

# **PROJECT DEMONSTRATING EXCELLENCE**

*Psychosocial factors that bind adults in a long-term, spontaneous group process: A grounded theory inquiry*

**by**

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## **Abstract**

This study used the grounded theory qualitative methodology to identify the psychosocial factors binding adults in a long-term voluntary social group. Consistent with the social constructionist perspective adopted for this study, data were collected from the stories that the group members voluntarily recalled about their relationships. Narrative analysis was conducted to identify themes common to the data. The study identified 12 psychosocial factors contributing to the long-term harmonious social relationships of the group members. Together these 12 psychosocial factors were associated with a secure attachment pattern among group members. This study extrapolated from the research data a general theory of organizational relationship patterns that posits four primary categories of organizational attachment: secure, avoidant, anxious, and fearful. Further, this study adopted the social constructionism perspective and posited that the organizational relationship patterns identified by this study are a social construct that exist independent from and antecedent to individual dyadic relationships.

## **Dedication**

To the Early Birds, of course, the wonderful folks who have shared so completely in this  
adventure.

May we never lose the third ball.

Thanks!!

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### *Research Overview*

In my admittedly limited experience as a clinical psychology intern it has struck me repeatedly that every client I have worked with has had some problem in relationships. That is, the “problems” presented by each client could be stated in the language of relationships. For the clinically depressed client, it could be a severely diminished set of relationships with both individuals and social groups. For the client with Axis II disorders, it could be conflictual relationships fraught with emotional volatility. For the client coping with the psychological imprints of trauma and abuse, it could be the loss of trust and efficacy in intimate relationships. And even for the client struggling with existential questions of self-meaning and self-worth, it could be an internal relational conflict of values and beliefs.

In each case I have also noticed that those individuals who had supportive preexisting social networks – whether a biological family that had stuck by them through their difficulties, or a social network of friends and business associates – had the best prognosis for restoration of psychological well-being.

In each case the therapeutic path has followed a similar course: facilitate the client’s restoration of supportive and sustainable relationships. For the depressive individual it has been the process of life enrichment through building connections with friends, family, and social groups. For those with Axis II disorders it has been skills training and affect regulation aimed at caring for self in relationship with others. For the client coping with the imprints of trauma it has been finding meanings in what could only previously be described as senseless relationships and the trust to enter again into relationship. And for the client with existential angst, it has been integration of the intrapsychic relationships.

In all cases it has been my overwhelming conclusion that there is a correlation between healthy relationships and psychological well-being. Research such as the MacArthur Foundation Study on Aging in America (1998) has documented clear links between our abilities to form healthy relationships with others and the overall qualities of our adult lives.

Yet at the same time that my clients struggle to form healthy relationships, the exigencies of day-to-day life in America work against them. More often than not, individuals have become separated from the relational nests that both protect and enrich. Trends in contemporary American culture are working against the kinds of long-term social relationships that correlate with psychological well-being. Baumeister (1997), who frequently writes about issues of self-identity, observes that all aspects of our lives – work, social relationships, neighborhood acquaintances, and more – are disrupted by our transient lifestyles making the possibility of long-term close relationships exceedingly difficult to sustain.

My interest was piqued then when I serendipitously joined an informally organized group of tennis players whom I soon discovered has existed uninterruptedly as a group for over 35 years. This group of tennis players, which refers to itself as “The Early Birds”, has informally come together on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday mornings at 6 a.m. for an hour of tennis and a cup of coffee – all without formal organizational structures apart from membership in the same tennis club. What increasingly caught my attention were the relative harmony of the group and the minimum of organizational rules governing behavior. The members, both men and women, simply seemed to enjoy each other’s company sufficiently enough to get up each morning around 5 a.m. to be together.

Given my increasing recognition of the importance of supportive social relationships as a correlate of psychological well-being, it became important to understand what held this group together in what appeared to be a long-term mutually beneficial relationship. I saw then and I still see today, something special in this group that is worthy of examination. It is for this reason that I

have chosen the Early Birds as the subjects of my research study entitled, “Psychosocial factors that bind adults in a long-term, spontaneous group process: A grounded theory inquiry.”

### ***Purpose of the Study***

In this study I intend to identify and analyze the psychosocial characteristics associated with the longevity of the Early Birds as a stable group of what appear to be psychologically healthy and high performing adults. I intend to identify and analyze both the intrapersonal, iconoclastic factors as well as those that could be attributed to the larger more encompassing group culture. I wish to gain a better understanding of what constitutes a psychologically healthy group of adults both in terms of what the individual can contribute to the group as well as what the group can contribute to the individual. I also wish to determine if there are any learnings that can be taken from studying this group that can be applied in general to other groups of adults.

My informal observations of this group have led to several subquestions that may be illuminated by my research study. Note that this list is based on my own personal reflections and may not reflect what is actually interesting or important to the group and therefore may not be included in the final study. Consistent with the grounded theory methodology as described later in this document, the direction of the research will be set by the content of the participant interviews. I anticipate that many of these questions will remain unanswered by this particular study and may become the seeds for additional studies of both this group and other groups. This particular list of questions has guided my preliminary Literature Review which follows in the next section:

- What is the psychosocial culture within which the Early Birds function and how is this psychosocial culture holding together or pulling apart the group?
- Is there something specific to contemporary Western culture that has led to the longevity of the group? Is the group a unique product of Western culture?
- Several members of the Early Birds have been with the group for over 25 years. Is there something significant to the adult life cycle that contributes to the longevity of the group?

- Are there factors associated with how the group has organized itself and how the group members have behaved towards each other that are significant to the longevity of the group?
- Is there something significant to the emotional processes and the way that relationships are formed within the group that contributes to its longevity? What about outside the group?
- Is there a larger construct, as yet not defined in the psychosocial research that can better explain the longevity of the Early Birds?

As the research process unfolds I anticipate that additional questions will become relevant and, consistent with the grounded theory methodology, will be researched in the analysis sections of this document.

### ***Social Relevance of the Research Study***

This is a time of great change, especially in terms of attitudes towards adult lifestyle and aging. We are living longer and healthier lives. Social security administration actuarial studies reveal that 4% of the population at the turn of the century was over 65; at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that number was closer to 70%. At the same time most deaths of our peers are occurring later in the lifespan. At the turn of the century 19% of deaths in the population occurred in individuals over 65; today that number is 72%. (as cited in Rowe & Kahn, 1998)

As we live longer, the importance of paying attention to the factors contributing to living well increases. Research is increasingly demonstrating that one of the key factors in successful aging is the maintenance of social relationships. Berkman and Syme (1979) conducted a study of residents who had participated in the 1965 Human Population Laboratory survey in Alameda County, California. Their research revealed that men and women with diminished social and community ties had a decrease in life expectancy. Their study was particularly important because it provided evidence that the association between social ties and mortality was independent of physical health issues such as smoking, obesity, and alcohol consumption.

More recently, the MacArthur Foundation study of successful aging in America that was conducted between 1988-1996 identifies the role that social ties play as strong contributors to long-term emotional and physical well-being. As the study notes, "... people whose connections with others are relatively strong – through family (including marriage), friendships, and organizational memberships – live longer" (Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p. 153). The study observes that among individuals that they describe as successfully aging it is socioemotional support in the form of "affection, liking, love, esteem, and respect" that is more significant to our well-being than instrumental help in the form of assistance with day-to-day tasks (p. 158). Uchino, Cacioppo, and Kiecolt-Glaser (1996) reviewed several research studies and concluded that there is a link between social support and improved cardiovascular and immune system functions. Also, researchers such as Gardner, Gabriel, and Diekman (2000) and Cantor and Sanderson (2000) recognize the importance of social involvement as key to well-being across the lifespan. We thrive on affection.

In the 1970s Maas and Kuyper (1974) in their longitudinal study of adult lifestyles and personality noted that "old age" should not be considered a terminal point but rather that it must be seen within the context of an entire lifespan. Accordingly, planning for the later years of life must progress along a continuum spanning the entire adult lifespan. Better understanding of the psychosocial factors that contribute to long-term membership in social groups such as the Early Birds may increase our understanding with regard to how to support the type of societal planning that Maas and Kuyper recommend.

At the same time that research has confirmed the importance of social contact to sustain our well-being, we are experiencing unprecedented changes in our society that are pulling our traditional social structures apart. A study conducted in the 1980s discovered that 70% of Americans felt that they had no close friends and experienced this situation as a personal loss in the quality of their lives. (Yankelovich, 1981) Gergen (1991) and others have reflected on the social implications of the "technology of social saturation" ( p. 74). We are living in a world of



increasing speed and change supported by a technological infrastructure that seems to have taken on a life of its own. What we have assumed in our lives to be true and absolute is increasingly exposed as contextually derived and only relatively applicable. We are saturated with information, communications, and conflicting and overlapping requests for our time and our commitments. We are living in the postmodern milieu. (Gergen, 1991)

So, while the mental and physical benefits of emotionally supportive social relationships are clearly documented, the pulls of our cultural and technological environment are increasing the difficulties of entering into and sustaining such relationships. In light of this dialectic, The Early Birds with their over 35 years of continued existence appear to be an island of relatedness in a sea of increasing social and cultural fragmentation and isolation.

A deeper understanding of the psychosocial factors that have contributed to the longevity of this group can contribute to a deeper understanding of what we must do as a society to sustain ourselves in the ever increasingly saturated experience of present day life. Insights gained from this study can potentially contribute to our understanding of how to introduce more of our adult population into the kinds of sustainable social structures that can contribute to their physical and mental well-being and how to plan early in the lifecycle. And as a corollary it may contribute to our understanding of the individual psychosocial factors that may be counter indicative for membership in this particular type of social group and may point instead to equally valid and important, but alternate forms of community.

Equally important, understanding of the psychosocial factors that unite the Early Birds can contribute to a better understanding of other organizational units such as work groups and society as a whole. This understanding can lead to the development of intervention methods that can facilitate secure and lasting social and organizational relationships that will contribute to our personal and social well-being.

## **Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**

In this section I provide a review of the literature related to three somewhat divergent voices: the postmodern and constructionist perspectives, the psychosocial dynamics associated with group longevity, and adult development and attachment theory. I first present the literature related to the postmodern and social constructionist perspectives with regard to the nature of reality and especially with regard to the reality of the self. These perspectives reflect my own beliefs with regard to the nature of reality as a social construction. I start with this section because it serves as a filter and focus for the following sections. It is the lens through which I view the next two sections of the Literature Review.

My Literature Review spirals from the broader and more abstract perspectives of the postmodernists about social processes, into a narrower focus on groups, and finally into a still narrower focus on the individual. The section on group dynamics presents the views of sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists with regard to group processes associated with both group cohesion and group longevity. Finally, in the last section on adult development and adult attachment theory I focus in on what the literature says about how individuals form relationships both with other individuals and with groups in general. I conclude with a final section describing the integration of these three voices into an integrated line of questioning that informs this research study.

### ***The Postmodern and Constructionist Perspectives***

In this section I provide an overview of the postmodern and constructionist paradigms that inform the research study. As stated above, clarification of these paradigms is essential in that postmodernism and constructionism provide the contextual frame for the remaining sections of the Literature Review as well as for the framing of the research question, the selection of the methodological approach, and finally the analytical interpretations. Guba and Lincoln (1994) in

describing qualitative research methods note the importance of founding the research in the basic beliefs of the researcher. The values and beliefs of the researcher influence every aspect of the research process and as such must be clearly articulated.

Having said this, however, it is important to observe that from a social constructionist perspective all paradigms are constructions of the social reality that they seek to describe. A paradigm's "truth" lies in its utilitarianism. Social constructionists would borrow the philosopher Vaihinger's (1935) coinage of the term *functional fictionalism* as the best way to describe paradigms.

### ***An Explication of the Social Constructionist Perspective***

This section includes an explication of the fundamental premises of social constructionism and its sister postmodern "isms", constructivism and radical constructivism. The commonality between the constructivist and constructionist positions lies in their shared denial of an external reality waiting to be discovered by scientific inquiry. Bruner (1986) in his summarization of philosopher Goodman's *Of Mind and Other Matters* (1984) describes this perspective as founded in an understanding that there is no preexisting "reality" apart from that constructed out of human cognition. That constructed reality is brought forth through human interchange and manifested as language.

Several theorists have posited variations on social constructionism based on their particular areas of focus. Radical constructivism, founded on the theories of American psychologist von Glaserfeld (1987) and his European followers Rusch, Schmidt, Luhmann, (Holtorf, 1998) extends the denial of an objective reality to a rejection of knowledge as mirroring a world with a pre-observational existence. Radical constructivism holds "... that we live in a relativistic world that can only be understood from individually unique perspectives, which are constructed through experimental activity in the social/physical world" (Derry, 1992, p. 415).

The radical constructionist perspective is often referred to as the “strong view” (Armon-Jones, 1986) and is distinguished from a “weaker view”. The difference lies in the credence given to the natural world. The strong view rejects even the most basic of naturalist positions such as the existence of the physical world and of ourselves within it. In contrast, the weaker position cedes that there is a physical world but continues to insist that its influence on our behavior and experience of self plays a relatively minor role.

Social constructionism is distinguished from the two constructivist positions in its outward focus on the world of socially shared meaning-making. Where the radical constructivist perspective places its emphasis on the meaning-making process of the individual, the social constructionist perspective is concerned with the collective use of language and social processes as the basis of a shared reality. (Schwandt, 1994) Social constructionism posits that reality is both embedded in and the product of our recursive social interactions. (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Burr, 1995; Watzlawick & Weakland, 1974)

K. J. Gergen and M. Gergen (1991) make an additional distinction between the constructivist and constructionist positions based on the *subject-object dichotomy*. They posit that the constructivist position is an endogenic swing of the endogenic-exogenic pendulum of empiricism. As such it remains firmly entrenched in the modernist paradigm. In contrast, they say, social constructionism transcends this duality by placing the locus of knowledge in the qualities of relationship. The locus of inquiry, if you will, is not on the “boxes” within which we categorize knowledge but rather on the “lines” between the boxes.

Martin and Sugarman (1997) attempt to construct a bridge between the two “isms”. They note that constructivism faces the dilemma of trying to explain how individual minds, operating in isolation from other minds, comprehend or affect other minds and “... how human beings are able to share so much socially” (p. 376). On the other hand, social constructionism faces an equally perplexing dilemma as it tries to explain away individual human agency. If reality is entirely social constructed, who is it that is acting and being acted upon? (1997)

A further refinement, a dialect if you will, of the social constructionist position is held by a group of theorists who refer to themselves as relational constructivist. (Hosking & Bouwen, 2000; Hosking, Dachler, & Gergen, 1995) Relational constructivists, as the name implies, place their focus on the relational processes that bring forth a constructed reality. These relational processes can best be expressed as stories or metaphors. (Cotter & Cotter, 1999)

Dachler and Hosking (1995) describe the relational paradigm as based on six premises. First, knowing is construed as the ability to construct meaning out of a running text. Second, “meaning making is a process, of narrating and a reflection of the oppositional unity of text and context” (p. 10). Third, text and context are inseparable from each other, each driving meaning from the other. Fourth, multiloguing is the process by which meaning is engendered out of the common understandings of the language game. Fifth, meaning is always a process of becoming, never final, never ultimate. And sixth, meanings are limited by the sociocultural context out of which they have evolved.

Constructivism has typically been the domain of psychotherapy and has its origins predominantly in the work of personal construct theorist Kelly (1955/1991) and his subsequent followers. (Bannister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994; Fransella, 2003; Mahoney, 2003; G. J. Neimeyer, 1993; G. J. Neimeyer & Jackson, 1997; R. A. Neimeyer & Mahoney, 1995; R. A. Neimeyer & Raskin, 2000; Raskin & Bridges, 2004) With its centering on the individual as the construer of reality it has established therapeutic approaches and resides, albeit somewhat awkwardly, in division 32, the Humanist division, of the American Psychological Association.

Raskin (2001), one of the chief proponents of personal construct psychotherapy (PCP), describes social constructionism as the “top-down position, emphasizing language, relationships, and social structures” as compared to PCP which “represents the bottoms-up view, accentuating the actively construed individual from whom the relationships and social structures emerge” (p. 368).

Constructionism has typically been the domain of social psychology and has an established lineage which will be elaborated on in detail in this section. Within the discipline of psychology, constructionism resides in division 8, the social psychology division, although its borders are significantly less clearly defining than those of constructivism and extends its reach into all aspects of research and scientific inquiry.

My view is that the distinctions being made between a constructivist psychotherapeutic approach and a constructionist social research approach miss the point. We do psychotherapy from a constructivist approach because our clients experience themselves as individual isolated selves. In most cases as therapists we also experience ourselves as existing as individual isolated entities. We engage in therapy as if the client, the therapist, and the therapeutic process are separate isolates. A social constructivist perspective allows for the possibility of opening up awareness to an expanded, what Varela (1999) calls a virtual view, of self. In a sense, we act out a form of intellectual dissociation. In the words of psychologists Martin and Sugarman (2000) , “... having labored within the straightjacket of modernity they [therapists] enjoy the ludic romp of postmodernism’s radical problematizing without really believing its full social constructionist and deconstructivist implications for themselves and their everyday and professional practices” (p. 398). The paradox of therapy and any other self-development processes is that they require a significant amount of ego strength most typically associated with a modernist perspective to begin the process of ego abandonment which a social constructionist congruent psychotherapy would entail. (Epstein, 1995)

It is the social constructionist position, within which I include the relational constructivist perspective, which I have adopted to frame this study. I do so because my aim in this study is to develop a social constructionist congruent theory of collective emotional processes. Social constructionism and relational constructivism, with their focus on how the individual and collective senses of self and other shape and are shaped by the relationship-building process, are

an appropriate “functional fictionalism” on which to base this study. The rest of what follows in this section is an expanded explication of the social constructionist position.

### ***The Social Constructionist Paradigm***

Social constructionism rejects the concept of an isolate self-identity. The social constructionist perspective on “self” is particularly relevant to psychosocial research. As I have described earlier, constructivism places the locus of reality within the individual whereas constructionism places that locus within the dialogic process. Cushman (1990), summarizing the social constructionist positions of Geertz (1973), Gergen (1985), Harré (1986b), Morawski (1988) , and Sampson (1985) states that social constructionism refutes the idea of a “fundamental pure human nature” that is independent of the psychosocial context within which it is embedded (p. 601). Human nature can only be defined within the context out of which it has arisen.

While social constructionism does refute the concept of an isolate self-concept, its proponents do provide alternate views of what a self might be like. Sampson (1985) posits a view of the self which he calls *constitutive*. In the constitutive view the description of the individual is incomplete unless we include a description of the social network he/she is embedded in. Relationships are not merely attributes of the individual but rather a core component of identity. Changes to relationships result in changes to identity.

This is a view shared by Miller and Prentice (1994) who note that anthropologists are increasingly finding it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the social influences of the individual from that of the group. This view is also shared by Guisinger and Blatt (1994) who note the recursive developmental oscillations between the development of the self-concept and the development of the self-in-relationship concept. Likewise, Turner and colleagues, whose self-categorization theory will be described in detail in later sections, posit that the self is “ ... a flexible, constructive process of judgment and meaningful inference in which varying self-categories are created to fit the perceiver’s relationship to social reality” (Turner, Oakes, Haslam,

& McGarty, 1994, p. 458). Turner et al.'s self-conceptualization theory posits that identity is reconstrued in each social relationship to match the social reality.

Brewer and Gardner (1996) contend that we hold multiple discontinuous self-constructs – personal, relational, and collective – that derive from different “origins, sources of self-worth, and social motivations” (p. 83). These differences depend on whether the relational connections are dyadic in nature such as between a parent and child or whether they derive from an attachment to an abstracted entity such as a social identification. They include in the dyadic relationships those that come about in friendships and small face-to-face groups. One of the questions that may be answered in this study is whether the Early Birds construe themselves as a composite of dyadic relationships or as a shared identity.

Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Blackwell (1987), whose theories of self-categorization will be examined in detail in later sections of this study, share a similar perspective. They contend that there can be tension and conflict between discontinuous and potential incompatible levels of self-identification.

From the social constructionist perspective, of course, how we might choose to parse the self-concept is considered a socially constructed artifact dependent on our sociocultural embeddedness. Indeed, it can be argued from a social constructionist perspective that this question becomes a non-issue. Nevertheless it has implications for the applicability of research derived from one theoretical level of self-identification to research focused on other theoretical levels of self-identification. This question will re-arise later in this study when I review the literature with regard to group cohesion and again when I review the literature pertaining to attachment theory and specifically the application of developmental attachment theory to the study of adult relationships and group relationships.

The most widely theorized about social constructionist as well as constructivist theory of the self is that of the *narrative self*. Hermans, Kempen, and van Loon (1992) for example liken the self to a Dostoevskian polyphonic novel where characters live in multiple worlds, each with



its own author, sometimes engaged in conversation between themselves and sometimes seemingly totally unaware of each other. Bruner (1986) describes the transactional self as the individual sense of self that is built out of the multiplicity of constructions of meaning that occur throughout life. This self is a negotiated outcome built out of the social transactions that occur throughout life.

The concept of the narrative self is the theoretical underpinning of the data collection and analysis methods that I have chosen for this study. Its application to the data collection and analysis processes is explored in detail in the Methodology section of this document.

Social constructionists cite research pertaining to historical and cultural differences with regard to how the self-concept is experienced as support to their views that the self-concept is a social artifact. Markus and Kitayama (1991), for example, examined differences in the self-concept between American and Asian research populations. They observed that the Asian concept of the individual places emphasis on “attending to others, fitting in, and harmonious interdependence” (p. 224). In contrast, Americans “seek to maintain their independence from others by attending to the self and by discovering and expressing their unique inner attributes” (p. 224).

The case for a social constructionist perspective on the self is further supported by evidence of historical changes in how the self and identity have been perceived. Baumeister (1987) in a historical review notes that our contemporary conceptions of self first began to appear in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. New words began to appear in the English language reflecting increased incorporation of self-reflection into the social context: self-praise (1549), self-pride (1586), self-contained (1591), self-regard (1595), self-made (1615), self-interest (1649), and self-confidence (1653).

Social constructionism also refutes the empiricist view of a preexisting reality and instead offers descriptions of the processes by which we co-create a shared reality. This co-created reality is first and foremost built in language. Language provides the means of transcending the gap

between the field of objectification and the fields of others. This co-creation engagement with reality is a life-long process. According to Vygotsky (1978) the child perceives the world not only through his/her sensory capabilities but also through language. As language develops, the child's worldview is altered by the languaging process. Language holds the power of communicating more than the "here and now" experience. It allows for the extension of reality to include relationship with previously constructed versions of reality.

