this study both you and your (superior/subordinate) must complete separate interviews. When you respond, please include an e-mail address for your (superior/subordinate) as well as a simple statement granting me permission to contact this person directly such as "I give you permission to contact my (superior-subordinate's name here) via e-mail for purposes of this study."

Again, do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Raquel Hellenga
Master’s Candidate
School of Communication
Western Michigan University
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Appendix E

Secondary Participant Recruitment Email Script

Description: The primary participant has responded to the student investigator to learn more about the study. The student investigator has responded via email to gain the contact information about the primary participant’s superior or subordinate (the secondary participant). Once this contact information has been received, the student investigator will contact the secondary participant with this email message.

Hello, my name is Raquel Hellenga and I am a graduate student from Western Michigan University. [name of primary student] suggested I contact you to invite you to participate in a research project about Facebook Communication between Superiors and Subordinates in the workplace. This pilot study looks at how the Facebook relationship between superiors and subordinates may transform the boss-worker relationship. This recruitment is open to those who are currently ‘Facebook friends’ with their immediate boss or immediate subordinate on Facebook. Participants’ information will be kept confidential. If you would like to learn more about this study, please contact me at raquel.n.hellenga@wmich.edu or by phone 269-612-0246.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview with me to discuss the relationship with your [insert name of primary participant] and its relation to the Facebook friendship. There will only be one interview session, which would take up approximately 60 minutes. Signing the consent document is how potential participants agree to become official participants.

Before deciding whether or not you would like to participate, you will have an opportunity to read a consent document and ask questions. Please keep in mind that participation is strictly voluntary and that refusal to participate will not negatively affect you in any way.

If you are willing to participate, I will need you to read the informed consent document provided. You will not be able to participate in the study if you do not complete the consent form. If you are interested in learning how the data is interpreted, and any other details pertaining to this study please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your consideration.
Appendix F

Interview Set-up Email Script

1. Primary participant emails me back with agreement.
2. I contact the subordinate via email.
3. Subordinate Emails me back with agreement.
4. Final email sent out to set up individual interview times.

Hello ______,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study on how Facebook friendship transforms the superior-subordinate relationship. The next step in the process is to set up an interview time and location. The interview will be in person with just you and me. The interview will last for approximately 60 minutes and will be audio recorded. If you have any questions feel free to contact me either by phone or e-mail at raquel.n.hellenga@wmich.edu or (269) 612-0246.

If you have no questions, please respond to this email by (response date) with a list of three dates and times that will work for you within my schedule over the next four weeks. My available interview times are as follows:

Week of ______
12/23: 4 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Along with available dates and times please inform me if you have a preferred interview location at your place of work. The location needs to provide privacy and quiet for the duration of the interview. If you would rather meet on Western Michigan University’s campus or another location of my choosing for the interview, please inform me of that as well.

Thank you and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Raquel Hellenga
M.A. Candidate
School of Communication
Western Michigan University
5. Confirm a time and place with superior
6. Confirm a time and place with subordinate
1. Primary and secondary contacts have confirmed interview dates, times, and locations.
2. This email is sent 3 business days before the interview as a reminder.

Hello _____,

I am looking forward to our interview on (date) from (time-time) at (location). You do not need to bring anything with you. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns between now and our interview. Thank you again for volunteering your time.

Sincerely,

Raquel Hellenga
MA Candidate
School of Communication
Western Michigan University
Appendix H
Interview Guide

Opening Statement

“Hi, my name is Raquel Hellenga and I am a graduate student at Western Michigan University. Thank you for agreeing to help me with my thesis project. The purpose of my project is to study explore Facebook friendship in superior-subordinate relationships in the workplace. My focus is on how communication using Facebook—messages given and received—figure into your relationship development with your immediate superior [subordinate]. I want to remind you that your responses will be kept confidential and your responses will not be linked with your name. I have designed this interview process to take approximately 60 min.

Your insight is important and I appreciate your willingness to help me understand superior-subordinate communication in a social networking context. This research may also potentially you by further understanding and enhancing your workplace communication. Before we begin the interview, I will review the informed consent document and answer any questions. Your signature on this document indicates you choose to participate in the study and agree to be audio taped. [Review informed consent document]

If you do not wish to participate you may leave at this time. Thank you for coming”

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your current position at ________.
2. Your involvement in this project means that you are Facebook friends with others. What does it mean to be a friend on FB? How does it compare to being a friend in a more traditional sense (e.g. face-to-face)?
3. Describe your boss [employee] and your relationship with him/her. [Probes: How long have you known each other? How did your friendship start? Evolve?]
4. Tell me about a specific time when you felt were pulled in different directions because you had two different relationships with your boss [employee]—one as a friend and one as a boss [subordinate]. [Probe for multiple stories]
5. I know you are FB friends with your boss [employee] but is it a friendship in a larger sense, how does it compare to you friendships with others? [Probes: Other face-to-face friendships? Other Facebook friendship?]
6. How does your communication with your boss [employee] compare to other forms of communication that you use in the workplace with him/her? (e.g., email, face-to-face) [Probe: forms of communication strategies]
7. Describe the process which led to you and your boss [employee] becoming friends on Facebook? What was your reaction to this part of your relationship? [Probe: specific conversations, stories]

8. Describe your current Facebook communication with your boss [employee].
   a. Participants can access their Facebook friendship pages via laptop of their own or one provided by the investigator here to facilitate recall of types of discourse with boss or employee.
   b. Student investigator will probe for: content examples (e.g., writing on each other’s walls, messaging each other, chatting each other, liking pictures and statuses of one another) and frequency of use for employee-boss friendship communication.

9. Earlier, we talked about having dual friendship and workplace roles. Recall a time when you were trying to manage your role as a friend and as a boss [employee]. Did that play out on Facebook? How so? What did that look like? [probe for multiple stories].

10. Do you have any restrictions on your profile that keep information from your boss [employee]? What prompted you to choose those restrictions? [Probe for multiple stories, tensions in dual roles, restrictions as a communication strategy]

11. Have you had any instances in which you held back or edited information on Facebook because of your friendship with your boss [employee]? What prompted those choices? [Probe for multiple stories; tensions in dual roles, restrictions as a communication strategy]

12. How do you think that being Facebook friends with your boss [employee] has influenced your relationship overall?

13. What types of advice would you give to other people who are considering a FB friendship with their boss?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add that would help me better understand how Facebook has contributed to the relationship between you and your boss [employee]?

**Closing Statement**

Thank you for coming today and sharing your time with me.
Appendix I

Codebook

1 – Relational Dialectic Present
   • Autonomy-Connectedness
   • Openness-Closedness
   • Impartiality-Favoritism
   • Judgment-Acceptance

2 – Management Technique for present Relational Dialectic

3 – Tertiary Themes
Appendix J

HSIRB Research Protocol Approval

Date: March 3, 2012

To: Julie Apker, Principal Investigator
Raquel Hellenga, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 12-02-05

This letter will serve as confirmation that the change to your research project titled “An Exploration of Facebook Friendships between Superior-Subordinate Dyads through a Relational Dialectics Lens” requested in your memo dated March 30, 2012 (to expand recruitment procedures by using personal networks for recruitment and revise recruitment materials accordingly) has been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: February 28, 2013