Language then is historical. We learn and are learned by what Wittgenstein (1953/1958) calls the *language game*. Social knowledge and language are synonymous. History and language are synonymous. In Wittgenstein's words, "When I think in language, there aren't 'meanings' going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought" (p. 329).

According to Bakhtin (1979/1986) it is not only the utterance but the response to the utterance that is also socially construed. The listener is responding from within a context of socially construed possibilities. As we engage in conversation with our constructed reality, we attach meaning to what we have externalized as an outward reality. This reality takes the form of our cultural icons – our rituals, myths, social structures. Our organizational structures, social and otherwise, arise out of the on-going continuity of conversation. Much of this conversational intertextuality becomes a background conversation that is by and large unconsciously informing and being informed by our current conversations. (Shotter, 2003) This background conversation acts as "a familiarity or obviousness that pervades our situation and is presupposed by every conversation" (J. D. Ford, L. W. Ford, & McNamara, 2002, p. 107). Shotter (2003) describes this phenomenon as *knowing-from*.

As these meanings become increasingly abstracted, they become separated from the original externalizations. Once separated, they take on a life of their own and both protect and shape us in a recursive relationship that is by and large unconsciously occurring. In this sense man produces himself. He reifies his externalizations. (Berger & Luckman, 1966) Individual

experience becomes objectified into what we consider to be “reality”. Within this process knowledge becomes socially distributed. Identity becomes formed by these social processes. Indeed, our earliest experiences are socially constructed. (Berger & Luckman, 1966) Social reality is presented to us in infancy by our initial caregivers through their interpretive filters. We objectify what we are presented with and then “forget” that we have constructed the objectifications. Socialization continues throughout life as we engage in recursive relationship with the social environment. Out of this we develop through secondary socializations that are role-specific. (Berger & Luckman, 1966) We continually externalize ourselves. (Berger and Luckman suggest that this is a biologically determined motivation.) This becomes our initial and most compelling reality.

If one assumes the social constructionist perspective then there are several implications to be considered. If the self and external reality are considered to be socially constructed, then it follows that what we refer to as our emotions are also social constructions. There are around 400 words in the English language describing emotions. (Harré, 1986a) From a social constructionist perspective when we ascribe one of these emotion words three conditions of use are met. First, although many emotion words are associated with bodily sensation, it is not enough to simply equate sensation with emotion. (This view stands in direct contrast with the James-Lange theory.) Emotion words are expressive of the “deep grammar” of the sociological context. Second, emotions are always about something. They are intentional. And third, they carry with them a local pre- and proscriptive moral order based on “... local systems of rights, obligations, duties and conventions of evaluation” (Harré, 1986a, p. 8). As such emotions are historically and culturally determined.

Emotional development entails the internalization of socially construed rules of emotions. Pathology is assigned to those individual who, for various reasons, incompletely or inappropriately complete this internalization. Averill (1986) describes neurosis from this perspective as the inadequate internalization of constitutive rules. Those who inadequately

internalize regulative rules are described as delinquents whereas those who fail to internalize heuristic rules are described as merely socially inept.

As an example of the social context of emotions, I am reminded of a personal experience that can serve to illustrate the social constructionist position. I am reminded of a time when I was conducting a group therapy workshop in Sweden and was interrupted by the translator as I began an explication of various emotional states that I was associating with anxiety. My translator interrupted me to explain that the many emotional responses that I was describing in English did not have counterparts in Swedish and were clustered all under a single Swedish term. Does this mean that the Swedes have a different sense of anxiety than Americans do with our expanded vocabulary? Social constructionists would say, “yes”.

Emotions, from the social constructionist perspective, cannot be separated from the dictates of the local moral order. (Harré, 1986a) That is, our emotional responses are implicitly or explicitly functional. They are functional in that they serve the sociocultural environment out of which they arise. Emotional constructs such as guilt, compassion, resentment, and anger play a moral role in that they contribute to the preservation of the moral rules of a society. (Armon-Jones, 1986)

These meanings are the basis of what we come to view as ethical behavior. Ethical behavior from a social constructionist position is not based on absolute or natural rules and principles. Rather, ethical behavior arises out of relationship. Because how we choose to be with each other is a construction of our own making, then the results of that constructive process become our own responsibility. The social constructionist position holds that ethics and morality are held not at the individual level but rather within the social relationship. When we speak, listen, and act, we do so from a social perspective and consequently take responsibility for those actions at the social level. (Cotter & Cotter, 1999) Craig (1997) also positions ethical action within the context of relationalism. She proposes that we reject the Cartesian perspective that positions the individual human at the center of the universe and instead recognize our interconnection with all living creatures and our mutual responsibility for our mutual self-protection.

Vitz (1990) drawing on the work of Bruner (1986, 1990), Sarbin (1986, 1998; Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1994), Tulving (1983), and others says that narratives and narrative thinking are the locus of moral behavior. Unlike propositional thinking and reasoning through abstract moral dilemmas, stories provide a far better direction for moral behavior. “Narratives allow us to stop talking about moral life and to point to it instead.” ( p. 718)

Following on from this, Maturana and Varela (1998) posit that ethics are construed out of our coexistence in language. Through language we bring into being a collectively construed reality. This shared bringing forth always has ethical implications and indeed is the only basis for ethical consideration. Consequently, everything we do and say has enormous significance. Varela describes this kind of ethical know-how as “the progressive, firsthand acquaintance with the virtuality of self” (1999, p 63). From this perspective ethical behavior arises as we move our locus of awareness outside ourselves and into the larger social environ that subsumes ourselves within it.

To summarize the social constructionist position, both the sense we have of a self-identity and the sense we have of an external reality are socially constructed. Indeed, the very experience of a self-other dichotomy is a social construct. Social constructionism rejects the notion of a preexisting reality that is waiting to be discovered and manipulated and instead describes processes through which humans bring forth a shared reality. Linguaging is the way in which reality is constructed. Linguaging is the process by which we bring forth a self-concept and collectively bring forth reality. It is by and large an invisible process to us because it has been with us for so long. For this reason it is important to pay attention to the narratives that societies create and tell about themselves. Narratives reveal both the world view and the ways that the world view was brought into being.

Because reality is socially created, ethical behavior cannot be based on preordained, immutable laws. Rather, the interconnectivity of humanity requires that ethical behavior be based

on the awareness of the shared responsibility to bring forth and operate in social organizations of benefit to everyone.

The implication of the view of a conversationally constructed reality is that the quest for “facts” must be abandoned. In a study such as this one that wishes to understand what holds a group or an organization together – or for that matter tears it apart – it is not enough to take at face value the conscious, concrete responses of members to predetermined questions of “factual” importance. Rather, it is necessary to gain access to the background conversations – the myths, values, and beliefs that are embedded in the social discourse – if one is to gain an increased understanding of how this *functional fictionalism* called the Early Birds came into being and continues to thrive.

### ***The Implications of a Social Constructionist Perspective for the Research Methodology***

Adopting a social constructionist perspective has important implications for the selection of the research methodology as well as for the interpretation of the research data. From a positivist perspective the aim of research has been described as a process of improving the ability to predict and control phenomenon. (Hesse, 1980) From this perspective the inquirer assumes the role of “expert” who through the research process both exercises his or her expertise and expands on that expertise and position of authority. This way of knowing is deeply embedded in Western research traditions. Shotter (2003) notes an historical compulsion carried forward from the Greeks through the Enlightenment to seek to uncover the hidden truths that once revealed will contribute to a stable and understandable world order.

In contrast, the social constructionist perspective sees the aim of research as expansion of understanding and construction of new meaning arising out of seeing connections. (Wittgenstein, 1953/1958) Gergen describes social constructionist inquiry as the explication of the processes “... by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including

themselves) in which they live” (1985, p. 266). What becomes “known” through the research is the outcome of a consensual process where multiple ways of knowing are possible and where outcomes are surrendered to continual revision. Such knowing requires that research not be conducted at a distance but rather that it actively engage the subject of inquiry. Outcomes are works in progress and are valued based on their trustworthiness and congruence with what is socially construed as authentic rather than their discovery of external truths or realities. (Gergen, 2001a) Shotter (2003) describes the differences between a social constructionist and an empiricist framework as those between a *monological* and *dialogical* approach. The monologic approach positions the researcher as the single voice in the research. In contrast, the dialogic approach forces a “multi-voiced polyphony” ( p. 62).

Research and theory-building from a social constructionist perspective is a particularly precarious undertaking. Theory-building carries with it an implication of completeness and wholeness of vision. Wholeness of vision, however, is a concept incongruent with a social constructionist perspective. The social constructionist perspective requires that we view all aspects of our being as works in progress, continually unfolding, continually incomplete and in a state of flux. (Shotter, 2003) Any theory that attempts to reify this ever-changing meaning-making process is rejected.

This is not to say however that social constructionism advocates the abandonment of the scientific method or of the body of research that has arisen from its application. Shotter recommends that we escape from this “entrapment” by “studying how it is that we come to entrap ourselves in the first place” (2003, p. 26). Gergen (2001a), speaking from a postmodern perspective, reminds us that empirical psychology with its traditions of practice and observation has as much of a right to be heard as any other dialogues. The point is not to eliminate discourse but rather to open up participation to all traditions. The strength of a social constructionist perspective lies in its capacity, indeed embracement, of multiple voices. It is in the recursivity of dialogue that meaning is brought forth.

A social constructionist perspective also carries with it an ethical imperative for the research process itself. This imperative has implications for the validation of the reasons why research is performed and the ways in which research is performed. The moral relativism of the empiricist tradition is no longer acceptable. The social constructionist perspective tells us that our research and theorizing is a meaning-making process out of which arises ways of being. We must take responsibility for the implications and outcomes of our research and theorizing. (Gergen, 1985)

How then should a research study such as this one that wishes to gain understandings of the processes that bind a group of adults together in a voluntary social organization be structured in order to maintain congruence with social constructionism? First, as Gergen (2001a) suggests, it must minimize the role of the researcher as authority by bringing in more voices into the research process. Second, it must avoid data collection based on preconceptions of what is important to investigate. Third, the researcher must be fully engaged, and indeed embedded, within the research population in order to fully engage with the research population. Fourth, it must ensure that the research is of value to the participants.

The first social constructionist requirement of this study is accomplished through the use of the grounded theory qualitative research methodology. This methodology, as will be more fully elaborated on in chapter three, requires that the data collection process precede the Literature Review. This requirement minimizes the preconceptions that the researcher brings to the research topic and allows the data volunteered by the research subjects to influence the direction of the study. The second requirement is accomplished by collecting data from the stories and narratives that are volunteered by the research participants. This method places the power to decide what is important to the study in the hands of the research participants. They choose what to disclose and what not to disclose in their narratives. This method also acknowledges the social constructionist view that the stories and mythologies of a social organization reveal the often unconscious meaning-making processes of that social organization. The third requirement is



accomplished through my joint role as both researcher and as research participant. As a member of the group being researched I gain additional perspectives for the research that result in the “multi-voiced polyphony” advocated by Shotter. (2003, p. 62). Finally, the fourth requirement has been fulfilled both by the wholehearted support that this research study has received from its participants as well as by the social values identified for this study as articulated in chapter one. Congruent with the social constructionist perspective, the goal of this research study ultimately is not to be “right” but rather to be “useful”. Paraphrasing Shotter (2003), as a researcher I am not seeking “one true view” or a “privileged voice” in the academic conversation. Rather, my research objectives are to be “taken seriously” but as “only a voice in a critical dialogue with others” (p. 183).

### ***The Postmodern Milieu***

In the previous section I reviewed the literature pertaining to how the sense of self from the social constructionist perspective is considered a relativistic and localized concept embedded within the social environment. From this perspective, as the social environment changes then the sense of self must also change. In this section I review the literature with regard to the enormous changes that are occurring in contemporary Western society and how these changes are contributing to a reconstrual of both the self-concept and our world views.

Many theorists use the term *postmodern* to characterize these contemporary Western civilizations and social structures. But what is postmodernism? Gergen, one of the leading theorists expounding on postmodernism, describes the postmodern condition as “marked by a plurality of voices vying for the right to reality – to be accepted as legitimate expressions of the true and the good” (1991, p. 7).

Inglehart (1990) describes four characteristics of the postmodern condition. I have organized the observations in this section about these four characteristics: material affluence,

informational overload, confusion with regard to available cultural alternatives, and the inadequacies of social systems to provide normative alternatives for self-identification.

With regard to material affluence theorists such as Borgman (1992) describe not only an easy access to the products of mass production but also a joyless culture of consumption. Lasch (1978) notes that the meaning of success in America has changed from its earliest conceptions as internal spiritual triumph to its contemporary definition as the gains of competition and acquisition. This is reflected he says in a desire for public acknowledgement not for what one has accomplished in terms of lasting achievements but rather for what one personifies oneself to be in the moment. Baumeister (1997) writes that the shift to a consumer based economy is at odds with personality characteristics such as self-restraint and impulse control – characteristics that we tend to associate with a certain level of healthy psychological maturity. Lifton (1993) describes our postmodern work condition as *work entrapment*. We trap ourselves in endless cycles of consumption and debt that rob us not only of our economic freedom but also of those things that give meaning and coherence to life. The needs of society for a sustained consumerism become the enemy of healthy psychological development.

Authors such as Cushman (1990) posit a causal connection between the loss of community and tradition and our adoption of meaningless consumerism. In the post World War II era, he says, we have redefined what it means to be master of one's own destiny. We have exchanged community, shared meaning, and tradition for a consumer based sense of self. Our mindless consumption however is only a mask covering a profound inner emptiness that we have lost the ability to satisfy.

With regard to information overload, technology has had a massive influence on our ability to both collect and disseminate information and the speed at which this occurs. The records of both the past and the present are readily available to us and are easily replicated, often without consideration for content or value. (Scheibe, 1998) Baumeister (1997) among others writes about the effects of mass media on our sense of self. He describes the effect of information

overload as a “burden on selfhood” that arises from having too much information and too many choices available to us. In a similar vein, Zurcher (1977) prophetically predicted that we would find ourselves challenged to organize the flood of information surrounding us. The unceasing ebb and flow of information also impacts our ability to discern the linearity and ultimately the veracity of the information that we base our life decisions on. (Lifton, 1993)

It is Gergen (1991) however who has perhaps most eloquently written about the impacts of the *technologies of saturation* on our senses of self. The technologies of saturation – media, radio, telephony, internet, rapid transportation, etc. – are all working together, he says, to bring us into contact with more and more varied relationships, and with more and more varied points of view, beliefs, and cultural behaviors. The result is saturation of the self.

Yet at the same time that perhaps more mature and established critics of contemporary Western culture are cautionary about the impacts of information overload on Western culture, there are also signs that our culture is rapidly adapting its behaviors in response to this flood of information. A recent USA Today article (Jayson, 2006) headlined “*Tech creates a bubble for kids*” documents changes in social behavior of children and adolescents who have never know anything but a world dominated by technology. The article describes how children and adolescents “... use technology to facilitate relationships and interactions in a way other generations never have. They are talking on a cell phone, IM-ing somebody, playing Xbox and having three or four parallel conversations, maybe ignoring someone else sitting in the same room” (p. 2D).

It remains to be seen what kinds of social organizations will best serve the current generation of individuals, both those who are adapting and those who may not be adapting, to the rapid changes in our culture. What is clear, however, is that the changes that technology has created to our access to each other and the information that accompanies those interactions, is showing no appearance of slowing down. We will adapt – one way or another.

The third postmodern factor that Inglehart (1990) identifies is confusion with regard to available cultural alternatives. With regard to the wide horizon of cultural alternatives associated with postmodernism, theorists tend to fall into one of two camps: those who emphasize (and despair over) the increased fragmentation and dichotomization of culture and those who emphasize (and sometimes rejoice over) the fusion and commingling of cultures. Gergen's writings (1991; Gergen & Davis, 1985) tend to fall into the first camp. He elaborates on the negative implications for the stability of the personal and interpersonal social structures that we rely on. Gergen describes a psychological experience of multiphrenia "referring to the splitting of the individual into a multiplicity of self-investments" (1991, p. 74). This, he says, is the result of both the intrusions of others ways of being into our self-consciousness as well as our intrusions into the self-consciousnesses of others. The result, he says, is an accumulated sense of doubt in regards to the objectivity of our own values and beliefs as well as doubt in regards to our evaluations of the values and beliefs of others. With this self-doubt in the objectivity of what we had previously thought to be "true" comes an inability to fully engage both with self and other, an inability to form the very lasting social relationships that are so vital for our well-being.

Gergen's predictions that lasting social relationships will be difficult to sustain is particularly interesting in juxtaposition to the intent of this study aimed at understanding the factors associated with the longevity of a long-term social group. Gergen's predictions may not be as generalizable as he would lead us to believe. On the other hand, there may be special characteristics of the Early Birds social group that shields the group from the disruptive influences that Gergen describes.

Hermans and Kempen (1998) fall into the second camp and contend that we are experiencing a hybridization of cultures. Migration is occurring on a massive scale and is resulting in multiple identities such as "... a London boy of Asian origin playing for a local Bengali cricket team and at the same time supporting the Arsenal football club" (p. 1113). From this perspective the individual is seen as embedded in a polyglot of cultural experiences. Cultural

identity becomes far more complex to grasp and takes on the characteristics of a process rather than as a static experience.

Lifton (1993), looking at this same phenomenon of cross-cultural experience, describes the rejection of one's cultural history as a characteristic pattern of what he calls *proteanism*. As he say, "No society has exceeded ours in ambivalence about personal roots" (p. 79). McAdams (1997), following on from the work of Lifton, describes the contemporary protean self as a "... 'hybrid' or 'mongrel', intermingling and interbreeding, transforming itself over time and across situations into new combinations that work in the here and now, in order to live on to meet the next here and now" (p. 49).

Hannerz (1992) also falls in the second camp. He proposes that we look at culture as flow rather than as a static entity. This flow, he says, is dependent on three characteristics of culture: first, the ideas and ways of thinking including values and belief systems that constitute how a culture speaks of itself; second, the ways that these ideas and belief systems are presented and expressed within the culture; and third, the ways that these ideas and belief systems are distributed within the culture. Hermans and Kempen (1998), building on Hannerz's model of culture, conclude that we should therefore abandon the idea of culture as geographically situated. Instead, they suggest, we should look at cultures from the perspective of "intersystems, mixture, travel, contact zones, and multiple identities" (p. 1117).

Inglehart's (1990) final postmodern factor, the inadequacy of systems to provide "institutionally based and culturally normative alternatives to self-identification" (p. 347) and the implications of these failures for our views of the self-system has been a topic of particularly intense focus for sociologists and psychologists. As what we have in the past believed to be absolute and true, the "shoulds" and "should nots" in our lives, are challenged by other belief systems and by the opportunities and choices afforded by easy access to technology and human comforts, we are increasingly challenged to find alternate "structures" as the basis of our self-identity.

Schachter observes that "... social contexts contribute not only to the content of identity but to their preferred structure and form" (2002, p .417). When these structures change, our concept of self must also inevitably change. The challenge of the postmodern milieu is to find alternate structures that can support a self-identity that is in a state of continual flux.

Lifton (1993) notes how the breakdown of our implicit beliefs in the scientific, medical, cultural, and political authorities is exemplified in the number of lawsuits, our general disenchantment with political processes, and our preference for alternate and personal belief systems. MacIntyre (1981) takes the position that it is the lack of congruence between contemporary social structures and the sense of self that is the issue. He contends that in the past the individual was embedded in a cultural environ with few self-defining choices. In contrast, in contemporary society the individual perceives of his/herself as preexisting and separate from the social environ. Baumeister (1997) describes this situation as a "... paradox or tension that continues to define (and plague) modern selfhood: the self exists as something outside of its particular connections, yet everywhere it seeks such connections" (p. 195).

In addition to these four categorizations of postmodernism as described by Inglehart and others there are two other categorizations that I would like to add to his list. The first of these additional categories I describe as the permeation of the postmodern milieu by a low-level but pervasive unnamed anxiety. This undifferentiated anxiety is the result of an awareness that there are forces at play in the world that we have no control of, will never have control of, and that we will never fully understand. Not only do we have no control of these forces, but because we cannot understand them, we have an unnamed fear of them. Where a modernist perspective held the promise of ultimately knowing all that there is to be known as the objects of the universe are revealed through scientific inquiry, postmodernism suggests the opposite. Change is the only constant. A sense of safety is lost.

Lifton (1993) notes that our contemporary worldview is dominated by an awareness of our own self-destructive capabilities and the very real possibility of the annihilation of the species

by our own hand. The information processing capabilities of mass media present us with images of our own destructive capabilities whether it be war, genocide, famine, or a host of other calamities. We are also presented with the increasingly unavoidable conclusion that the planet itself is threatened by our existence. This awareness of our failures as a species leads us to a questioning of our identity at a core level. We have collectively lost a sense of personal and social safety and instead live in a state of perpetual anxiety.

The second characteristic that I add to Inglehart's list is boundary ambiguity. Hinde (1995) contends that social and emotional development is constructed through the recursive relation processing occurring at three levels of analysis: the within-individual, the within-relationship, and the within-group. This way of looking at the self as a recursive process rather than as a stable entity provides a frame for examining the muddying of boundaries – both intralevel and interlevel – that is characteristic of the postmodern milieu. When boundaries become ambiguous, self-definition becomes more challenging. Questions such as “Where do we belong?”, “What do we believe in?”, and “What do we know to be true?” become impossible to answer. Baumeister (1997) proposes that an increase in self-consciousness is a byproduct of this dilemma. And as a result, as Gergen observes (1991) emotional and cognitive processes lose their sense of reality and we are increasingly left with a sense of inauthenticity.

The postmodern milieu then is characterized by an erosion of virtually everything that Western civilization has held to be “true”. As we gain more of everything, material wealth and informational wealth alike, we lose the certainty that we previously held with regard to the inviolate nature of our social systems, our belief systems, and the very nature of reality. As our reach extends throughout the world and indeed outward into space, our certainty about what we can depend on to be constant and knowable shrinks at an even faster rate.

Baumeister (1987) gives this phenomenon an historical perspective. Drawing from his research on the historical concept of the self he concludes that the relationship of the individual to his/her culture has gone through four historical stages each of which has presented the individual

with more alternatives for self-identity. Baumeister holds that Western civilization is currently in the fourth of these stages.

Each of these stages as described by Baumeister carries with it an increased responsibility for the individual to make more choices about his own ways of being. As illustrated in the following table, he describes five self-definition processes that he sees as evolving along the same evolutionary path as the stages of relationships of self to society:

**Table 1: Self-definition processes (Baumeister, 1987, p. 171)**

Type	Description	Problem	Example
I	Assigned component	None (stable, passive)	Family lineage, gender
II	Single – transformational	Achievement: single self-definition by one standard	Motherhood, knighthood
III	Hierarchy of criteria	Achievement: frequent or continual redefinition of self by one standard	Wealth (in middle class)
IV	Optional choice	Choice is available: alternative options exist, but one option is dominant or clear guideline exists	Religious or political affiliation (in pluralistic society)
V	Required choice	Person is required to find metacriteria for choosing among incompatible alternatives	Choice of mate or career (in modern society)

Throughout history, according to Baumeister, more and more choices have opened up for the individual. In the medieval period, for example, identity was associated with types I and II choices where one's life course was laid out from birth. In our postmodern milieu we face the dilemma of a preponderance of type V choices. These choices are problematic in that they are not accompanied by a set of absolute values or belief systems to serve as guidelines.



Baumeister however is overly optimistic in his placement of contemporary Western culture in the fifth of these historical stages. I contend that from the perspective of his model that we are sitting on a cusp between the fourth and the fifth stages. This is quite clearly represented in the academic thinking presented in this study. The positions that researchers and theorists take could be construed as dependent on the side of the cusp they view contemporary Western culture from. Those researchers and theorists who focus on the isolating, fragmentary, and dichotomous aspects of postmodernism seem to be writing from the perspective of Baumeister's fourth stage, that of alienation. Alternately, those writers who look to socially embedded alternate models of social identity such as narrative models seem to be viewing postmodernism from the other side of the cusp.

McAdams (1997) also notes an ambivalence in the postmodern message. He notes that Gergen among others "... cannot decide if he should lament or celebrate the passing of both 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism and 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism for the arrival of the contemporary postmodern sensibility" ( p. 54). I would propose that this ambivalence is one of the defining characteristics of postmodernism and is indeed the expression of our historical position on the cusp between alternate experiences of self.

### ***The Self-System from a Postmodern Perspective***

Even the most optimistic of postmodernists describes a view of the individual as struggling to find his/her place in the postmodern milieu. At the same time that our postmodern Western cultural values, beliefs and behaviors, underpinned by a technological infrastructure that seems to have a life of its own, propel us towards fragmentation and isolationism, psychologists, gerontologists, and other theorists tell us that the ability to be psychologically and physically secure in ourselves as individuals derives from loving, secure and sustained attachment to others that can only be formed in fully committed relationship. (Bowlby, 1988; Rowe & Kahn, 1998; Shaver & Fraley, 2002; Simpson & Rholes, 1998; Stern, 1985)

In some of the earlier writing about this situation, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, and Tipton (1985) in their research on individualism and commitment in American life, observed that our traditional American cultural obsession with rugged individualism and self-sufficiency while contributing to our economic success may now be working against our long-term success as related persons and as a society. As they observed, "... if the entire social world is made up of individuals, each endowed with the right to be free of others' demands, it becomes hard to forge bonds of attachment to, or cooperation with, other people, since such bonds would imply obligations that necessarily impinge on one's freedom" (p. 23).

Similarly, McAdams (1997) observes that the multiplicity of personal choices available to the individual that has already been described earlier in this section as emblematic of the postmodern milieu poses a direct challenge to identity. MacIntyre (1981) describes an inherent tension that plagues the postmodern milieu. The contemporary self is seen as existing apart from the social context that it longs to be connected with. Each of us is tasked with finding where we fit and where meaning lies. It is as if we have pulled ourselves up by our roots and yet yearn to return to the soil.

Gergen (1991) presents one of the more extreme and boldest positions as he describes how the self disappears altogether into postmodern relationship. He makes an important link to the social constructionist perspective already described earlier in this chapter. The individual, he says, will cease to exist as we move towards new self-definition based on the ways that we organize ourselves collectively. I quote Gergen at length here because of the direct relationship of this research study to this specific statement by Gergen. Gergen, unlike most postmodern writers offers not only a critique of the challenges presented by the postmodern milieu but also a vision of alternatives to individual identity.

With postmodern consciousness begins the erasure of the category of self. No longer can one securely determine what it is to be a specific kind of person – male or female – or even a person at all. As the category of individual person fades from view, consciousness

of construction becomes focal. We realize increasingly that who and what we are is not so much a result of our 'personal essence' (real feelings, deep beliefs, and the like) but of how we are constructed in various social groups. (1991, p. 170)

What requires elaboration however, and what Gergen to date has not provided, is an explication of what such social groups would look like. This study, which is a social constructionist inquiry into the factors holding together a successful long-term social group, contributes insights into the characteristics of such social groups.

American men in particular have been targets of the concern of postmodernist with regard to their adaptability to the challenges to identity associated with the postmodern milieu. Levant (2003; Levant & Kelly, 1989; Levant & Pollack, 1995) theorizes about how American men have adapted to the postmodern milieu. He describes the psychological response of contemporary American men as *alexithymic*. American men, he contends have been socialized in such a way that "... boys grow up to be men who are genuinely unaware of their emotions, and sometimes even their bodily sensations" ( 2003, p. 2). This pattern is so prevalent, indeed dominant in American culture that he refers to it as *normative male alexithymic*. Abnormal socialization in his model occurs as the result of parents, and society in general, pacifying male infants and teaching their male toddlers to reject their emotions. As a result, American men develop action empathy, which Levant (2003) describes as an overdevelopment of anger and a channeling of caring emotions into sexuality. Levant defines action empathy as "the ability to see things from another person's point of view, and predict what they will, or should do" (p. 12). This type of empathy stands in contrast to emotional empathy, more typically identified with women, which involves taking "another person's perspective and being able to know how they feel" (p. 12).

Previous to Levant's work, the social constructionist perspective on the socialization of men was described by Pleck (1981, 1995) as the *gender role strain paradigm*. Pleck posited that gender role strain occurs as the result of stereotypical gender socialization. He deconstructs and

uncouples maleness from masculinity and femaleness from femininity. It is his contention that when males or females are coerced into roles that are incongruent with their self-sense of maleness or femaleness that trauma occurs. (1995) Levant and Pollack (1995) contend that it is not only certain classes and categories of men who experience this trauma but rather that it is the traditional models of masculinity such as the one described by Bellah, et al. (1985) earlier in this section is inherently traumatic to all men.

In *Seasons of a Man's Life*, Levinson's (1988) study of adult male development stages, he also notes the predominant absence of close friendships between men and men, and between men and women in American society. (His study did not explore female adult developmental stages.) At the same time he notes the importance of such relationships to support the tasks of the adult development stages he has identified. If, as Gergen (1991) says, the future lies not in individual identity but in social identity as defined by the social organizations we associate ourselves with, then American men, with their focus on individualized life pursuits, will be particularly challenged to adapt.

This is not to imply that only men will be challenged to respond to the demands of the postmodern milieu. We are all vulnerable to missteps along the way including surrendering our self-definition to cults, special interest groups, substance abuse, and psychological disorder. Lifton (1993) warns that the response of the protean self, made vulnerable by the perceived threats to its personal and collective identity, will take on the psychology of the survivor. This can either lead to shutting down completely or to opening out indiscriminately. In either case there is an underlying sense of profound existential loss. Behaviorally, this can be expressed, Lifton notes, in adherence to fundamentalist and totalitarian belief systems characterized by absolute dogmatism and monolithic self-concepts that are vulnerable to incorporation of violent defense processes.

Lifton also contends, in a view similar to my own with regard to the low-grade pervasive anxiety that I believe is permeating our society that the protean experience of emotions is that of

free-floating anxiety. He says that as the social arrangements that we have learned to associate our emotional reactions to have broken down, we have developed an uncertainty about what our “true” feelings are and what we are feeling them about. We have lost the anchors that validate our emotional responses.

Baumeister (1997), mirroring Lifton’s predictions, notes that the pressures associated with developing a self-concept can lead to avoidance and numbing behaviors as individuals overwhelmed by the enormous personal responsibility for determining who they are attempt to abdicate that responsibility. This lead, he says, to narrowing of the scope of selfhood. Alternatively to narrowing the scope of selfhood, we are also vulnerable to developing false senses of self that are responses to external pressures that are disconnected from authentic self-needs and self-motivations. Resultantly, the individual experiences reality as inherently empty and devoid of meaning. (Harter, 1997)

In addition to the risks of developing diminished selfhoods and/or alternate selfhoods, many psychologists and theorists cited earlier in this section have spoken of the dangers of developing fragmented selfhoods. As noted by Danziger (1997) most of the clinical literature until recently has equated fragmentation of the self with pathology. More recently however, fragmentation is being reframed as normative. If proteanism becomes the new “normal” as the theorists in this section suggest, then we must either redefine our definitions of psychological health or cede that what we view as pathology is normative.

The resolution of this dilemma, I propose, lies in how we manage this fragmentation. Information overload combined with a self-perception of a high degree of personal choice leaves any moderately aware individual in Western civilization with a moral and ethical dilemma. Knowing what we know as a result of the seemingly unending flood of media supplied information about the physical and emotional suffering of whole societies, perceiving that we have choices with regard to how we use our personal resources of time, money, and creativity, and aware of our failure to protect our environment from our own contaminative behaviors we are

faced with the dilemma of how to live moral and ethical lives. Our social response is one that I term *normative dissociation*. That is, we have developed an ability to selectively narrow and define what we consider to be “self” based on the environment that we find ourselves in. It becomes possible then to describe ourselves as loving and caring human beings as we send our children to college, for example, while at the same time walking past the homeless on our way to work. We have developed an ability to selectively ignore and indeed dissociatively blind ourselves to the global implications of the choices we make and do not make.

We do not sit easy however within our normative dissociative behavior. Indeed this is the source of the pervasive undifferentiated social anxiety that I have already described. It is as if we are haunted by the “ghosts” of choices not made, of actions not taken. Lifton (1993) describes this situation as living a “double life where we oscillate between protective numbing with a partial shutting down of the self and sufficient openness to troubling feelings of meaninglessness and disintegration for these to serve as stimuli to self-exploration and change” (p. 49).

Bowen (1985/2004), who is best noted for his therapeutic work with families, has also written about this characteristic of the postmodern milieu. He notes an increase of anxiety in contemporary society that he attributes to some of the characteristics of the postmodern milieu already described – the failures of social structures to support us and increases in technological overload. He also ascribes this anxiety to overpopulation and the loss of frontiers and the threat this represents to the biological imperative for territory. Like Lifton, he believes that we are haunted by a growing awareness of the inability of the planet to continue to support us in the fashion that we have adopted in Western civilization.

Bowen contends that his theories of regressive behavior in dysfunctional families can be applied to society as well. According to Bowen, regressive behavior manifests as “an increase in cause-and effect thinking” and “a focus on ‘rights’ to the exclusion of responsibility” (p. 281). It also manifests as an increase in sexual behavior and in an increase in the use of drugs and an increase in violent behavior. Bowen contends that researchers who have attributed the rapid

increases in the permissiveness of Western society to a normal social progression are in error. Such rapid and profound changes, he believes, can only be the result of regressive behavior. Bowen further believes that regressive behavior will continue as long as the anxiety-inducing social environment exists – and he does not see that going away any time soon. I will return to Bowen's theories later in this study when I review the literature on group cohesion and again when I develop my hypotheses. His theories with regard to social anxiety have an important place in my theory-building.

What then becomes the “ideal” model for self-identity in the postmodern milieu? Zurcher (1977) proposed that the model of self-identity most appropriate for sustaining ourselves in the contemporary American society is the *mutable self*. The mutable self-concept is the evolutionary response of the individual to accelerated sociocultural change. The self-concept of the individual evolves from being primarily structured as a relatively permanent object to a dynamic process. “In everyday life,” Zurcher says, “the individual is engaged to a greater or lesser degree in a dialogue with social structure” ( p. 27). When we minimize this dialogue into a narrow set of “givens” then we view ourselves as objects that can easily be characterized by names such as *boy-sailor-college student*. On the other hand, if we stand apart from social structures and actively engage in dialogue with them, then self takes on the structure of process rather than object. This later way of being he says is necessitated for survival within the realities of contemporary American society where the social structures that we relied on in the past no longer have permanence and stability.

Lifton (1993), in language very similar to Zurcher's (1977), describes the *protean self-process* as one of continually reshaping the self in a creative tension between responsiveness to flux in the social environment and the need to consolidate and hold together as a self-concept. The strength of the protean self, he contends comes from “... a capacity for bringing together disparate and seemingly incompatible elements of identity and involvement” in what he refers to as “odd combinations” accompanied by a capacity for “continuous transformation of these

elements” (p. 5). Personality characteristics such as mockery and the use of irony and humor and a preference for fragmentary ideas rather than belief systems allow the protean self to make meaning of seemingly paradoxical and absurd experiences. He sees narrative as the process by which this integration occurs.

The use of narrative as a means to describe reality both of the self and of the psychosocial environment is a thread that runs through both the constructionist and the postmodern literature. Narrative psychologists propose that a dialogic construal of the self is the best response to the postmodern environ. A dialogic self-view is inherently social in that “...other people occupy positions in the multivoiced self” (H. Hermans et al., 1992, p. 29). It allows for an ever changing progression of conversations where voices move in and out of the conversation even as the narrative holds the contextual string for the individual. In contrast the rationalistic, highly centralized self-view ties the individual to a particular space and time and is no longer meaningful or useful in our rapidly changing globalized environs.

McAdams (2001) proposes that a narrative perspective on self can provide a solution to postmodern concerns with the culturally induced fragmentation of identity concepts. The *self as narrative* perspective allows for viewing identity as a process that is continually unfolding and evolving. It allow furthermore for multiple concurrent narratives, each giving meaning to various aspects of our lives that would otherwise be disconnected.

These descriptions of the postmodern self however still cling to a somewhat romantic view of the isolate self. True, the descriptions are of a mutable, adaptable self that morphs into whatever form it needs to take to respond to the psychosocial environment. But what these descriptions lack and what differentiates them from the social constructionist perspective is a sense of the equality of relationship between the individual sense of self and the social sense of self. That is, Lifton and Zurcher still speak from the voice of the primacy of the individual in solving his/her needs for adaptability to the postmodern milieu. The social constructionist perspective however, as elaborated on in the writings of Shotter and Gergen (1989), for example,



recognize the primacy of relationship as the new paradigm for the postmodern self. Who we are is a function of our embeddedness in the discourses of social relationships. This includes both the discourses of the self and the discourses of others. That is, we are defined as much by ourselves as by others. (1989)

Postmodern perspectives also challenge our traditional concepts of morality and ethics as has already been alluded to earlier in this section. In the past we looked to our social structures, such as cultural norms, religions, and laws, to provide our moral compass. Postmodernism however dictates that we turn to our direct discourse with others as the basis for moral and ethical belief and action. Ethical behavior becomes based on what we collectively construe as meaningful and good. (Gergen, 1991) This means expanding the dialogue to include those voices that are least heard or otherwise silent.

Baumeister (1997) also notes that the locus for values and ethical decisions has shifted from being centered in society as represented in religious mores and cultural institutions to being centered in the individual self. The overwhelming responsibility for self-definition that has shifted from the cultural environ to the personal environ he feels, has contributed to many of the self-identity problems of Western society. This stands somewhat in contrast with Gergen's view that places the responsibility for ethical behavior with the embeddedness in social structures. The connection lies, in the understanding that each of us is not an isolate, but rather an embodiment of our social environments. What we construe as individual self and as individual agency is a misconception based on habitual modernist thinking patterns. Postmodernism says that what we had taken as inviolate – our religions, our laws, our fundamental beliefs – are now all open for reconceptualization. Social constructionism says that this reconstrual occurs in social engagement.

It is critical then, as perhaps never before in human history, to understand how our social structures inform and are informed by human agency. Nothing can be taken for granted. Lifton (1993) notes that we must look to new definitions of community in response to the postmodernist milieu. Yet at the same time that we are directed to look for something new, it is also important to

look at our current condition and to examine what is working, what is indeed thriving within the current psychosocial environs, and draw from that lessons to take forward. That is indeed the purpose of this study.

My research focuses on an instance of a contemporary social group structure that has potentials to give guidance to the inquiry that Lifton recommends. It corresponds to what Smith and Berg (1987) describe as “formed because of mutual interest in performing certain activities together such as playing tennis together in a recreational setting” ( p. 229). Smith and Berg refer to this type of group as an *attraction group*. It forms out of the shared interests of its members in a particular activity or outcome. Groups of this nature typically do not have defined work products to produce or services to perform except on a voluntary basis.

In a similar vein, Brewer (2003) distinguishes between two kinds of social groups based on the kinds of commitments that the members make to each other. He describes *aggregations* as bound by rules that hold individuals together in a cooperative activity that serves preexisting needs of its members. Members make personal sacrifices such as giving up certain personal freedoms or tolerating undesirable attitudes and behaviors in order to reap the benefits of group membership. These are often groups that have perceived prestige associated with membership such as country clubs. In contrast, he describes *associations* as differing from aggregations in that associations are built on member commitments to a set of coordinated group actions and/or the creation of a common set of group products. (2003)

In aggregates commitments to the social group are explicit and of the type “I promise”, “I declare”, and “I consent”. They do not require an internalization of a shared set of values. In contrast, in associations commitments arise out of internalized commitments to shared values and beliefs and do not require the types of explicit commitments of aggregates. Brewer notes that members of aggregations are “concerned primarily with the actions of fellow members” whereas “members of associations are interested not only in each other’s actions but also in the ideals and values that prompt these actions” ( p. 571).

Bellah, et al. (1985) in their commentary on American society describe two contemporary social structures that fall within Smith and Berg's category of attraction groups and which also appear to map at least loosely to Brewer's distinctions between aggregates and associations. The *lifestyle enclave* as described by Bellah, et al. is a phenomenon of midlife. It is represented by the country club, the gated community, and other socially engineered social structures. Bellah et al. distinguish it from community in that where community is "an inclusive whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life" the lifestyle enclave in contrast celebrates the "narcissism of similarity" ( p.73). They characterize the lifestyle enclave as having two segmental characteristics. First, it involves only a segment of each individual member in that it concerns "... only private life, especially leisure and consumption" (p. 73). And second, it is socially segmented in that it only includes members with the same lifestyle. Bellah et al. express some ambivalence in their description of the lifestyle enclave. While they posit that it may be the "appropriate form of collective support within a radically individualized society" they also posit that it is representative of the very social fragmentation based in a cancerous individualism that is at the heart of an American social malaise. (p. xlii)

Bellah, et al. however also describes the possibility of a second type of social structure, the *community of memory*, in more positive terms. The community of memory is less a social structure than a social experience. Communities of memory are characterized by their ability and desire to keep the past alive in the present. The community continues to tell and retell its story to its members. It cites the needs of its past members as if they are alive in the present. (1985)

Bellah et al.'s description of lifestyle enclaves can be conceptualized as being aggregative in nature given that their membership roles and rules place an emphasis on maintaining similarity of outer appearances without question of shared inner values unless the rules are challenged. Communities of memory, on the other hand, are difficult to conceptualize as anything but associations. The internalization of shared values and beliefs that Brewer describes as characteristic of associations is consistent with Bellah et al.'s description of a shared socially

constructed past. This congruence is further strengthened by Brewer's observation that "the guiding principles of the association have to be passed along to new generations in a form that they are able to find convincing" (2003, p. 571). What Bellah et al. describe as constitutive narrative exemplifies such a vehicle for trans-generational perpetuation of the group.

Lifton (1993) challenges Bellah, et al.'s description of lifestyle enclaves. He proposes instead that the type of group that attracts the protean individual is "free-floating". For the protean self, he says, "communities are partial, fluctuating: come in odd places and combinations; are often at a distance; and vary greatly in their intensity and capacity to satisfy the needs of members" (p. 103).

This view of contemporary groups is also shared in part by Zurcher (1977). In describing the characteristics of organizational structures most able to meet the needs of postindustrial America, he predicts that these organizational structures will be small in size, encourage more face-to-face relationships, engage in participative decision-making and power-sharing among members, and be equally as concerned with their operational processes as with their production of products and services.

Whether the Early Birds experience themselves more as a lifestyle enclave/aggregative group, as a community of memory/associative group, or as free-floating, whether the structure of the Early Birds community can be seen as having characteristics matching those described by Zurcher, above – these are some of the more interesting questions to be answered by this study and have implications for the analysis of the psychosocial factors that bind this group together. Additionally, in asking the Early Birds to recount stories of their experiences in the group I am, in essence, inquiring into whether the Early Birds carry within themselves the types of stories that Bellah et al. have described as representative of communities of memory and if they do, what values are embodied in those stories.

***Psychology and psychotherapy in the postmodern milieu.***

Earlier in this study I stated that postmodernism requires that we either redefine our definitions of psychological health or alternately cede that what we have previously viewed as pathology is normative. Several writers have made observations about these implications of postmodernism on psychology and psychotherapy.

The postmodern perspective on self-identification challenges modernist theories of the self that posit a unified self-concept. Modernist psychological theories were developed within dramatically different social environs and make little sense within the postmodern milieu. Many of the major theories of psychology were developed during the era of modernism and consequently reflect the focus on self-contained individualism so pronounced in American psychological theory. (Sampson, 1989) Erikson's identity theory, for example, describes a psychosocial developmental process aimed at attaining a "subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity" (1968, p. 19). At the core of this theory is a view of self as having a sameness across time and across all life situations. Individuals who fail to attain such a unified self-concept are labeled by interpreters of Erikson's theories as *diffuse* or *in moratorium*. (Marica, 1980) In contrast, the postmodern view of self considers models such as Erikson's to be outdated because they were developed within a social paradigm that no longer exists.

Such a change in environs postmodern theorists say requires a rethinking of how we see ourselves as individuals and as communities. And indeed, how we define psychological health. Psychological models of a unitary self-system, framed in an obsolete modernist perspective, no longer provide a useful base of support. (D. Miller & Prentice, 1994)

The concept of egocentric individualism has particularly come under attack as a limiting psychological construct. Hogan (1975) presents the case that modern psychology is dominated by four models of individualism – romanticism, egoistic individualism, ideological individualism, and alienated individualism – that fail to consider the implications of our embeddedness in social relationships. These egocentric perspectives, he says, do not acknowledge the role of group membership as constitutive of the self-system. More recently, Oyserman (2002), in a meta-

analysis of individualism and collectivism, observed that the dominance of American and Western psychology by individualism-based theory and methods may make it difficult for theorists and practitioners to reframe their approaches to support yet to be defined collectivism-based methods of intervention.

Theorists and researchers are increasingly recognizing this limitation of contemporary psychotherapeutic approaches. Hermans and Kempen (1998) note that the psychology of self and identity has not kept pace with multiculturalism and continues to view culture in dichotomous terms which are intrinsically separating and divisive rather than inclusive and flowing. Cross-pollination of cultures directly challenges the notion of cultural identity as seen from a modernist perspective. Psychology of self and identity, they say, should instead focus on the “interactional meeting place” between the three characteristics of culture as described by Hannerz. (1992).

Gergen is one of the most vocal critics of modernist psychotherapeutic approaches. In particular he challenges the role of psychotherapist as “expert” and “authority figure” and of the individual as “patient”. Instead, he asks that we recognize that the individual is engaged in multiple relational patterns some or all of which are problematic. We must view the psychological “problem” as one of collaborating with the individual to renegotiate and reframe meaning systems that make sense to the patient.

In addition to Gergen’s suggestions, I recommend that we should also refrain from referring to the individual as *patient* and reframe the relationship as one between *client* or *customer* and *facilitator* or *coach*. Doing so moves the locus of the psychotherapeutic process to the shared relationship. To remain relevant our roles and goals as psychologists and psychotherapists must change. We must look to the psychological well-being not of the individual as individual, but rather to the psychological well-being of the individual as relational cusp, as a node in a network of ever changing choices and experiences. Our role as psychologist is in facilitating an optimum capacity and capability for managing the paradox of infinite choice in a highly embedded and constrained social environ. The challenge for the psychotherapeutic process

is to facilitate the individual's journey to find self-meaning framed within a purposeful life when society no longer provides guideposts to point the way. (Baumeister, 1987) Further understandings of the psychosocial dynamics of a group such as the Early Birds with its high level of member satisfaction can provide direction for pointing our clients to the kinds of group processes that will enrich and sustain them.

### ***The Psychosocial Dynamics of Group Longevity***

In this section I examine the literature pertaining to the psychosocial factors that contribute to group longevity. There is surprisingly little academic research that directly addresses the longevity of social groups. One exception is a series of studies examining small group phenomenon in America and its impact on formal religion. In the 1990s Wuthrow (1994) conducted a 3-year national study of small groups and spirituality. While the emphasis of his study was with regard to how small groups were changing the nature of religious practices, his study also provided several insights into what he calls the small group phenomena in America. His study revealed, for instance that 4 of every 10 Americans belongs to at least one small group and that two-thirds of small groups are associated with a religious community. These groups, he noted, are characterized by exceptional levels of caring and support for their members as demonstrated in both emotional and more material forms of support.

Like the postmodernists whose perspectives I discussed earlier, Wuthrow cites the breakdown of traditional social structures – marriage, nuclear families, churches, villages, places of work – and sees the small group movement as an American social response to rebuilding community. He describes these groups as characteristically fluid with open membership and an interest in emotional support. He also notes that most members of these groups have regular attendance and have been in their groups for more than five years. In a more cautionary tone, however, he also notes that the fluidity of small group membership with their limited levels of

commitment should not be confused with the commitments of marriage and formal religious communities.

In a recent study premised on Wuthrow's work, Lawson (2006) studied a women's bible study group of over 40 years duration. Asking similar questions to my own with regard to causes for group longevity and vitality, Lawson explored the benefits and detriments of group longevity as an approach to ministry outreach. He began with a definition of a *vital small group* which has applicability beyond its focus on spiritual groups:

A small group that over time exhibits the following characteristics: (a) maintenance of sense of purpose by its members, (b) concerted efforts to carry out activities to help it achieve its purpose, and (c) willingness to allow others to join the group, creating an open atmosphere that makes others feel welcome. (p. 183)

Lawson used semi-structured interviews with eight group members, some of whom had been with the group since its inception and others for shorter periods of time. He then did a thematic analysis of the results and shared findings with the interviewees to complete his analysis. In response to his questions regarding why the group had remained together for so long he found nine behavioral themes that ran through the individual and group interviews: (a) stable group membership and leadership, (b) common experiences and suffering that led to openness and commitment to each other, (c) a consistent schedule and a slow pace of the bible study that helped when people missed a session, (d) flexibility in responding to group member needs and life changes, (e) common purpose and commitment, (f) real value found in participation, (g) qualities of the leader, (h) continued openness to new members, and, (i) diversity of personalities and backgrounds enriching the group experience.

In response to his questions regarding why the group felt they were so open to new members, which he identified as critical to sustaining membership levels, he found seven themes that ran through the interviews: (a) growth by personal invitation; (b) a lack of congregational sponsorship; (c) hospitality and simple study format; (d) focused agenda, avoiding controversy; (e)



shared life experience; (f) open atmosphere, good listeners; and, (g) knowing when not to invite new people. Like the Early Birds, the history of the women's bible study group transversed the time from midlife to late life for many of the members. When asked to describe the impact of the group on this transition in their lives the group's responses clustered around 5 themes: (a) acceptances, (b) friendship and support, (c) broadened perspective and learning, (d) stronger faith, and, (e) deepened prayer life.

Lawson's research has strong similarities to my own both with regard to the characteristics of the groups and to the manner in which the research data were collected and analyzed. Neither Wuthrow nor Lawson however went beyond a descriptive explanation of the longevity of the small groups they studied. That is, they catalogued the behaviors of long-lived small groups but did not look beyond the behaviors for motivational and psychosocial determinants. I will return to Wuthrow's and Lawson's findings in the analysis portion of this study where I will compare my own findings to theirs with regard to the distinguishing characteristics of long-term groups. It is also my intention to look beyond behavioral characteristics to examine the psychosocial factors associated with group longevity.

A line of research called relationship maintenance, although predominantly focused on the study of couples, has something useful to say about group longevity. The central focus of this line of research is on the nature and quality of communication processes in relationships. Dindia (2003) describes these as critical for the maintenance of healthy relationships. Dindia identifies four possible definitions of successful relationship maintenance which have applicability to a study of group longevity. First, the most minimalist definition of relationship maintenance defines a relationship as successful as long as it is not terminated; second, a steady-state definition defines a relationship as successful if it retains the same fundamental characteristics throughout its period of existence; third, a dialectical definition, as opposed to the steady-state position, allows for the possibility of a relationship changing over time as it adapts to changing tensions; finally, a

fourth definition places an emphasis on the repair processes that occurs over time that keep a relationship healthy. (2003)

Dindia recommends that researchers should identify which of these four alternate definitions of relational maintenance they are using in their studies. (2003) With regard to this study of the Early Birds, however I will work “backwards”. That is, I will use the research data to determine which of Dindia’s four definitions is most appropriate to describe a group that has already demonstrated itself to have a high level of successful relationship maintenance. Have the Early Birds maintained the same static relationship structures or have these structures evolved over time? Are relational repair processes a critical component of the group work? What psychosocial factors must be maintained in order for the group to sustain itself? I will return to these questions in the findings sections of this study.

Kaplan (1975/1976), another researcher in the field of relationship maintenance, distinguishes between two emotional maintenance styles in relationships. Maintenance-by-suppression, as its name implies, describes a process by which the relationship partners maintain their relationship by suppressing direct communications of mutual feelings. The partners avoid explicitly stating their feelings and deflect negative affect into indirect strategies. In contrast, maintenance-by-expression describes a process by which relationship partners use direct communication of feelings as part of the maintenance process. The partners talk about the relationship. Kaplan contends that this later form of maintenance is most effective over the long-term with regard to maintaining overall relationship satisfaction. One of the questions that can possibly be answered with regard to my own study is with regard to which type of emotional style is most predominantly present in the Early Bird relationships.

A great deal more literature is available with regard to a construct closely associated with group longevity – *group* or *social cohesion*. In the literature *cohesion* is defined as the glue that holds groups and social units together. Carron, a sports psychologist, describes group cohesion as a dynamic process centered on the desire of the group members to unite around a common set of

goals and objectives. (1982) Festinger, Schachter, and Beck (1950) describe group cohesion as comprised of the totality of forces acting on the group members to hold the group together. Friedkin (2004) provides a definition of group cohesion that particularly resonates with a social constructionist perspective.

Groups are cohesive when group-level conditions are producing positive membership attitudes and behaviors and when group members' interpersonal interactions are operating to maintain these group-level conditions. Thus cohesive groups are self-maintaining with respect to the production of strong membership attractions and attachments. (p. 410)

I feel an affinity with Friedkin's definition because of its focus on the recursive relationship between group-level dynamics and individual-member dynamics in determining the characteristics of a group. While I doubt that Friedkin would consider himself to be a relational constructionist, his definition does fit well with the constructionist perspective I favor.

In the subsections that follow, I have organized the literature into three broad categories: the theories and research that favor a member-centric, "bottom-up" approach to the development of group cohesion; the theories and research that favor a group-centric, "top-down" approach to group cohesion; and the theories and research that favor recursive and inclusionary perspectives that emphasize a synergistic perspective.

Those who favor a bottom-up perspective attribute group cohesion to the accumulation of individual relational efforts. This is the "sum of the parts" perspective and can be summed up with a statement by Allport (1924) from his classic text, *Social Psychology*. "If we take care of the individual, psychologically speaking, the group will take care of themselves" (p. 9).

Alternatively, the top-down perspective is held primarily by social identity theorists (e.g., Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Locksley, Ortiz, & Hepburn, 1980; Turner, Sachdev, & Hogg, 1983) who propose that group attachments form based on shared social identities. Other theorists coming from a variety of theoretical positions including relational constructionism ((Bettencourt &

Sheldon, 2001; Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005), propose that we view individual and group forces as interdependently contributing to group cohesion.

Although I have segmented the research along these three parallel and often overlapping tracks, I am also highly conscious of the somewhat arbitrary nature of this segmentation and the somewhat contrived nature of the debates that swirl around the study of group identity and group cohesion. This perspective is shared by other researchers. Prentice (1994), for example, commenting on the either-or debate between individual-oriented and group-oriented perspectives, observes that these two camps have tended to adopt competing and exclusionary views of group cohesion which have detracted from an examination of the possible synergistic relationship between the two theoretical positions. Friedkin (2004) adds an additional complaint by observing that there is definitional confusion among researchers in relation to individual and group factors that is “symptomatic of the complexity involved in reciprocally linked individual-level and group-level phenomena” (p. 410).

A key debate centers on the question of whether or not there is a dialectic tension in groups between the needs of individuals and the needs of the group. As noted by Bettencourt and Sheldon (2001), two schools of thought exist with regard to this debate: one that posits a dialectic that positions individual needs in competition with group needs and another school of thought that sees these two sets of needs as uncoupled from each other and as independent variables. For theorists such as Komorita and Parks (1995) who researched how individuals choose between their own needs and the groups, Smith and Berg (1987) who examined the resolution of the paradox of concurrent individual and group needs, Brewer (1991) who elaborated on the conflict between distinctiveness and inclusionary needs, and others, there is an implicit assumption that groups cohesion depends on resolving the individual-group needs dialectic.

Other researchers such as Friedkin who is quoted above and Bettencourt and Sheldon (2001, 2002) posit that either no such conflict exists or that indeed there may be a complementary relationship between individual-needs satisfaction and group-needs satisfaction. Implicit in their

position is the assumption that individual-needs satisfaction and group-needs satisfaction are either independently or collaboratively associated with social cohesion.

### ***Member-Centric Theories of Group Cohesion***

Member-centric approaches to defining social cohesion operate on the principle that group cohesion is the aggregate manifestation of the individual-level indicators. That is, there are either no group-level social cohesion constructs as such, or those that are so labeled are composites of those at the member level and are insufficient to describe group phenomena. As noted by Prentice(1994), “Individualists, who focus primarily on member attachments between group members, do not need, and, in the extreme case, do not even believe in direct attachment to the group itself” (p. 485). Researchers may posit only member-level indicators or may posit both individual-level indicators and group-level indicators.

Social cognition theory when applied to group dynamics is an example of one of the most arguably member-centric perspectives on groups. Pryor and Ostrom (1987) describe processes within groups as unabashedly intrapsychic. They take the stance that, all group and organizational structures, whatever their purpose, exist within the individual’s cognitive organization of social information. To understand the group we need only and solely to understand how the individual group members construe the group-related information and processes.

The analysis of these individual processes, however, is not straight forward. Indicators of group dynamics tend to focus on member attitudes and dyadic member behaviors. One of the difficulties in evaluating member-level indicators of social cohesion is the indeterminacy with regard to whether an indicator should be a single construct, subsumed as part of a multi-component indicator or causally linked to one or more other components. Separating out individual indicators for examination may miss the point in much the same way as the committee of blind men goes about describing an elephant. Alternately, using such techniques as factor

analysis may tell more about the analytic skill of the researcher than the characteristics of group cohesion.

Common methods for assessing member-level group cohesion include observations, sociometry, self-report questionnaires, observer-rating scales, and social network analysis. (Freidkin, 2004; Treadwell, Lavertue, Kumar, & Veeraraghavan, 2001) There are a wide variety of self-report questionnaires and observer-rating scales. Many of these instruments have been designed as measurement tools for specific types of groups and raise the question of universality of social cohesion indicators across all groups.

There are several factors on which the literature on member-centric social cohesion has been focused. I am using the generic term *factor* at this point in the study to avoid wrestling with the task of parsing constructs and subconstructs until it is indicated in the analysis s of this document and until it can be framed within the context of the research data.

Brewer, whose descriptions of aggregations and associations have already been reviewed earlier in this study, describes trust as a critical factor in the sustainment of associations. He says, “the human capacity for association, then, depends upon a background social capital of trust in the moral seriousness and sincerity of others” (2003, p. 573). Indeed, whether the data reveal that such trust is present within the Early Birds should be able in part to determine whether the group can be characterized as an association rather than an aggregate.

Sheldon and Bettencourt (2002) researched the correlation between needs-satisfaction and subjective well-being in social groups. In particular, they looked at the distinction between the fulfillment of individual needs for autonomy and distinctiveness and the group needs for collective identity and collective behavior. Two competing theories were examined. Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) posits that there does not need to be conflict between needs for interpersonal relatedness and individual needs for autonomy. These needs from the self-determination theory (SDT) perspective can complement each other. In contrast, optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) (M. B. Brewer, 1991) pits two competing human drives, the need

for assimilation and the need for differentiation, against each other. From these two theories, Sheldon and Bettencourt (2002) developed a list of needs associated with group membership. The socially-based needs consisted of group inclusion and interpersonal relatedness; the self-based needs consisted of personal distinctiveness, personal autonomy, and group distinctiveness.

Sheldon and Bettencourt drew several additional conclusions from their research. First, they concluded that the need-satisfaction constructs were positively correlated with intrinsic motivation, commitment and positive affect. Second, although commitment levels were the same for formal and informal social groups, informal social groups were characterized by perceptions of greater autonomy and distinctiveness among members accompanied by lower levels of group identification. (2002) Third, they found corroborating evidence for the SDT premise that autonomy and relatedness are complementary needs while also finding no evidence for the ODT premise that needs for differentiation and assimilation should be negatively correlated. Fourth, commitments were found to be highest when participants perceived their group to be highly distinctive from other groups and when they felt that they had close friends within the group. Finally, in a comparison of the need for autonomy and the need for uniqueness, they concluded that the need for sense of self-determinacy and personal choice tends to outweigh choices for uniqueness. (2002) They went on to observe that “it appears that feelings of distinctiveness and uniqueness may at times be quite problematic for individuals” (2002, p 34).

Gable, Imprett, Reis, and Ashler (2004) in a similar vein examined how the sharing of *good news* in a social setting results in positive benefits for all members of the social exchange above and beyond the benefits that could be associated with the single experience. This conclusion had been earlier reached by Langston (1994) who used the term *capitalization* to describe the phenomenon of increased positive affect associated with sharing news of positive events with others. The research of Gable, et al. (2004) added to Langston’s findings. They determined that with regard to the subjective and objective benefits of sharing positive events that benefits increased with the amount of sharing that occurred. Additionally, they found that the

positive effects were increased when the relationship partner responded positively. That is, relationship quality improved when partners responded favorably and conversely deteriorated when responses were negative or even passive.

Gable et al. also identified findings that have relevance to group cohesion and group longevity. They hypothesized that one of the underlying emotional constructs of capitalization is pride. The engenderment of pride may be a contributing factor to the desire for social interaction and connection with others.

*Entitativity* is the term used to describe the awareness of a group of its own groupness. If a group is to survive over a long period of time many researchers cite entitativity as a requirement. That is, the group must have a sense of itself as a group and be able to identify what is ingroup and outgroup. Two opposing views provide competing perspectives with regard to how entitativity comes about. Theorists such as Cartwright and Zander (1968), Lewin (1948|1997), Rabbie and Horwitz (1988), and Thibaut and Kelly (1959) view entitativity as dynamically arising from patterns of interdependence among its members. In contrast, theorists such as Tajfel and Turner (1979) and Turner et al. (1987), whose theories I will describe in detail in the next section, take a category perspective and view groups as arising out of comparative constructs in regards to similarities and differences among collections of individuals. Theorists from both perspectives view entitativity as the source of ingroup bias which can lead to prejudice and discrimination. Gaertner and Schopler (1998), attempting to reconcile these two competing perspectives, describe entitativity as the perception of interconnection and interdependence between group members.

They go on to say that the sense of interconnectedness and interdependency between group members arises out of multiple sources including similarities of interests, demographics, and proximity. From their research they concluded that increased intragroup relations contributes to increased entitativity; conversely, they found no such correlation between increased intergroup relations, including competition, and increased entitativity. That is, they concluded that groups draw their meaning and sense of identity from the relations between the individual members



rather than from the collective relationship between the group and other groups. They also found that ingroup bias forms out of preference for the ingroup rather than decreased preference for the outgroup.

Wellbourne (1999) also examined entitativity in groups and came to conclusions that may be insightful with regard to why groups stay together. She compared how perceivers interpret behavioral inconsistencies as they are attributed to individuals and groups. She found that when the same inconsistent behaviors are attributed to both individuals and to groups that these behaviors will be interpreted differently. Perceivers, she concluded, will resolve challenges to the entitativity of an individual by using schematic processes to form a unified single impression. This does not occur as they try to resolve perceived entitative inconsistencies in group behavior.

If groups are to survive over time they must find ways to successfully refresh their membership. Groups are less likely to experience disruption when new members enter the group as individuals or as very small groups in proportion to the size of the whole group. (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) In explanation, Mooreland (1985) hypothesizes that when members join existing groups as groups themselves, there is a tendency to associate with each other rather than to assimilate into the larger group which in turn slows down the assimilation process. Moreland attributes this phenomenon to social categorization where the newcomers are initially more identified with other newcomers than with the larger group.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of social groups is the voluntary nature of membership. Members join and leave based on their personal preferences. In looking at why groups stay together then, it is important to look at what draws individuals into a group in the first place and then keeps them associated with the group. Clement and Krueger (1998) conducted research that revealed that individuals will base their liking of a particular individual based on their liking or disliking of that individual's characteristics. In contrast, an individual will base their liking of a group primarily on how well that group reflects their own values and beliefs and how similar they feel to the group. Thus, even though an individual may have a negative

experience of a particular member of the group based on dislike of particular personality characteristics they will nevertheless maintain their membership as long as they have a strong sense of identification with the group as a whole. This preference of the group based on similarities translates into ingroup favoritism based on negative perceptions of the outgroup's similarity. "They're not like us" becomes the basis for ingroup bias.

In a small study of college students in brainstorming sessions Moore (2001) examined the correlation between cohesion in small groups and creativity. His research concluded that groups with high cohesion, which he defined as having similar likes and dislikes, were highly creative whereas low cohesive groups were better off working as individuals. From this it can be inferred that highly cohesive groups are likely to gain satisfaction and high value from their distinction of being highly creative.

Findings from research on romantic relationships may also have relevance and cross-over to understanding why groups stay together. Construction of personal narrative histories that reframe partner faults and shortcomings in more positive interpretations has been found to correlate with relationship stability and longevity in intimate couples. Murray and Holmes (1993) conducted research that indicates that individuals will adopt stories about their close relationships that reframe even negative experiences in ways that will contribute to sustaining the relationship. In further research they (1994) determined that these stories are constructed to reframe negative characteristics of partners in such a way that faults are actually seen as virtues. In still further research (1999) they found that such narratives appear to be core constructs of couples that remain together. They suggest that "...the very stability of relationships may rest in part on the capacity to create such integrative mental ties" (p. 1242). They note also that these stories are a means to reduce ambiguity about the availability of the romantic partner and are used to maintain confidence in the relationship. While these findings are derived from research on close relationships it is not a far stretch to suggest that similar processes may be occurring in groups as

the group collectively adopts stories that reframe individual and group behavior in confidence-sustaining manners.

Several economists (Frank, 1988; Hirshleifer, 1987; Nesse, 2001; Schelling, 1960), straying into the field of social psychology, posited that socio-moral emotions such as guilt, loneliness, desires for approval and fear of rejection function within groups to bind individuals to the group. According to Nesse (2001) these socio-moral emotions have evolved as a motivational mechanism that commits the individual to the group and helps to foster cooperation.

Building on commitment theory, anthropologist Fiske (2002) hypothesizes a constructionist congruent theory of socio-moral emotions that he calls *proxy theory*. He posits that emotional processes within the group are the mechanisms that bind individuals to the group. According to Fiske socio-moral emotions serve as immediate proxies for the long-term benefits associated with group membership. That is, feelings such as affection, warmth, and safety serve to regulate the self-system in the present in order to ensure perpetuation of relationships associated with long-term benefit. Fiske further contends that unique aspects of relationships should be associated with distinct emotional responses. He hypothesizes that socio-moral emotions: “motivate and guide behavior to sustain important relationships”, “have distinct motivational effects”, “are culturally modulated through developmental processes that orient emotions toward the particular kinds of relationships and relational problems that are adaptively important in a person’s culture and community”, “reflect the current relational situation of the person”, and, “when absent, weak, excessive, or misdirected, result in predictable kinds of social dysfunction” (p. 174).

Anderson, Keltner, and John (2003) also looked at emotional processes in relationships and drew conclusions that have applicability to group processes. Their research centered on a phenomenon they label as *emotional convergence*. They hypothesized that individuals in relationships would over time develop similarities in their emotional responses. They based this hypothesis on prior research (Barsade, 2001; Dimberg & Ohman, 1996; Hatfield, Cacioppo, &

Rapson, 1994) which demonstrated that humans in interaction with one another have a tendency to mimic facial expressions, vocalizations, and postures leading to shared emotional experiences. Their research was particularly interesting because it was conducted on two groups with different types and degrees of relationships, romantic partners and same-sex college roommates, and observed the same emotional convergence within both research populations. It is also interesting because the time period that was evaluated was relatively short – six months – which leads one to believe that emotional convergence should be a fairly common phenomenon. From this they concluded that similarities in research outcomes could be extended to all long-term affectional relationship.

Their research also demonstrated that the more powerful individuals in a relationship will have greater influence over the emotional processes that become dominant. This led them to surmise that “...high-power individuals may create social environs inhabited by people with emotional tendencies similar to their own” whereas low-power individuals “would seem more variable, changing across relationship contexts” (2003, p. 1065). They note that this is not necessarily an unhealthy relationship. They hypothesized that the malleability of low-power individuals to the emotional dynamics of the high-power individuals is an important contributor to relationship cohesion and relationship longevity. They also found that the romantic partners and roommates that were most successful in developing emotional convergence were also the ones more likely to still be together at the end of the research study.

Anderson et al. (2003) examined the mechanisms through which emotional convergence occurs and identified three. First, they concluded that relationship partners may create a shared emotional context which then conditions reactions to events. Second, they hypothesized that relationship partners may develop common appraisal styles which would lead to similar emotional responses. And finally, they hypothesized that what Hatfield et al. (1994) calls *emotional contagion* might be occurring. That is, emotional contagion would result in shared emotional experiences which would then translate into common behaviors and cognitions.

Anderson et al. drew a final conclusion from their research that I find extremely compelling. They suggest, in a manner highly congruent with the constructionist perspective, that we should look beyond the individual's emotional experience of the relationship to an examination of the individual's relationship patterns within the social context.

Anderson et al.'s final comments become an invitation to conclude this section with the relational constructivist/constructionist perspective on member-centric theories of group and social dynamics. Relational constructionists are less than neutral in their critique of what they call the enitative approaches. Gergen (1995) for example, contends that individual-centric theories, centered in the subject-object paradigm, are at the root of abuses of power. The end game becomes "the war of the all against the all" (p. 34).

This is a sentiment that I concur with and which resonates with my constructionist perspective. What follow in this and later sections of this study explores the relational aspects of the psychosocial experience of being with others and offers I hope more fruitful insights into the meanings derived from social relationships.

### ***Group-Centric Theories of Group Cohesion***

Group-centric theories, as I have categorized them, posit that group dynamics are more than the sum of the characteristics of individual group members. Fully describing group dynamics from a group-centric perspective requires examination of psychosocial constructs that cannot be reduced to individual member constructs and additionally does not require individual level constructs for validation.

Group-centric theories fall within what social psychologists call the Type III socially shared cognition research paradigm of social cognition research. This type of research assumes that social interaction constitutes cognition. (Thompson, 1998) It is characterized by "(a) a focus on dyads and groups as entities, (b) interaction among persons, (c) coordination and synchrony among interacting persons, and (d) development and change" (p. 3). A key question that is

implicit in socially shared cognition research is in regard to where cognition resides. Type I research, which explores how the individual perceives social information, places cognition within the cerebral cortex of the perceiver. Type III however allows for the possibility of socially shared cognition which moves the locus of cognition to the social network within which individuals operate.

Theories of group mind, perhaps the earliest instances of Type III research and hypotheses, date back perhaps to as early as Rousseau (1767) and Hegel (1910). Within the field of psychology the work of Jung (1959/ 1990) falls within this category. So too does the early work in social psychology of Durkheim (Durkheim, & Giddens, 1972) and Wundt (1912/1973). Research into shared metacognitions, which first manifested in the symbolic interaction movement (Mead, 1934), also falls within this third category. Theories of group mind with their emphasis on mindless herd mentality and the loss of individual will have until very recently fallen out of favor with social psychologists. But perhaps under the heading of “what was once old is new again” there has been a revival of group-centric theories of social behavior. This has in part been spurred by the social constructionist perspective.

By far, most group-centric theories of group cohesion have come out of the social psychology lineage of theory-building and research. Fiske (1991) posits a relational-model theory of social relations that falls within this category. It is Fiske’s hypothesis that individuals use models of social relationship that provide them with assumptions with regard to how to interpret the behaviors of others in the social relationship and in turn how to respond. Fiske maintains that there are four universal psychosocial relations models: communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing.

The communal sharing model is characterized by a strong sense of common identity where the boundaries between individual members are blurred and group membership becomes the dominant means by which individuals identify themselves. The authority ranking model is characterized by its asymmetrical hierarchical authority models. Ranking determines power

within such a social model. Fiske notes that this model is not the same as coercive power which is based on domination and involuntary hierarchy. The equality matching model is characterized by an egalitarian relationship between equals who maintain a strong sense of separation and individuality. One-person, one-vote describes decision-making within this model. Finally, market pricing, is characterized by relationships based on exchange values. This is the wage based model.

From the perspective of Fiske's quasi relational-model, a group's longevity is anchored in a shared psychological model that defines the underlying assumptions that determine the initiation and governance of relational interaction. Social organization differs depending on which of the four models shapes the individual's engagement with others. Communal sharing is marked by a sense of commonality that blurs the distinction between self and group. The self-construct is inseparable from the group construct. Authority ranking is usually associated with a charismatic leader around which the members build their own self-identity. Equality matching on the other hand is built on peer-to-peer, tit-for-tat dyadic relationships. Market pricing frames the self-identity in terms of economic worth.

Fiske, drawing on the early work of Murray (1938), concludes that individuals engage in communal sharing groups when there is a predominant need for affection and affiliation. Individuals with a need to be led by others who are presumably more competent or who feel the need to lead and/or dominate are drawn to authority ranking groups. A need for achievement and distinction draws individuals to groups and organizations based on market pricing. A need for justice, equality and fairness propels individuals into equality groups.

Fiske hypothesizes that his relational-model is endogenous and emerges in a predictable sequence during the child and adolescent maturational process. Acquisition of the communal sharing model begins with the initial infant relationship with the primary caregiver and is followed by emergence of the authority ranking model, the equality model and finally the market sharing model. He speculates that there is a sensitive time for emergence of each model and that disruption of the emergence process may have correlations with dysfunctions with attachment

styles as described by Bowlby (1988) and Ainsworth (1978). Fiske's model indeed has similarities to the theories of adult attachment theorists in that he posits that "...the self is the person who relates to others in specified ways, and for us to understand a person's self we need to know the nature of the relationships that the person assumes to be most valid" (1991, p. 82-83). His model, it should be noted however, differs from those of most adult relationship theorists in that it posits four distinct categories of social interaction rather than a dimensionally constructed model. Still, his attempts to develop links to attachment theory are one more datum point associating attachment styles with social structures larger than the dyadic relationships between mother and child and romantic couples.

Social identity theory and its variants are one of the dominant group-centric theories currently in circulation. Social identity theory was initially formulated by European psychologist Tajfel (1981) as a response to what he perceived as the overly individualistic focus of American psychological theory. Tajfel states that there is a component of a person's self-concept that he labels *social identity* that is derived out of the individual's group membership and the values and emotional significance that the individual assigns to that membership. Social identity theory takes the position that a group's psychosocial identity arises out of its member's shared self-conception of what it means to be a member and what it means to not be a member. (Hogg & Knippenberg, 2003) Social identity theorists refer to this self-conception as a *prototype* which is further defined as "... a fuzzy set of features that captures ingroup similarities and intergroup differences regarding beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and feelings" (p. 6). This prototype is contextually fluid; it varies over time and with the composition of the group.

Group cohesion from the perspective of social identity theory occurs because individuals derive a positive sense of self from their membership in groups that they perceive to be of high value and behave in manners that will preserve their relationships with those groups. It is in also in their interest to highly value their own group, and therefore to work for the betterment of their



group, while devaluing out-groups. (Thoits & Virshup, 1997) Social identity theory therefore pays great attention to relationships between groups.

Cultural psychology take a view of the relationship between the self and the collective that at first appears similar to that of social identity theories. Miller and Prentice (1994) however make the important distinction that where social identity theorists consider an individual's social categories to be the basis of the *content* of the self, cultural psychologists consider that an individual's social relationships and categorizations are the basis of much of the construal of the *structure* of the self. This is an important distinction. The later view is congruent with the social constructionist position which I have adopted for this study.

Tropp and Wright (2001) also adhere to a theoretical position similar to that of Miller and Prentice. They propose that individuals incorporate their specific group identification into their self-systems. Ingroup identification, they say, is determined by the degree to which the ingroup is incorporated into the self-system. (2001, p. 586) Their research investigated individual differences in ingroup identification and concluded that there are variations in the way individuals within the same groups identify with the group and incorporate specific ingroup identifications into their self-system. I find Tropp and Wright's research interesting and significant to my own investigations because they describe the interconnectedness between the self and the ingroup as a fundamental psychological process found in all ingroups.

In an elaboration on Tajfel's self identity theory, Turner, et al. (1994) propose self-categorization as an explanation of group cohesion. Social identity from the perspective of self-categorization theory is constructed out of the choices of social categories that the individual identifies with and does not identify with. A key distinction of social categorization theory is the view that cohesion occurs when group members become depersonalized as they increasingly conform to the prototypical icon. A high degree of depersonalization from this perspective is positively correlated with group cohesion. This conformity extends to the emotional domain. It affects the feelings that members have for each other and for those outside the group. Abrams

(1994) reasons that anxiety reduction is the motivating factor that leads to depersonalization as the individual seeks to meld into the collective. The depersonalized social attraction hypothesis posits that those group members who are most prototypical will also be most liked and found to be most socially attractive. (Hogg, 1992, 1993)

Social identity theorists also posit that leadership and influence in groups with high levels of prototypicality is associated with the leader's conformity with the prototypical icon. Members more highly value the communications of those in the group who most closely conform to the prototypical icon. Hogg and Knippenberg (2003) propose however that group members do not associate their attraction to the group leader with their conformity with the prototypical characteristics but rather with a charismatic leadership personality that they create for that prototypical member. This process separates the prototypical leader from the rest of the group and creates a sense of leader-follower within the group members.

Thoits and Virshup (1997) note that both Tajfel's and Turner's theories do not pay adequate attention to the emotional processes that contribute to collective identity. This challenge has been responded to in a variety of ways, chief of which is to view social identity as a multidimensional construct with both cognitive and affective components.

Several researchers have examined whether social identity should be construed as a unidimensional construct or a multidimensional construct (Cameron & Lalonde, 2001; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Jackson, 2002). Ellemers, et al. (1999) identify three distinct components to self identity: a cognitive component premised on awareness of group membership; a judgmental component premised on the value that is placed on group membership; and an affective component premised on the level of emotional commitment to the group. (1999) They further conclude that individuals who self-selected for their group membership rather than being assigned to a group will have higher group commitment. They found this variable to be independent of whether the group was a high-value or low-value group or whether the group was large or small in size.

Cameron (2004) has developed a three-factor model similar to Ellemers, et al. but organized differently. Cameron describes the first factor, centrality, in terms of the frequency with which the group comes to mind for its members as well as the subjective importance that members place on group membership for their self-definition. He and other researchers describe centrality as having a cognitive valence. Cameron describes the other two factors, ingroup affect and ingroup ties, as having an affective valence. He associates ingroup affect with scales of collective self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) and describes it as specific emotions arising from group membership. Ingroup ties are described as emotional closeness to the group and the degree to which one feels bound to the group. It is interesting, given the review of adult attachment theory which will follow in the next section of this document, that Cameron states that ingroup ties are similar to those between parents and children.

Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002) have developed a taxonomy for examining social identity theory that I think is particularly worth attending to and which I will examine in some detail here. They conclude that we cannot use a single framework for identifying the causes of commitment to the group. Commitment will vary depending on the social context out of which the group has arisen and within which the group now resides. They propose a taxonomy summarized in the following table:

**Table 2: Primary concerns and motives of the social self (Ellemers et al., 2002, p. 167)**

		GROUP COMMITMENT	
		LOW	HIGH
No threat	Concern	Accuracy/efficiency	Social meaning
	Motive	Noninvolvement	Identity expression
Individual-directed threat	Concern	Categorization	Exclusion
	Motive	Self-affirmation	Acceptance
Group-directed threat	Concern	Value	Distinctiveness, value
	Motive	Individual mobility	Group-affirmation

The no threat, low group commitment type is characterized by low levels of involvement with external social stimuli and low levels of commitments of the members to the group. The group sense of self is relatively uninvolved and self-interest becomes the chief driver of participation. Members of this type of group would be expected to score high on measures of individual self-interest. The group will remain together as long as the interests of the individual members are served. Emotional bonding is minimal.

The no threat, high group commitment type is characterized by an acquisition of self-relevancy and self-relativity at a group level. The primary concern of the group will be to affirm and express its identity. This group can be described in both cognitive and affective terms. If the group identity is still in formation it is likely to be defined in terms of comparisons to outgroups. Once the group identity is formed, Ellemers et al. state, the behavior of this type of group follows the patterns set out in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1983) as have already been described. This group, in contrast to the previous group description, is motivated to positively differentiate itself from outgroups by developing collective esteem and behavioral differentiators.

In the self-directed threat, low group commitment type of group, membership is threatening to the individual. The chief concern of the individual is to resist categorization by affirming behaviorally and affectively one's distinctiveness. If membership is voluntary, then a desire for differentiation from the group is paramount.

In the self-directed threat, high commitment type of group, membership is highly desired by the individual but may not be desired by the rest of the group. In this case the individual strives to identity through what he/she conceives of as the group norms. This may take behavioral and affective forms such as adopting dress and speech patterns as well as belief systems.

In the group-directed threat, low group commitment type of group, the group itself is threatened although the individual has no strong commitment to the group. The individual will seek to avoid being identified with the group by distinguishing him/herself from group behaviors by establishing a strong independent identity. When this is successful, the self-esteem of the individual is not damaged and threat to the self (as in Type 3) does not occur. One of the dominant strategies is the attempt to leave the group and align with another group.

The group-directed threat, high group commitment type of group is characterized by either a threat to the group's morality and values or a threat to the group's distinctiveness as when cultures are assimilated. Strong ingroup loyalties as well as self-stereotyping occur as the group attempts to distinguish and validate itself. This is often accompanied by negative comparisons with outgroups.

Ellemers et al. (2002) mapped existing research related to group commitment against their taxonomy and make two important observations that are relevant to my own study. First, they observe that social psychology has been primarily concerned with theorizing and research focused on individual processes and interpersonal interaction. Second, they observe that most laboratory experimentation uses the "minimal group paradigm" with groups "with no history and no future" and consequently low levels of commitment to the group. (p. 163) I am apparently not the only researcher to notice the overwhelming predominance of psychology graduate students in

the research population. I have also in the course of reviewing the literature noted how even those researchers purportedly espousing theories such as social identity theory or self-categorization theory have a tendency to state their findings in terms of individual member characteristics rather than those of group dynamics which are the hallmarks of these theories.

I have tentatively placed the Early Birds within the *no-threat, high commitment* cell of Ellemers et al. taxonomy. Review of the research findings will confirm or disconfirm this initial hypothesis. The Early Birds then may be an additional datum point for an under researched population. By couching my research on the Early Birds within the social constructionist paradigm I hope to shed light on those characteristics of group dynamics that can best be framed within a group rather than individual paradigm. Additionally, Ellemers' et al. taxonomy is a further way of narrowing the applicability of the research findings. Earlier in this document I noted that my findings must be limited in applicability to contemporary Western culture. I would add to this limitation that my findings will also be limited based on where the Early Birds are positioned on Ellemers' et al. taxonomy.

A recent, and from my perspective, particularly interesting contribution to the understanding of group dynamics is that of the transpersonal groupobject. Karterud (1998) first used the terms *transpersonal group* and *transpersonal groupobject* as a conceptual response to Kohut's (1977) description of the group self. As an alternative to the reification of the group that Kohut's work seemed to be logically heading toward, Karterud described the group as "impossible to define or locate precisely" (p. 88). Cohen and Ettin (2002) elaborate on the concept of the transpersonal groupobject. They posit two construals of the group. First, there is the *personal group self* which is the internal cognitive schema of the group that is part of each individual members self identity. Second, the *transpersonal group self* is described as being perceived by members and nonmembers alike as an other with its own consciousness and agency.

When group members hold similar perceptions of the group attributes, including shared beliefs, customs, values which will determine relationships with each other and nongroup

members they interact with the group as a transpersonal object. (Cohen & Ettin, 2002) When members engage with each other they engage not only as individual selves but also as speakers and listeners of the transpersonal group. The perceived objectivity of the group increases with time.

The theories of Cohen and Ettin were developed out of their extensive work with psychotherapy groups. For this reason, many of their explanations arise out of an attempt to explain processes that may be exaggerated in these types of groups and, in my opinion may be somewhat skewed by this specialized application. They make a distinction, for example, between the usage of the term *groupobject* as described by Segalla (1998), also drawing from his experience with psychotherapy groups, and their own usage of the term *transpersonal group-self*. They draw a distinction between a *group-self* function that they describe as cognitive and a *groupobject* function that they describe as motivational.

This distinction between the cognitive group-self and the affective groupobject strikes me as artificial at best. It does however lead Cohen and Ettin to describe alternate ways that individuals relate to the group that I do find useful. When an individual's internalization of the group as their personal group-self is insufficiently differentiated from their perceived transpersonal group-self, then they will place demands on the transpersonal group sense to satisfy unmet psychological needs. This (ab)use of the group Cohen and Ettin describe as the use of the transpersonal group self as an *archaic groupobject*. In contrast, when the group self is approached as a mature groupobject it functions to meet more mature ways of meeting needs for companionship, recognition, and belonging in ways that respect the boundaries separating the individual from group. While Cohen and Ettin are making very important observations about group behaviors I consider their model to be overcomplicated and at the same time insufficiently subtle.

This discussion of archaic groupobjects allows a return to the concept of organizational regression that I first presented in the section on postmodern culture and its relationship to the

effectiveness and longevity of groups and organizations. As cited earlier, Bowen (1985/2004) has posited that his theories of regression in the family group can be applied to organizational and societal structures as well. Lack of differentiation between the individual and the family unit is the pathology core to Bowen's theories of family dysfunction. As such, it leads to the dysfunctional behaviors of triangling, observational blindness and distancing that Bowen also describes as the methods used to manage anxiety on a broader scale as characteristic of societal regression.

In a similar but surprisingly, at least to this researcher, independent line of research Kilburg, Stokes, and Kuruvilla (1998) (the authors appear to be oblivious to Bowen's earlier work), drawing on the earlier work of Kernberg (1978, 1979), have also applied theories of organizational regression to the life cycle of professional organizations. Their work is important in this section on group cohesion because they categorize the stages an organization goes through as it degenerates and finally dies based on its degrees of regressive behavior. The thesis of Kilburg, et al. is that leaders and followers of organizations, under certain stressors, both from inside and outside the organization, will regress into infantile and childlike methods of coping with anxiety and feeling of lack of safety. These methods will most likely be dysfunctional and will work to tear the organization apart. While Kilburg, et al.'s work is applied here to the business environment it has important implications for social organizations as well. I base this belief in part on Bowen's conclusions drawn from his work with families and then extended into societal applications which I have presented earlier.

Kilburg, et al. (1998) presents an interesting overview of the progression of organizations from health to dysfunction. They provide an intriguing story of how organizations regress into primitive behaviors that work against social cohesion. Making use of methods similar to Lewin's force field analysis (1951), they describe the internal and external driving, restraining and barrier forces operating on an organization. According to Lewin's theories, organizations cannot grow unless the driving forces are stronger than the restraining and barrier forces. Kilburg, et al. use the



terms *internal regressive forces* and *external regressive forces* to describe the forces working against organizational health and cohesion. They use the term *balancing forces* to refer to the forces contributing to resisting regressive tendencies. They describe this set of forces as including “psychosocial, administrative, leadership and organizational mastery; personal and professional well-being of the members of the organization; the existence of a vision, a mission, and identifiable core values, organizational structures, and organizational processes; effective leadership and followership dynamics and behaviors; and a functional organizational culture” (p. 110).

But what they do not present however is an explanation of why these forces remain operative and resistive of regressive forces in some organizations while other organizations, even with knowledge of what is required to resist regression, succumb to regressive forces. Why do some organizations regress while others, experiencing the same internal and external regressive forces, self-heal and remain high functioning?

Bowen, whose theories of social regression I have reviewed earlier in this study, centers this question around the issue of how organizations manage anxiety-inducing stimuli. He proposed that an even and harmonious balance between individuality and togetherness in any social system is critical to its optimum functioning. Togetherness forces, he contends, are derived from “the universal need for ‘love’, approval, emotional closeness, and agreement”. Individuality forces, on the other hand, he says, are derived from an equally strong drive to “be a productive, autonomous individual” (2004, p. 277). When a group is calm and not experiencing anxiety these two needs are balanced and not in conflict with each other. Healthy group functioning then is fostered by maintaining low levels of organizational anxiety by balancing individual and collective needs.

***Research Supporting Recursive and Synergistic Models of Group Cohesion***

I have categorized recursive and synergistic models of group dynamics as those that focus their attention on the relationship between the multiple layers of organizations and structures within groups. These models concern themselves with how the recursive relationships between levels mold the behavior of the group. Many of these theoretical approaches attempt to provide a bridge between member-centric and group-centric approaches.

Postmes, et al. (2005) explicitly tackled this issue. As an outcome of their research with small groups they concluded that understanding of group processes requires understanding what is happening at multiple organizational levels – individual, intragroup, intergroup, and ultimately at the socio-structural level. They build on both social identity theory and self-categorization theory that have already been described earlier. They propose an interactive model of social identity formation that includes both a top-down component and a bottoms-up component. Top-down, the existing social influences both within the group and superordinate to the group, shape the social identities of the individual members. This view is consistent with social identity theory. At the same time, they propose that an additional force is at play in small groups. This second force contributing to social identity is built up out of intragroup interaction. At the heart of this interaction is identity-mediated communication. Postmes et al. (2005) observes that communication processes are the means by which the group develops its situated social identity from the bottom-up. This process moves the group away from abstract concepts of what it is to be a group into meaningful personalized experiences.

This second view stands in contrast to social identity theory which posits the occurrence of depersonalization as collective identity increases. The research and theorizing of Postmes, et al. challenges this assumption in that it emphasizes the strength of the individual personal identities, negotiated through discourse, as contributing to the bottom-up construction of the group's social identity. I find their work particularly interesting because in hypothesizing that intragroup

communications contribute to building up a shared social identity, Postmes, et al., provide a link to research on the role of narrative and storytelling as contributing to group identity. This research and theorizing will be described in the methodology section of this study.

While some of the theoretical positions described earlier have taken the position that there is an inevitable tension in groups between the needs of the individual and the needs of the group, other theorists reject this position. Bettencourt and Sheldon (2001), for example, conclude that autonomy and relatedness are complementary psychological needs. They conclude that one key way in which this synergy can be achieved is through authentic social role enactment. Social role enactment they contend affords opportunities to display competence that motivationally contributes to group cohesion. It also provides opportunities “for meeting needs for distinctiveness in the context of group memberships” (p. 1139).

While not cited by Bettencourt and Sheldon, their findings are also supportive to the theories of Bowen (1985/2004) as cited earlier with regard to the manifestations of anxiety in social groups. That is, authentic role identity becomes a means to reduce anxiety in social environs. I will return to this discussion later in the findings section of this study.

Several theorists have taken a relational constructionist perspective and have focused on interactive and recursive system dynamics. Shotter (2003), for example, proposes a view of social structures that is reflective of this view. He suggests that we view social life as an ecosystem. That is, we should view social life as holistically comprised of self-sustaining interdependent nodes of activity.

There are several things that I find particularly interesting about Shotter’s view. First, he proposes that there is a moral interdependence within social groupings to provide each other with what he calls *socio-ontological resources*. We are morally obligated to provide each other with the “... communicative opportunities we all require if we are to realize our own distinctive modes of being” (p. 163). Second, Shotter contends that we are not naturally endowed with this capability. Rather, it is the result of continual effort on our part to learn how to create and sustain

the social conditions conducive to attaining our distinctive modes of being. Third, following on from the findings of Prigogine (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984) in the natural sciences, Shotter proposes that groups sustain themselves by *continuous interaction* with their environs. Shotter adopts Prigogine's theories of *dissipative structures* to describe this phenomenon. According to Prigogine's theory dissipative structures maintain their organization by means of a continual energy exchange with their chaotic external surroundings. Constant engagement is required at the organization's boundaries. Dissipative structures cannot exist apart from their external environments. In contrast to this model of creation and sustainment, Shotter, states that social orders that deny their members socio-ontological resources and that isolate themselves from their surroundings cannot sustain themselves.

Similarly, Melucci (1995) in his descriptions of how collective identity forms the basis for social movements describes collective identity as "...an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which action takes place" (p. 44). He describes collective identity as process. It is constructed and reconstructed out of the repeated interactions of individuals at multiple levels of organization. In Melucci's view, the success or lack of success of group cohesion is dependent on the success or lack of success of the network of active relationships.

One of the key questions circulating through the theorizing and research presented so far is with regard to where cognition and indeed consciousness resides within the group. Does the group have a consciousness of its own? Does it have entitivity? Is there a group mind?

Cohen and Ettin (2002) whose concept of the transpersonal groupobject was introduced earlier in this section, make a distinction between the personal group self which they describe as "myself" in or in relation to a group and the transpersonal groupobject which they describe as members' personification of the group as an other having a self of its own. Members develop

interpersonal relationships with the transpersonal groupobject in the same way that they form these types of relationships with individuals.

Cohen and Ettin do not give enitative status to the transpersonal groupobject in the way that is implied with the usage of such terms as *group mind* or *collective consciousness*. They do however give it the status of phenomenological object in the way that developmental psychologist Winnicott (1971) refers to the transitional object of the young child. Indeed, they posit a similar role for the transpersonal groupobject as that played by the transitional object for the young child. According to object relations theories such as Winnicott's, the child uses the transitional object – the teddy bear, the blanket, the imaginary friend – in the process of differentiating their sense of personal self from that of their sense of self as fused with the mother or primary caregiver. When this differentiation is incompletely or inadequately navigated the child fails to develop a fully individualized, and hence psychologically sound, sense of self.

Cohen and Ettin contend that a similar type of developmental process can be occurring in group relationships. They distinguish two types of group relations between the individual and the transpersonal groupobject: archaic and mature. Archaic relations occur when the individual is unable to differentiate their transpersonal group self from their personal group self. In these instances the individual is particularly vulnerable to changes in group dynamics. Disruptions of group activities, changes to group membership, shifts in group beliefs, etc. all have a profound effect on the individual's sense of self. In contrast, the maturely related individual, because their sense of self is fully differentiated from their sense of the transpersonal groupobject, can accept changes in group dynamics and even see them as learning experiences.

Although their theorizing is based on observations of psychotherapy groups I feel there is generalizability of Cohen and Ettins' theorizing to all group processes. They are saying something very important with regard to why informal groups can remain together for extended periods of time and why perhaps other groups fall apart.

Wegner (1987) brings his theory of transactive memory to this discussion. He defines a transactive memory system as “a set of individual memory systems in combination with the communication that takes place between individuals” (p. 186). A group may maintain a collective memory that is not held in total by any single member. The group distributes the cognitive processes of the group throughout its members through communication processes. In a sense, the group replicates on a metascale the cognitive processing that occurs in individuals. According to Wegner, new knowledge is created within the group when it engages in integrative processes. Integrative processes bring together pieces of knowledge from group members in new configurations that engender new meanings.

Tindale and Kameda (2000) consider transactive memory to be a key component of more broadly defined shared mental models. According to them shared mental models can be shared without group awareness. The degree and type of these largely unconscious mental models will determine how the group makes decisions, conducts its activities, shares information, and indeed how the group defines itself in every aspect of its being. Goethals (1987), in a commentary on Wegner’s theories, takes the position that transactive memory is most visible and viable in groups with high levels of trust and mutual appreciation.

Wegner’s theory wavers somewhat between a constructivist and constructionist position. While he does not explicitly say so, his model seems to suggest what I would call a “bits and pieces” perspective on knowledge sharing. That is, it seems to imply that every piece of knowledge is located somewhere. You have a bit; I have a bit. Together we have a memory. At the same time however he also speaks in a relational perspective. He posits, for example, that transactive memory systems, once in place “... can have an impact on what the group as a whole can remember, and as a result, on what individuals in the group remember and regard as correct even outside the group” (p. 191). As a result of this he notes, that the system then recursively influences future transactive processing. I think this can be a useful explanation of how group

processes can take on a life of their own independent of the individual group members. I will return to Wegner's theories later in this study.

## ***Adult Developmental Factors and Their Relationship to Cohesive Group Behavior***

Although I have segmented this section of the Literature Review into two subsections – adult development theory and adult attachment theory – I consider this segmentation to be an artificial construct in the service of improved readability. Indeed, my views concur with those of Lopez and Brennan (2000) who propose that we should view personality and development as interdependent constructs and furthermore that we must view relationship patterns as the language to be used for making meaning of personality and developmental constructs. Perhaps representative of this interpenetration, what follows in the next subsections will often “bleed” from one subsection to another as the literature itself crosses the artificial boundaries I have placed on the organization of this section.

### ***Theories of Adult Development***

Western theories of adult development place an emphasis on the progressive changes that may occur in motivation, emotion, cognition, and behavior over the lifespan. My focus here is in presenting theory and research specific to adult development that have relevance with regard to what might motivate or dis-motivate adults to form long-term social relationships that may or may not extend over multiple stages or phases of the adult development cycle, however it might be defined. Further, I have limited this discussion to the theory and research that informs the social constructionist perspective that I have adopted for this study. This body of research will inform my analysis of the data regarding the psychosocial factors associated with the sustained Early Birds relationships.

The Early Birds in casual group conversations and in individual and group interview sessions have vehemently resisted being researched as “senior citizens” or in any way separated out as research subjects based on their age. When, for example, I proposed the phrase *older adults* as part of my research question, there were protests of “who are you calling old?” This in itself is perhaps indicative of the high functioning, both mentally and physically, of the group. Reference group theory provides supporting evidence that individuals perceive their own age in comparison to their peers. Individuals over 70 who perceive their life circumstances, particularly with regard to physical health and cognitive ability, as better than that of their peers will tend to perceive themselves as middle-aged. (Bultena & Powers, 1978) This seems to be borne out by the attitudes of the Early Birds who continue to be extremely active.

Nevertheless, based on antidotal information from conversations with members of the group it is significant that the average age of the Early Birds has been moving steadily upwards over the decades and that the current average age of those who were interviewed for this study was 68 at the time that the interviews were done. It is necessary then to at least briefly explore the implications of aging on the social cohesion and longevity of the group while still honoring their request to not be researched as a group of older adults.

My approach here is to examine aging as a lifespan *process* rather than as an examination of a particular *stage*, static and complete. This, as the research will demonstrate later in this document, is congruent with the perceptions that the Early Birds have of themselves. It is also congruent with a social constructionist perspective as described earlier in this document. As this section will demonstrate there is an enormous variety in the types of adult developmental theories to choose from. I have organized the theories and research presented in this section into two broad categories: stage models that define adult development as a sequential series of primarily biologically determined invariant developmental stages with predefined characteristics and achievements such as those by Erikson (1968, 1980, 1997) and Levinson (1988); and,



developmental models that reflect a constructivist perspective that emphasizes adult responses to socio-environmental factors.

*Stage models.*

Those theories that I classify as stage theories can be further divided into two categories: those that generally posit one or more postformal stages that follow on from the formal operations stage of classical Piagetian development theory and those that take a broader approach to adult development beyond that of examining cognitive capabilities, looking into motivation and emotional processing that generally build on the work of Erikson.

Piaget's work is considered by most constructivists to be the first constructivist developmental theory in that it emphasizes the role of social context in the developmental process. (Durkin, 1995) Even though Piaget's work does not speak to adult development it is important from a constructionist perspective to acknowledge his theories as the launching point for theorists who do speak to adult development. The Piagetian postformal stages can be characterized in a general sense as an ability to hold more than one belief systems concurrently even when there is conflict or paradox between them. This is thought to be the result of increased life experience and a deeper understanding of the contextual base of reality. (Stevens-Long & Michaud, 2003) Of those neo-Piagetian theories presented here some posit a single postformal stage and describe the characteristics of that stage; others posit multiple postformal stages, each characterized by an increase in cognitive sophistication.

Moral development holds an important place in constructionist thinking. Varela (1999), for example, as previously cited, placed enormous importance on the development of "ethical know how". Knowledge of what constitutes ethical behavior becomes increasingly important as we move our locus of awareness outside ourselves and into the larger social environ that subsumes ourselves within it. For this reason, Kohlberg's later stages of moral development are often referred to in the constructionist literature (Kegan, 1982, 1994) as the starting point for discussions of the social constructionist perspective on moral development. Kohlberg's (1969)

theory of moral development is an elaboration on Piaget's theories. Kohlberg identified six stages of moral development, each of which represents an increasing level of psychosocial complexity. Two assumptions permeate Kohlberg's model that make it specifically a stage model. First, Kohlberg posits that there is stage unity in that an individual's reasoning will reflect a consistent cognitive capacity throughout an entire stage. Second, there is stage-sequence invariance in that each achievement of the developmental capabilities of any stage requires the sequential completion of all previous stages. (Durkin, 1995)

Levels 5 and 6 of Kohlberg's model fall within postformal operations that are typically uncoupled from chronological considerations. Level 5 acknowledges the relativity of social values and rules while at the same time holding one's own beliefs in highest esteem. While one feels obligated to the values and rules of one's own group, there is also an appreciation for the possibility that another group outside one's own could hold a different view that is valid for that group. Level 5 is characterized by rationality. Characteristic of postformal operations, the individual is able to hold multiple, sometimes conflicting views and recognize the difficulty that reconciling these views may entail. Tolerance and respect for others are the hallmarks of this stage. Kegan (1982) notes however that there is also a vulnerability associated with this stage of Kohlberg's model. The ambiguity inherent in holding contradictory views in equal esteem can create moral confusion.

Level 6 of the Kohlberg model is associated with the individual recognition of universal ethical principles. These universal principles, such as a belief in the equality of all humans or the common good of mankind, supersede all rules and values of individual groups or societies. Where the rules and values of the group are in conflict with the universals, the individual is committed to act in accordance with the universals. The possibility of moral ambiguity that Kegan associates with stage 5 is resolved through reintegration in stage 6 of the individual in relationship with others.

An understanding of the level of moral development at which individuals in a particular group operate is an important consideration in evaluating its group dynamics. The level of moral development has implications for both how the group treats its own members as well as how it treats nonmembers. A group predominantly operating at levels 5 and 6 of Kohlberg's model, for example, should demonstrate more tolerance for divergence both within the group and between the group and nongroup members. These models will be examined in conjunction with findings from the Early Birds later in this study.

Loevinger's (1976) developmental model is perhaps the most broadly encompassing of the neo-Piagetian perspectives. Central to her model is the conception of ego as integrative of emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal functioning. Loevinger identifies nine stages of personality development that she arranges into three tiers. Each of these ego stages is a referential frame within which the individual interprets their experiential environment. (Pfaffenberger, 2005)

The first tier, preconventional, is comprised of the symbiotic, implosive and self-protective stages and is achieved during normal childhood development. The second tier, conventional includes the conformist, self-aware, and conscientious stages. It is during these stages, according to Loevinger's model, that development may be arrested. Various research studies have shown that an increasingly smaller percentage of the population will achieve each of the successive stages. Cohn (1998) estimates that the majority of the American population is operating at the self-aware level of development.

The postconventional tier is comprised of the individualistic, autonomous, and integrated stages. These stages become increasingly open to conjecture with regard to exactly what they "look like". Crooke-Greuter (1994) estimates that less than 1% of the American population is operating at the integrated levels. Words such as *transpersonal*, *self-actualization*, and *peak experience* begin to enter into the descriptive literature.

These are themes explored by Kegan (1982), another neo-Piagetian who also applied the constructive perspective to the developmental model. Like several of the theorists described

earlier in this section, he presents a stage model of development based on that of Piaget. He identifies four stages that are traversed in a sequential manner. What he calls the *incorporative* stage maps to Piaget's sensorimotor stage. The stage that he calls *impulsive* in that it is embedded in impulses and sensations can be mapped to Piaget's preoperational. The *imperial* stage which is characterized by self-centered needs for self-reliance corresponds to Piaget's concrete operational. The task of the *interpersonal* stage is to establish identification through relationships and corresponds to Piaget's early formal operational. The last of Kegan's stages that maps to a Piagetian stage is the *institutional* which is related to identification through groups, work and career and corresponds to Piaget's full formal operational stage.

To Piaget's model, Kegan adds an additional postformal stage called the *inter-individual*. This stage is involved with engagement in multiple group involvement and the development of a capacity for self-sacrifice and genuine intimacy. This includes adult love relationships and intimacy with others in general. Kegan's perspective is constructionist in that he describes development as a meaning-making process with each stage a point of being embedded in a larger cultural context. For this reason he is especially interested in the transitions between stages. This is the point where his theories expand out from the Piagetian model. He describes the movement from one stage to another as an alternating sequence of construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of the self-system with each new stage adding complexity to the overall system. There is a period of relatively stable time within each stage which he calls *evolutionary truces*. He suggests that these are temporary resting points within the larger human journey of continual meaning-making. In a very interesting way he reinterprets the object relational theorists such as Winnicott (1965) and Mahler (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975). The development process, according to Kegan, involves extracting oneself from instances of embeddedness and essentially creating the separated environment as an object that one relates to. Life becomes a journey of continually extracting oneself from current holding environments as meaning-making progresses.

The transition process goes through three steps, losing of the current self-concept, acquiring of a new self-concept, and reintegrating those now separated parts of oneself – family, friends, and organizations – into the self-concept. It is critical, he notes for the existing environment, what he calls the embedded environment, to support this transition. The embedded environment, whether it be the mother, the family, the school, work environment, or whatever, must be able to let go of the individual, maintaining its presence even while it is itself being rejected, and then finally, be present to be reintegrated. If any of these three components are missing from the relationship, then there is potential for thwarting the evolutionary process. When the environment fails the individual, as for instance when it asks the individual to function at a lower level of development, then the discomfort may be so great that the individual is compelled to abandon the environment.

This final point, the responsibility of the social unit to the development of the individual, whether it be the family or a work environment, differentiates Kegan's perspective from that of other developmental theorists. Movement from the institutional to the interindividual requires a change in how social units see their responsibility to the developmental process. Ultimately the social unit must be willing to accept change, contradiction, and ultimate loss of control of its own institutional point of view. Kegan directs the following challenge which I will respond to when I present the findings. What, he asks, "... will a workplace or organization" look or feel like "when it can culture interindividuality as well as institutionality" (1982, p. 247)? These themes as well as the ones uncovered by Pfaffenberger as described earlier have interesting implications for an examination of the factors contributing to the longevity of a social group.

Commons and Richards (2002) posit a four-stage theory of postformal operations that they call the *model of hierarchical complexity*. Their model is significant they contend because it provides a framework against which other theories can be compared and contrasted. According to their model the first postformal stage, *systemic operations*, is concerned with mastery of the task

of collecting multiple variables into a single, unifying system. In the process of doing this some variables that do not fit the single system may be ignored for the sake of theoretical coherence. The next stage, *metasystematic operations* is concerned with constructing multiple systems and metasystems derived from disparate systems. At the level of *paradigmatic operations* the individual is able to synthesize new paradigms out of a reconstruction of existing systems. Finally, at the level of *cross-paradigmatic operations*, the individual is creating entirely new fields of knowledge. This final stage according to Commons and Richards has been achieved by only a small number of individuals including the likes of Copernicus and Descartes.

Sinnott (2002) provides a slightly different way of organizing his descriptions of postformal operations. He views postformal operations as a single stage with multiple tasks. The processes of adulthood, he says, are not intended to lead toward a predefined developmental endpoint. Maintaining a balance, a dynamic homeostasis, is the characteristic of this model of postformal operations. Maintaining this balance requires the complexity of thought associated with postformal operations. Although I have placed this model within the stage model it seems to have more in common with non-stage models given the broadness of the stage definition.

Several adult developmental stage models have also been built that take a broader view of development that considers more than increased cognitive sophistication. Any discussion of these types of models of adult developmental must begin with Erikson (1980) whose work influenced so many other theorists whose positions will be described later in this section. Erikson defined human development in terms of a series of internal conflicts, each of which resolves into a higher level of development.

Erikson's model is important for at least two reasons. First, he framed his model of human development in psychosocial terms, as opposed to the then current psychoanalytical model which was couched in psychosexual terms. Fundamental to his view of development is the belief that development is inextricably intertwined with the social environment and that development entails an ever-increasing widening of the social radius. Second, Erikson's eight stage model of

development included for the first time three adult stages as well as the early life stages.

Successful navigation of each stage according to Erikson's model requires successful completion of the tasks of the previous stage. Failure to complete the previous tasks results in pathology.

Thus, Erikson describes each stage in terms of successful-unsuccessful couplets

The first adult stage, *intimacy vs. isolation*, entails establishing a loving relationship with another individual that is based on mutual respect and reciprocal sharing of emotional experiences. *Generativity vs. self-absorption*, the next stage, addresses the question of who the individual will be to the larger society. Will the individual reach out to community in a giving manner or will the individual retreat into him/herself without regard for others? Erikson describes the final stage, *integrity vs. disgust and despair*, as the last great life task. Wisdom is the key operant of the integrity stage. If however, the tasks of the previous stages have not been successfully navigated, then the alternative to wisdom, according to Erikson, is a sense of loss.

Stevens-Long's (1988) theory has strong similarities to Erikson's. She proposed that our thinking about adult development theories can be organized into a system-of-systems model as illustrated in the following table. Her views are also interesting because of their dynamic nature that integrates findings from some of the non-stagelike theories that I will describe later in this section. She envisions, for example, that in her model an individual's development at any point in time to be at various levels across the matrix illustrated below. She associates each period of life with its own unique set of developmental tasks along four parallel tracks.

**Table 3: Development across the adult lifespan. (From Judith Stevens-Long, *Adult Life*, Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, 1988, p. 86)**

	Young Adulthood	Middle Adulthood	Later Adulthood
Motivation	<p><i>Self-Actualized Intimacy</i></p> <p>The need to resolve the conflict between individuation and fusion in the context of close relationships; to be intimate and self-sufficient</p>	<p><i>Self-Actualized Generativity</i></p> <p>The need to develop and maintain the social system and continue to individuate in the context of pressure; to be stable and responsible</p>	<p><i>Self-Actualized Integrity</i></p> <p>The need to accept one's past, one's life history as meaningful, and to continue to develop or individuate</p>
Emotion	<p><i>Mature Love</i></p> <p>The ability to identify completely with another and maintain a strong sense of self</p>	<p><i>Responsibility</i></p> <p>The ability to maintain a sense of self and exercise judgment in spite of personal and social disequilibrium; to exhibit both compassion and control</p>	<p><i>Patience</i></p> <p>The ability to tolerate conflict; to identify with opposition</p>
Cognition	<p><i>Insight</i></p> <p>The ability to analyze relationships within a system and to find logical solutions</p>	<p><i>Perspective</i></p> <p>The ability to compare relationships across systems, and to find adequate solutions</p>	<p><i>Autonomy</i></p> <p>The ability to see one's own role in the experience of reality; to mediate between emotions and cognition</p>
Behavior	<p><i>Ethical/committed</i></p> <p>Behavior becomes driven by personal principles rather than conformity; interests deepen</p>	<p><i>Effective/Enabling</i></p> <p>One is able to meet one's own needs and to assist others without wasted effort; behavior becomes productive</p>	<p><i>Reciprocity</i></p> <p>One is able to meet one's own needs without using another person instrumentally</p>



Many of the theories in this category focus on relational changes that appear to be specific to older adults. Bellah et al.(1985), whose research was described earlier, observed that for many Americans there is a midlife change in priorities from a competitive orientation to one of “sharing with others in intimacy” (p. 71). Interest in family and friends increases while there is a simultaneous withdrawal from more public aspects of life such as career.

Bellah, et al.’s findings are consistent with the landmark research of Levinson. Levinson (1988) used his study of a small group of men with admittedly similar demographics to develop a theory that he says is a macrostructure of sequential eras incorporating the entire life cycle. He posits that there is a sequence of age-specific eras of approximately 25 years each that each man goes through. The eras are overlapping with one era beginning before the previous one has terminated: childhood and adolescence from birth to 22; early adulthood from 17 to 45; middle adulthood from 40 to 65; and, late adulthood from 60 to end of lifespan.

Early adulthood in Levinson’s words “is distinguished by its fullness of energy, capability and potential, as well as external pressure. In it, personal drives and societal requirements are powerfully intermeshed at times reinforcing each other and at times in stark contradiction” (p. 23). This is the time of the dream. In contrast, Levinson says that midlife is characterized as a period of loss of the vitality of early adulthood and a fear of one’s own mortality. The task of late adulthood is to find new ways to define oneself that involve social engagement and reaching out for beyond one’s previous highly personalized and self-serving interests.

Levinson pays particular attention to the transition periods between eras. These transitions can take four or five years, take as little as three years, and rarely take more than five years. They can be mildly disruptive or become what we have come to know as the midlife crisis. The task of the transition period is to reappraise existing psychosocial structures and, based on the opportunities and losses associated with each era, to make moderate or drastic changes to the life structure. Like Erikson, he believes that the degree of change depends on how well the tasks of

the previous era were completed to the satisfaction of the individual. If too much of the work from previous eras and transitions between eras is left undone, then Levinson believes that decline and despair can set in and block further development.

In addition to the smallness of the research sample and the similarities in demographics, there are other qualifiers to Levinson's research. One is that both Levinson and Levinson's research participants were living and writing during an era when the humanistic writings of several theorists were popularized in American culture. The questing motifs of the humanist writing of May (1953, 1969, 1976), for instance, resonates through Levinson's conclusions.

So too, do Maslow's (1971; 1968, 1970) writings about the struggle for self-actualization and climbing the ladder of the hierarchy of needs. Maslow's (1970) conception of human development is framed as a hierarchical ladder of individual needs beginning with the initial and primary need for safety at the bottom of the ladder and the need for self-actualization as the final and most sophisticated need. Maslow's theory is a stage model in that the higher stages cannot be reached until the needs of the lower stages are fulfilled. Maslow's model does not associate these stages with any particular age of the individual and consider attainment of self-actualization, while highly desirable, not the inevitable achievement of all individuals.

*The Study of Aging Development* at Harvard University (Vaillant, 2002) is probably one of the longest lived prospective longitudinal studies of aging. It is especially interesting because of its large size and its composition of 3 initially independent studies together totaling 824 participants. The three cohorts include the 268 participant Harvard Grant Study of socially advantaged male Harvard graduates born around 1920, the Glueck study of 456 socially disadvantaged inner city men born in the 1930s, and 90 women from the relatively small Terman study of gifted children born around 1910.

Based on this study, Vaillant developed a model of adult development which is a variation on Erikson's model. Between Erikson's intimacy vs. isolation stage and the generativity vs. stagnation stage Vaillant added a stage he calls career consolidation. Successful navigation of

this stage, according to Vaillant, involves engaging in work that is characterized by “contentment, compensation, competence, and commitment” (p. 47). He adds another stage called Keeper of the Meaning between Erikson’s generativity vs. stagnation stage and integrity vs. disgust and despair stage.

While Vaillant presents his theories as a stage model of development, many of what I feel are his most significant findings about adult development are not stage specific. He observes for example that study participants who could be sick without being ill were characterized by the study researchers as aging most successfully. Additionally, he identified increases in creativity and play, the acquisition of wisdom, and development of spirituality also as qualities of those who were most successfully aging.

Vaillant identified six predictive factors of healthy aging, which when present at high levels at the age of 50 were predictive of being categorized as Healthy-Well rather than Sad-Sick at ages 75 to 80. These included: (a) no heavy smoking, (b) no alcohol abuse, (c) a stable marriage or relationship, (d) some exercise, (e) not being overweight, and (f) mature defenses. With regard to this last factor, mature defenses, Vaillant emphasizes the importance of developing four mature psychosocial coping skills: sublimation, humor, altruism, and suppression. These skills are not always achieved by adults but rather are the hallmarks of having achieved the later levels of Eriksonian development.

A recent and rather controversial developmental model is that of gerotranscendence developed by Swedish gerontologist Tornstam. Tornstam (Jönson & Magnusson, 2001) contends that there is a naturally occurring shift in old age to a psychological state of Zen-like wisdom characterized by increased feeling of cosmic connection to the spirit of the universe, changes in senses of time and space, an increased affinity with past and future generations, a decrease in attention to material things, and increased time in contemplation and meditation. This naturally occurring shift however is obstructed by the competitiveness and materialistic nature of Western society. Tornstam’s theory is controversial in that the results of his research studies are

considered by other researchers to be highly ambiguous and contradictory. Jönson and Magnusson, for example, conclude that there is no evidence of gerotranscendent wisdom that is qualitatively different in old age from any other period of life. Despite the lack of empirical evidence gerotranscendence has been adopted in Scandinavia as a major influence in social policy for the aged. Additionally, J. Erikson (1997) has given over the entire final chapter of her revision of E. Erikson's *Life Cycle Completed* to gerotranscendence theory. I agree with Jönson and Magnusson that while it is difficult to prove that gerotranscendence is indeed a developmental stage ala Erikson, it may have considerable value as a postmodern gerontology emphasizing the importance of cultural and psychosocial factors as key to the meaning-making processes of old age. In this sense Tornstam's theories resonate deeply with the views of Bellah, et al. (1985) who view American cultural traditions that exalt the individual quest for self-fulfillment as limiting and isolating.

In a similar vein, American geropsychiatrist Cohen (2000) also views adult development through the lens of transcendent processes. Like Vaillant (2002) he identifies creativity as a hallmark of the later phases of adult development. He proposes that we look at the stages of adult development as openings to creative processes untapped during earlier development periods. He presents a model of later adult development comprised of four sequential stages: midlife reevaluation, liberation, summing-up, and encore. He characterizes the midlife evaluation phase, which he locates between the 40s and early 60s, as a period of insightful reflection. This is the period that is most typically associated with the popular phrase *midlife crisis*. Cohen states that the creative processes during this developmental phase are associated with intense urges to create meaning out of one's life. The liberation phases, which typically occurs during the 60s and 70s is associated with increased comfort with who we are and a willingness to take risks without worry of embarrassment or loss of status. The summing-up phase typically occurs during the 70s and later and is associated with consolidating the life experience into a unified story line. This is a period where creativity is expressed through personal narrative and wisdom sharing. Finally, the

encore stage which typically occurs at times of advanced age is associated with a desire to make a contribution to society. Creativity in this phase is associated with efforts to create a legacy.

Cohen considers the ways that we maintain and evolve in relationship to others is a key component of the adult creative process. To fully optimize the creative process he recommends that we pay attention to balancing our social portfolio across a continuum of individual and group activities that are both high and low energy and both group and individually oriented. The social portfolio framework is illustrated below. According to Cohen's model, The Early Birds fall into the high mobility/high energy quadrants. I will return to an examination of Cohen's theories when I present my findings.

**Table 4: The social portfolio matrix(G. Cohen, 2000, p. 167)**

	GROUP EFFORTS	INDIVIDUAL EFFORTS
	Group/High Mobility	Individual/High Mobility
HIGH MOBILITY HIGH ENERGY	<i>(Early Birds)</i>	<i>(Early Birds)</i>
LOW MOBILITY LOW ENERGY	Group/ Low Mobility	Individual / Low Mobility

This examination of adult developmental stage models reveals that there is little common consensus on what the end point or final stage of adult development could or should be. This is also the conclusion of Moshman (2003) who notes that "... there is no consensus on what constitutes the highest stage of cognitive development" (p. 47). What there is in common however seems to be a shared belief among researchers and theorists that there is in later adulthood a movement towards increased self-integration and self-meaning-making. I am struck however by the solitary nature of the theories and their emphasis on individual effort and achievement. While the end-state might be increased integration into a social context, the

developmental paths are generally described from the perspective of the individualistic solitary pursuit. These theories from my perspective may have as much to do with their embeddedness in the logical positivist social paradigm as with adult development. In the next section I will begin an exploration of some nonlinear, non-stage, constructivist models of adult development.

*Non-stage models.*

Another broad category of adult development theories differs from stage-like models in that while these theories may or may not be progressive, they are all consistent with each other in that they do not adopt set sequences of lock step dependencies as stage models do. These models are described in various terms such as systems-oriented, ecological, holistic, and especially as constructivist. Stevens-Long and Michaud (2003) describe these theories under the general term of *dynamic* which is the term I will use. These theories are characterized by their focus on the circumstantial nature of developmental change and also on the interactivity with the environment.

The constructivist perspective views development as the process by which organisms transform themselves through their own engagement with the psychosocial context.

Developmental advances are increasingly separated from genetic and environmental factors.

Hudson (1999) is an exemplifier of this second category and of the constructivist position. He distinguishes between the life lived in a linear manner and the life lived in a cyclical manner. He associates the linear development model as described in the previous section with our past cultural environment and the cyclical developmental model with what is most appropriate for the current social and cultural environment. He associates much of what he sees as American disillusion, cynicism, and lack of faith in the future with trying to make the linear model of adult development work in a world where only the cyclical model is appropriate. Hudson contends that the primary characteristic of the current cultural environment is rapid change. In this environment, he believes, the cyclical model of adult development is the only one that will bring personal and social satisfaction.

Hudson developed a model for the navigation of the cyclical process that he calls the *renewal cycle*. He notes that most adults are totally unprepared for this cycle even though they will inevitably go through it numerous times in their lives. Birth, death, loss of jobs, divorce, all these, and many other situations are potential triggers for the renewal cycle. We can either be thrown involuntarily into the cycle by outside events, or we can choose to go through the cycle out of our own volition.

Hudson believes that we grow as individuals and as social beings based on how we navigate these cycles. Successful navigation can leave us stronger, more real, and more socially available to others. In contrast, failure to navigate the cycle – often by resisting the changes in ourselves that it requires – can leave us with only a shadow life, living off past memories. Hudson calls each time through the cycle a *chapter*. Part of the cycle is experienced as stability; part as instability. There is no preference for which is better than the other. He notes that there are two ways that we can navigate this cycle. We can go through the whole cycle and experience a major change to our core ways of beings, in a real sense, recreating ourselves. Or, we can do what the vast majority of people do, we can make mini adjustments to our current ways of being so that the as-is situation is more workable. Hudson points out that in many cases we would be far better off to make the major change rather than trying to shore up what is no longer working for us in our lives. Hudson notes that there are different life skills that are required for each phase of the renewal cycle. Our successes in using these life skills determine whether we will use the life cycle as a transformation process or continue to shore up the status quo.

Constructivist developmental models focus on the role of relationships in the developmental process. Several researchers posit that the reasons for social relationships often change as one advances into old age. In later life relationships are more often sought out to enhance emotionally meaningful experiences while at the same time social contacts associated with less meaningful or rewarding experiences are curtailed. (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990) Baltes and Smith (1999) examined how the individual handles

life events. They view the adult lifespan as a series of gains and losses. They note that growth management is of greater concern during early adulthood while loss management becomes increasingly important into the later years of life. These works may have relevance to the motivations for a group of adults to remain in a long-term social relationship. It may be that the Early Birds view their participation as a means for emotionally meaningful experiences and emotionally as a loss maintenance action.

Creativity in later adulthood was discussed earlier in relation to the developmental theories of Cohen and peripherally in relation to Tornstam's developmental model of gerotranscendence. Creativity is also an interest of Tahir and Gruber (2002), who like Cohen, posit that creativity takes on special characteristics in later life. They adopt an evolving systems approach however that rejects the idea of formal developmental stages. The evolving systems approach (Wallace & Gruber, 1989) contrasts with nomothetic approaches (Lehman, 1953) that tend to focus on statistical age brackets as markers for where particular qualities and quantities of creative productivity are most likely to occur.

Rather, the evolving systems approach focuses on the interrelationship between knowledge, purpose, and affect as determinants of creativity. How the individual structures knowledge must be such that it is conducive to the creative process; purpose must be such that the individual is capable of sustained effort and of reaching out to the appropriate resources; and finally, affect must be sustained by interrelational networks of support that foster creative processes. (Tahir & Gruber, 2002)

Tahir and Gruber's findings regarding creativity are at odds with those previously described. They conclude from their research that there are no common trajectories and peak periods that can be associated with creative styles and productivity. Nor are there common styles, such as an emphasis on the aging process itself, which can be generally attributed to later life creativity subject matters. What they do find however that is common to later life creative processes is an importance placed on collaboration and generative engagement. They associate



this desire to leave something of themselves behind with Erikson's generativity vs. stagnation stage.

Because Tahir and Gruber place such a high emphasis on the collaborative aspects of creativity as well as on the importance of an optimal interrelationship between knowledge, purpose and affect, there are interesting implications for the study of group processes. What are the characteristics of an interrelational network that provide the affective environment conducive of creativity? And is there an association between an environment conducive to creativity and sustained group processes? My preliminary observations of the Early Birds suggest that as individuals they are highly creative and collectively demonstrate a lively interchange of ideas and jokes when together. I will return to this them later when I present my findings.

Averill (1986) also adopts a constructivist perspective on adult development. He contends that emotional processes are not innate or developed solely out of the events of childhood. Rather, they continue to develop and evolve throughout the entire lifespan. He further elaborates that emotional development process are not linear but rather follow a piecemeal and cumulative path. This view allows then for possibility of changes to emotional response patterns, even dramatic changes, within adults. Research results from the Boston University Fatherhood Project (Levant & Kelly, 1989) where men were provided psychoeducational and cognitive-behavioral treatment in order to increase the ranges and degrees of their emotional responses to their children are among an increasing body of research results pointing to this possibility.

***Gender-specific developmental factors.***

Research such as Levinson's work was limited by the homogeneity and size of the research population. One of the largest questions unanswered with regard to the applicability of Levinson's research was its applicability to the adult development of women. Research conducted by Roberts and Newman (1987) in the 1980s concluded that while by and large the Levinson model had universality between genders there were still significant differences. The differences were primarily with regard to an increased complexity in the goals and motivations of women.

Women, their research showed, were equally as likely to place importance on their own goals as on the goals of their family members and especially their husbands. Thus relationship played a more important role in female development than in male development.

Their research also showed that the transition periods of women's lives were more likely to reflect higher levels of dialectical tension that resulted in alternating priorities throughout the lifecycle. Women were more likely to make life changes from family-oriented careers to individual-oriented careers and vice versa. Huyck (1977) interpreted these findings as midlife changes in genderized priorities; women were more likely in midlife to take on male gender characteristics while the reverse could be said of men.

Neugarten (1968) reminds us however that the dramatic changes in lifestyles and life choices that women have been afforded in the last half century make it difficult to find generalizable psychological patterns specific to the development of women. It is not surprising then, that Roberts and Newman, among others, found more complexity and variability in the life choices of women. What appears to be common to the findings however is that as women move into midlife they increasingly gain confidence, coping skills, and self-discipline that often leads to dramatic life changes. (Helson & Moane, 1987; Josselson, 1996; Schuster, Langland, & Smith., 1993)

Josselson (2002) attributes the wide variations in the life choices of women to a revision in desire. Women, she says, have difficulty determining earlier in their lives which of their life choices are their own and which are derived from choices made for them or made by their own passivity and fear. As they age, however, they may take a more active and engaged approach to their life choices. The developmental process for women then becomes "an internal process of more clearly understanding the nature of her desire – and more firmly grasping the reins" (p. 434).

This period of revision has been mapped by some researchers of women's development to counterpart periods in developmental models that have been based on data from male research participants. Most of the interest has been placed on the midlife period. Strayer (1996), for

example, recommends that we use the term *image* to describe the time in women's lives that corresponds to the stage that Levinson calls the *dream*. At this time she suggests that women are focused on their physical presence. Women facing loss of physical attractiveness, she says must undergo modifications to their self-image similar to what Levinson describes. Josselson (1996) contends that Erikson's generativity vs. stagnation stage for women is more typically a time of blurred distinctions between resolving issues of intimacy, identity, and generativity.

In general then, my Literature Review suggests that the development tasks of women offer more opportunities for self-exploration and reframing of the definition of "woman's work", as well as more challenges associated with this process. This makes it more difficult to predict as a developmental model. Development for women is best characterized as a revision and balancing process that may result in significant life choices. This revision is typically premised on increases of self-awareness, and breaking away from social constraints that are perceived as having conditioned previous decisions.

***Interpersonal neurobiology and evolutionary psychology.***

Many, if not most, of the theories that I have described so far view adult development from the perspective of the individual. Even those theories such as the constructivist theories that highlight the relationship between the individual and his/her social environment seem to take the perspective of the individual as a member of the group. It is always the development of a single adult that is explored. It is the view of the individual embedded in the social context. Using a biologic metaphor, it is the view of the cell as part of the body. Returning to the previously described concerns of Bellah, et al. (1985) about the limitations of the rugged individualism of American society, it seems that there may be something to be learned about adult development by gaining a better understanding of how the group can be embedded in the individual and be an enabler of development; by taking the view of the body examining the contributions of its cells.

Theories such as Smith and Thelen's model of "multiple, heterogeneous components exhibiting various degrees of stability and change" (Stevens-Long & Michaud, 2003, p. 6),

Waddington's epigenetic landscape, and Fisher and Bidell's constructive web and other theories informed by open systems theory, dynamic systems theory, chaos and complexity theory move closer to this perspective. (2003) What these models have in common is a view of adult development as constructed out of the interrelatedness and interrelatingness of the individual and the myriad of systems that he/she is embedded in.

Two relatively new fields of inquiry, interpersonal neurobiology and evolutionary psychology, offer views on human development that have interesting implications for this study because of their emphasis on group processes and because of their divergence from the individualistic theoretical perspectives that I have described above. These fields take a broader view of development that expands into examinations of the developmental advancement of the species.

A field of study called interpersonal neurobiology, led primarily by theorists and researchers from the disciplines of psychotherapy and education takes a species-level view of adult development. Interpersonal neurobiology rests on the assumption that the brain is a social organ. It has experience-dependent plasticity. That is, both its structure and its content are built up out of recursive psychosocial engagement. That engagement is primarily defined in terms of relationship and attachment. (Cozolino, 2006)

Cozolino uses the term *social synapse* to describe the mechanism by which relationships are built. Families, groups, tribes, cultures are all linked together through the processing of the social synapse. What is important about interpersonal neurobiology is its adherence to an evolutionary perspective on social behavior. It is the contention of these theorists and researchers that the human brain has evolved and continues to evolve as a social brain. That is, it has continued to evolve increasingly complex processes for maintaining social processes.

Much of what is being categorized as evolutionary psychology falls on the side of the *selfish gene* in the nature-nurture argument. Hamilton's (1964) early theory of inclusive fitness for example defines the success of a gene as based on the number of replications that can be

passed on to the next generation. Interestingly, this “success” according to Hamilton can be the result of the actions of an individual (procreation) but can also be supported by the actions of others such as when social mores influence behavior (don’t marry your first cousin).

Early works by sociobiologists (Cosmides, 1989; Cosmides & Tooby, 1987) have argued for a greater role in the nature-nurture debate for evolving psychological mechanisms. These mechanisms contribute to increased sociability and support of more complex social structures. Systems theorists take the broadest and most inclusive view. From this perspective evolutionary psychology is a repeatedly constructed and emergent process with organism and environment coevolving and mutually defining. (Brandon & Antonovics, 1996; Lewin & Lewontin, 1985)

Evolutionary psychologists Pederson and Moran (1999) support the premise that “... most mammals, but especially humans, have evolved a variety of brain and behavioral systems to ensure the development of relationships” (p. 498). They believe that this developmental model extends far beyond the parent-child dyad into all styles of relationships. I will explore this theme further in the findings section of this study.

Developmental-evolutionary psychologist Caporael (1997) proposes that we look at the complexity and scope of coordination and cooperation as the defining characteristics of human evolutionary analysis. She posits the model of core configurations as a mechanism to describe how such coordination processes have evolved over the course of human history. She identifies the following four core configurations that have evolved over the course of history.

**Table 5: Caporael's model of core configurations (1997, p. 284)**

<b>Core Configuration</b>	<b>Modal Group Size</b>	<b>Modal Tasks</b>	<b>Coordination Function</b>
Dyad	2	Sex, infant interaction with older children and adults	Microcoordination
Work/Family Group	5	Foraging, hunting, gathering, direct interface with habitat	Distributed cognition
Deme (Band)	30	Movement from place to place, general processing and maintenance, work group coordination	Shared construction of reality (includes indigenous psychologies), social identity
Macro-deme (Macroband)	300	Seasonal gathering, exchange of individuals, resources, and information	Stabilizing and standardizing language

She describes repeated assembly as the mechanism by which these core configurations hold together over time. Repeated assemblies are the core processes and specialized functions – organisms, habits, groups, and cultural practices, for example – that are repeated generation to generation over evolutionary time. According to her theory humans have evolved psychologically correlated repeated assemblies conducive to adaptation to each of the core configurations. The Early Birds according to her model based both on the size of the group and its functioning, would fall into the deme category. The coordination function of the deme group is the development of social identity and a shared reality.

### ***The Psychosocial Dynamics of Adult Attachment***

In this section I explore the theories and research related to what is currently understood about adult attachment-related self-concepts and behavioral patterns. As described by Mickelson, Kessler, and Shaver (1997), the theoretical premises of adult attachment theory are that: (a) “the emotions and relational patterns of adults, like those of infants, are guided by internal working models of self and relationship partners constructed from prior relationship experiences”; that (b) “these models both shape an individual’s beliefs about whether the self is worthy of love and whether others can be trusted to provide love and support”; and, (c) “influence the kinds of interactions individuals have with others and their interpretations of these interactions” (p. 1092).

Adult attachment theory is an extension of the developmental attachment theories of Bowlby, Ainsworth, and Main. Bowlby (1973; 1982; 1988), a British researcher, developed the theory of childhood attachment as a result of his observations of children in England during World War II. His observations of the behavior of children who were separated from their parents during the Blitz led him to develop a model of how the child develops internal representations of the world and of the significant caregivers in it. Ainsworth (Ainsworth et al., 1978), an American researcher, continued Bowlby’s work primarily based on her observations of the *Strange Situation*. The Strange Situation consisted of observing young children who were separated from their mothers and left with a kind stranger for a brief period of time and who were then reunited with their mothers. Out of this combined research a model of childhood attachment styles developed that has been almost universally accepted by developmental psychologists. Three types of attachment styles were identified:

- Secure attachment: The child expresses trust in caregivers that are perceived to be dependable, trustworthy, loving, and accepting.
- Avoidant attachment: The child uses minimizing techniques to respond to a caregiver who is perceived as not dependable, trustworthy, or accepting. The child turns away from the

caregiver and retreats emotionally and consequently loses touch with his/her own emotional processes.

- Anxious-ambivalent attachment: The child uses maximizing techniques to respond to caregiver neglect and becomes overly enmeshed with the caregiver and consequently loses affect regulation.

In the 1980s Main and Solomon (1986) contributed a definition of a fourth type of attachment to the theory:

- Disorganized attachment: This represents the most profound disorders of personality in which the child is unable to establish any relational coping pattern and any stable sense of self.

Disorganized attachment is associated with the most profound personality disorders.

The concept of working models is central to Bowlby's theory and to linking developmental attachment theory to adult attachment theory and to linking dyadic relationship attachment styles to more general social constructs. Internal working models of attachment are the core of personality. These core constructs with regard to how we experience ourselves and how we experience others shape cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement with the psychosocial environment (Collins & Allard, 2001). Bowlby (1973) felt that working models are important because they become the basis for predicting the behavior of others in social relationships and for planning one's own behavior. During childhood and adolescence these working models become solidified and generalized into core components of personality which operate more or less automatically.

Collins and Allard note that these working models differ from other social-cognitive structures in that first, they are more driven by motivational needs and goals; second, they are formed out of needs for emotional fulfillment and are consequently more affect-laden than other social-cognitive structures; and third, that they are explicitly interpersonal and relational. (2001) Working models according to Collins and Reed (1994) are composed of "(1) memories of attachment-related experience; (2) beliefs, attitudes, and expectations about self and others in



relation to attachment; (3) attachment-related goals and needs; and (4) strategies and plans associated with achieving attachment goals” (p. 63). More will be said about working models later in this section and other following sections.

Simpson and Rholes (1998) note that there are two traditions within attachment theory research. They describe the normative tradition as associated with species-specific development patterns common to all humans. They describe the individual differences tradition, on the other hand, as explanations of deviations from modal behavior patterns and stages. They also note that the vast majority of attachment research, both developmental and adult, is focused on the second tradition of individual differences.

As elaborated on in previous sections, social constructionism recognizes the local nature of knowledge. While psychological theories framed in modernist, empirical, language make claims to universality of findings, the social constructionist and postmodern perspectives deny the possibility of universality of knowledge. This perspective directly challenges the assumptions of the normative tradition of attachment research in that it challenges the assumption of species-typical attachment behavior. Rothman, et al. (2000), for illustration, in a comparative study of American and Japanese child rearing practices found basic assumptional differences in how attachment is perceived. They concluded that secure (optimal) attachment in the United States is associated with independence and generative tension whereas in Japan secure (optimal) attachment is more closely associated with symbiotic harmony. (J. Miller, 2002)

Similar conclusions were reached by Wang and Mallinekrodt (2006) who investigated differences in opinions about ideal adult attachment styles between U.S. and Taiwanese subjects. They concluded “that some behaviors and beliefs valued by Taiwanese regarding healthy ideal attachment could be misperceived from the U.S. standpoint as reflecting enmeshment, blurred interpersonal boundaries, and a preoccupation with abandonment” ( p. 201). They found in particular that what the Taiwanese construe as normal behavior of restraint with regards to asking for help or identifying personal needs could easily be misconstrued as avoidant attachment

behavior by Western standards of psychosocial health. The research and theories that follow in this section then must be viewed as relevant to twentieth and twenty first century American and Western European cultures only.

***The Biological Imperative.***

Although this study is focused on the psychosocial factors contributing to group cohesion, it is worth briefly mentioning that many, if not most, researchers and theorists ascribe, at least in part, to a belief in a biological imperative for the formation of social bonds and the desire to maintain those bonds. Bowlby (1988), Winnicott (1965), Stern (1985, 1995), and others assume that there is a biological drive that bonds the mother and the child. Stern extends the model of biologically driven social bonds when he describes the motherhood constellation as the network of relationships around the mother and child that provide the support necessary to healthy development. (1995)

Hoffman (1981) cites evidence that there is a biological imperative to aid others in distress that is evident even in newborns. This he feels is representative of instinctive relational behavior. Friedman (1985) argues that natural selection has resulted in favorance of an instinct for altruism and cooperative behavior. Bowen (1985) and Minuchin and Fishman (1981) based their psychotherapeutic approaches on the view that it is the family group, not the individual, that is the basic emotional unit and the level of analysis for therapy. This being said, the purpose of this study, however peripherally relevant it may be, is neither to provide affirming or disaffirming evidence for a biological imperative for social cohesion. This is left to later researchers.

***Assessment of adult attachment.***

There are two distinct theoretical frameworks in use within the research community for the exploration of adult attachment. (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998) The first explorations of adult attachment came out of the clinical and developmental psychology traditions. These traditions are concerned with predicting and postdicting infant attachment behavior based on the attachment styles of the parents. In studies, parental attachment styles were determined based on

clinical interviews of the parents and observations of parent-child interaction. The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985) is the most common assessment tool used for this line of research. Results of this line of research indicate that adults with dismissing attachment styles are likely to have infants with avoidant behavioral styles in the Ainsworth Strange Situation; conversely, adults with anxiously preoccupied attachment styles are likely to have infants with anxious behavioral styles in the Ainsworth Strange Situation.

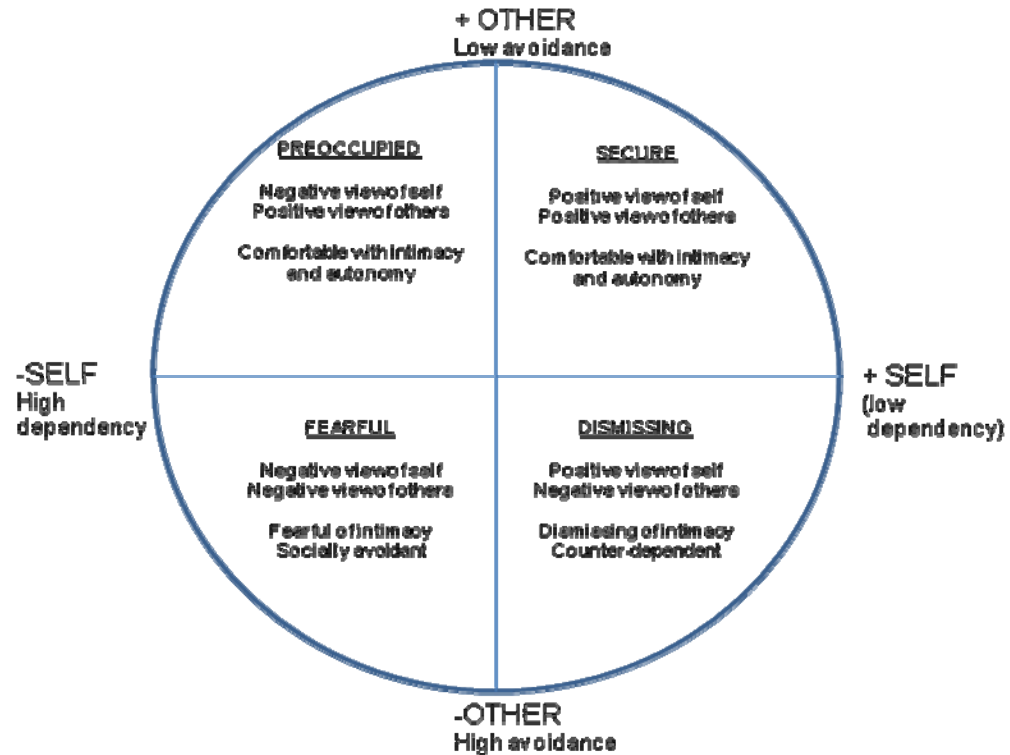
A separate, independent line of research arising out of the social psychology tradition has sought to examine how attachment behavior plays out in adult romantic relationships. The first model in this second tradition to be developed was the three-category model of adult attachment formulated by Hazen and Shaver (1987). Hazen and Shaver used this model to evaluate romantic attachment patterns in adults. This model directly follows from Bowlby's and Ainsworth's original models of infant attachment. Mickelson, Kessler and Shaver (1997) identify three attachment patterns. Secure adult attachment patterns are associated with comfort and ease in relationships and with partners having a high regard for each other. Avoidant adult attachment patterns however are associated with issues of trust and a desire to minimize contact. Finally, anxious attachment patterns are associated with individuals who need continual reassurances from their relationship partners and who are often clingy and highly dependent.

One of the interesting questions in the area of assessment of adult attachment is with regard to the convergence or lack of convergence between the two traditions of research. Bartholomew and Shaver (1998), in a comparative analysis of these two assessment approaches note that the differences in disciplinary subcultures are likely to produce differing results. The clinical approach of the AAI, for example, uses small sample sizes and coding of clinical interviews. Hazen and Shaver's self-report scale on the other hand is a questionnaire tailored for study of large populations and comes out of the social psychology tradition. The AAI approach for examining parent-child relationships places its emphasis on examining the psychodynamics of attachment including both conscious and unconscious motivations. The Hazen and Shaver self-

report questionnaire explores self-perceptions that are totally within the conscious perceptions of the interviewee and may or may not match with observations made by others. Not surprisingly, as Bartholomew and Shaver noted early in the history of adult attachment theory, these two traditions persisted in completely ignoring each other.

In 1990 Bartholomew conducted research that concluded that differences between the two models could be resolved by splitting avoidance behavior into two distinct categories, “one pattern motivated by a defensive maintenance of self-sufficiency (labeled *dismissing*) and the other motivated by a conscious fear of anticipated rejections by others (labeled *fearful*)” (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998, p. 27). Additionally, Bartholomew proposed an assessment approach that combined use of the Hazen and Shaver self-report measures and two interviews, one pertaining to childhood experiences and the other pertaining to adult romantic relationships.

As a result of Bartholomew’s research, Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) elaborated on the original model and transformed it into a two-dimensional, four-category model. This model focuses on differences in self and other internal working models as the framework for describing attachment patterns. Bartholomew returning to Bowlby’s original work on attachment, conducted research that confirmed that these two dimensions are continuously distributed rather than categorical measures as proposed by Hazen and Shaver in their three-dimension model. (Simpson & Rholes, 1998) This dimensional view is also supported by the research of Lopez and Brennan (2000) among others who hold the view that psychological health is not a composite of fixed configurations or traits but rather the result of flexible patterning built out of recursive relationship with others. The following illustration illustrates the four attachment types and their accompanying dimensions.



**Figure 1: The Bartholomew two-dimensional, four-category, model of adult attachment patterns**

Individual adult attachment styles can be plotted on this matrix based on assessment scores for both working models of self and working models of others. Individuals with any one of the three insecure attachment styles develop secondary relationship strategies as a compensation mechanism to support the assumptions associated with their attachment pattern. These secondary patterns are protective of the working model and incorporate cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement strategies. Individuals with a preoccupied pattern for example will spend the vast amount of their energy making sure that their relationships are intact. They will be hyper vigilant in watching for slights and negative reactions and will be always looking to expand their relationship circles. Individuals with fearful patterns will interpret every experience negatively. They will experience a great deal of emotional distress associated with these negative interpretations and will often lash out in response. Finally, individuals with dismissive patterns will tend to dismiss or ignore their attachment-related cognitions and emotions and will resist social engagement. (Lopez & Brennan, 2000)

Based on research examining how attachment patterns effect day-to-day interactions, Pietromonaco and Barrett (1997) determined that the descriptions of the self-other working model required further refinement. They suggested that preoccupied individuals actually held both positive and negative views of other (rather than only positive views as described by Bartholomew and Horowitz and others). They attributed this mixed behavior to the tendency of preoccupied individuals to idealize their relationships with others and consequently experience disappointment when their expectations were not met. Likewise, their data showed that both fearful and dismissing individuals did not necessarily show less esteem for others but rather were more likely to have negative social experiences and consequently avoid social experiences. Interestingly, their research determined that preoccupied individuals were the only category that did not find high-conflict situations to be unpleasant. The authors concluded that preoccupied individuals may use high-conflict situations to gain the intensity of relationship intimacy that they desire and cannot find in any other way.

Several researchers have also conducted reach that confirms the four-dimension models theoretical assumptions of two underlying dimensions: anxiety and avoidance. The selection of these dimensions for the evaluation of adult attachment styles is based on their analogous use in the assessment of developmental attachment styles. Stayton and Ainsworth (1973), for example, associated the degree of crying with an infant's anxiety about maternal responsiveness and associated resistance to being held with avoidance. Sanford (1997) conducted a study of married and unmarried college students that confirmed the reliability of the four-dimension model and its superiority over three-dimensional and one-dimensional models. This study, using the Collins and Reed (1990) 18 question self-report Adult Attachment Questionnaire, also showed a correlation between loneliness and the anxiety dimension suggesting that "the experience of being in a committed relationship significantly reduces anxiety over attachment figure availability, yet only marginally increases comfort with closeness" (p. 142).

Several additional issues exist in the area of assessment of adult attachment. One issue centers on the question of whether attachment behavior should be considered a trait or a continuously scaled dimensional characteristic. Earlier research, beginning with Ainsworth (1978) and then Main (1986) favored the trait-based approach. This may have been however more a function of a lack of availability of computer-supported factor analysis than of a true philosophical distinction. More recent research, making extensive use of computerized factor analysis suggests a lack of true taxonicity. (Fraley & Waller, 1998; Waters, Beauchaine, & Brennan, 2000) In closely related research, other studies (Vaughn & Bost, 1999) have concluded that there is no correlation between infant temperament and attachment styles. And, as has already been described earlier in this section, the dimensional models of attachment (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994) which propose an orthogonal relationship between the dimension of anxiety and the dimension of avoidance also reject categorical definitions.

A second issue exists with regard to whether attachment is a latent characteristic. That is, does attachment behavior only exist when the attachment system is activated by external stress or threat or does it exist at all times in general attitudinal behaviors and cognitive beliefs? Another challenge exists with regard to measuring avoidant versus enmeshed attachment styles. Avoidant attachment styles by their very definition involve desensitizing strategies that result in fewer external manifestations and may indeed mimic secure attachment styles. Observational techniques then may fail to fully assess or properly interpret avoidant attachment styles. As an example, Gjerde, Onishi, and Carlson (2004) conducted research addressed to this question. They compared self-report measures to interview measures for assessment of attachment styles related to romantic relationships. They concluded that interview assessments return a better result. However, given the significant cost differential, use of interview methods in most cases may not be justified.

Collectively then, both in terms of what is assessed and the results of the assessment, there is a lack of consistency in the assessment of attachment styles. (Lopez & Brennan, 2000) Importantly to the findings of this study, they note that most of the research has conceptualized attachment as a singular construct rather than considering the possibility that attachment responses may vary dependent on the target of the attachment. To Lopez and Brennan's already extensive list of issue I add my own observation regarding the overrepresentation of psychology graduate students in the subject base.

I have taken the time in this Literature Review to describe these theoretical issues and assumptions because of their implications for my study. With regard to the strength of the theoretical models, my preference is for the Bartholomew four-dimensional model. I find this model particularly useful because it provides an integration of the model of the self-concept with the associated attachment-related affective behaviors. Unlike most previous researchers however I am not using self-report questionnaires for my study. As will be elaborated on in depth in the methodology section of this document, I am using narratives and observation for my data collection. This is in part because I am not assuming that attachment theory can explain all or part of the reasons for the longevity of the Early Birds as a social group. I must allow opportunities for revelations from the analysis of the data that can potentially support a variety of theoretical perspectives. Additionally, because my research is based in the traditions of clinical research, like the AAI researchers, I am interested in the psychodynamic behavior of a small sampling of participants which includes both conscious and unconscious viewpoints. Finally, as has been described in earlier sections, a social constructionist perspective dictates an approach that permits the research subject an equal voice in the data collection process. In a sense, I am returning to a more fundamental approach to the research in that rather than building and using an assessment tool based on my interpretation of attachment theory and then determining if the data fit the model, I am instead asking the data to point to the theory or theories.

***Characteristics of adult attachment.***



Both models of adult attachment have been used as theoretical frameworks for research studies and I have included reviews of the research based on both models in this study. My preference as stated earlier is for Bartholomew's four-category model. I will elaborate further on this model when I present my own theories in chapter five of this study.

Adult attachment theory is premised on the hypothesis that attachment patterns first learned in infancy and early childhood are continuous and relatively stable throughout the lifespan. Supporting evidence comes from Waters and colleagues (Grossmann, Grossmann, & Waters, 2006), for example, who conducted a longitudinal study of adults that determined that approximately 70% of their subjects had maintained the same attachment pattern that first developed in their relationships with their parents from infancy to adulthood. This study also revealed that traumatic life events such as abuse, death, and separation were prevalent life events for those individuals whose attachment patterns had changed during the lifespan from secure to insecure patterns. This finding is consistent with Bowlby's original theory that holds that traumatic breaks in relationship patterns are instrumental in changing attachment patterns from secure to insecure styles.

Research on attachment styles in American populations using the three-category model (Mickelson et al., 1997; Shaver & Clark, 1994; Shaver & Hazan, 1993) estimated that approximately 55% to 59% of adolescent and adult subjects evaluated in the 1990s could be categorized as securely attached, approximately 25% could be categorized as avoidantly attached, and approximately 11% to 20% could be categorized as anxiously attached. The differences in ranges of securely and anxiously attached subjects have been attributed by Mickelson and his colleagues to differences in research populations. Higher numbers of anxiously attached subjects have been found in research studies where the research population was comprised of students. Studies such as the one done by Mickelson, et al. with a subject population drawn from the general American population ranging in ages from 15 to 54 show lower percentiles of anxiously attached subjects and a higher percentage of securely attached subjects. They attribute this

difference to the possibility that individuals may resolve their anxious attachment patterns into secure attachment patterns over the lifespan. This hypothesis has interesting implications for this study of the Early Birds, many of whom are in their 70s and 80s. I will return to this later in chapter 5 of the study when I present my theoretical work.

Lopez and Brennan (2000) recommend that we look at attachment as having three analysis perspectives: a triad of cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns. Cognition of perceived dangers triggers affective responses that are then translated into habitual behavioral strategies. These behavioral strategies are motivated by a need to manage the proximal relationship with the caregiver so as to reduce threat and relieve anxiety. Like Bowlby (1988) and Main (1981) they view attachment styles as an adaptive behavior that is learned and then habituated over the course of repeated iterations until it becomes an abstracted and generalized and by and large unconscious internal working model predictive of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to situations experienced as threatening to the self.

This view of attachment as a representational schema provides a framework for understanding how attachment-related behavior continues throughout the lifespan. In a sense, attachment patterns become self-fulfilling prophesy. For example, an individual who has developed a preoccupied attachment pattern (using the four-dimensional model) would be cognitively hyper-attuned to perceived threats to the relationship and respond with clinging and overanxious dependency on the relationship partner. The relationship partner, overwhelmed by the emotional demands would push away and reject the individual. This would in turn contribute corroborative data to the individual's preexisting representational model confirming the belief that relationships must be clung to tightly lest they result in abandonment. The result is a rigidly and narrowly construed representation of relationships that significantly reduces the probability of sustained relationship.

Bowlby, Ainsworth and others noted that secure attachment allows for secure exploration. The infant, feeling secure in the attachment relationship with the caregiver, uses the caregiver as a

“secure base from which to explore”(Ainsworth et al., 1978, p. 22). Elliott and Reis (2003) conducted research to determine the relationship between exploration and attachment in adults. They concluded that securely related adults are more comfortable with exploration and risk taking in achievement settings whereas insecurely attached individuals tend to expend their energy in minimizing anxieties that they associate with the unknowns of achievement-related activities. They reasoned that optimal achievement motivation in secure individuals was related with focusing on goals and gains. In contrast, insecure individuals tend to focus on what might be lost if unsuccessful. Lopez and Brennan (2000) similarly describe secure attachment as associated with the accomplishment of adult developmental tasks. Comfort with self-reflection coupled with affect regulation allow for exploration of what they consider to be the higher developmental paths of empowerment and autonomy.

Secure representational schemas allow for more flexibility and accommodation in relationships. Indeed, one of the distinguishing characteristics of securely attached individuals is the ability to engage in potentially stressful and/or anxiety-inducing experiences without trauma to the self-system. Simpson, Rholes, and Nelligan (1992) in a study of support-seeking in romantic couples determined that secure attachment styles serve to ameliorate the effects of emotional stress. Mikulincer and colleagues concluded from their research of Israelis during the Gulf War that individuals with early experiences of secure attachment were better able to successfully negotiate stressful situations in adulthood. (Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993) Kemp and Neimeyer (1999), based on research with introductory psychology students and using Bartholomew’s four-dimensional attachment model, also demonstrated the correlation between secure attachment styles and the experience of relatively low levels of psychological distress when placed in stressful situations. Their findings departed slightly however from those of Mikulincer et al. in that they did not find a correlation between secure attachment and an outreach to supportive others. They attributed this difference to the high degree of dissimilarity in the degree of stress being experienced by the research subjects.

Their research also agreed with previous research that found high levels of emotional distress among individuals identified as having preoccupied attachment patterns. (Kemp & Neimeyer, 1999) Their findings in relation to avoidant and fearful styles were less conclusive however. They attributed the lack of observable psychological distress to the characteristic of avoidants to use deactivating and desensitizing strategies to cope with stressful experiences.

These characteristics of securely attached individuals seem particularly salient to living in the postmodern milieu where change and uncertainty are the norm rather than the exception. It also has implications for understanding how groups can sustain long-term relationships. This line of inquiry will be continued later in this section when group-level attachment is explored.

In contrast to the favorable characteristics of secure attachment, the three insecure attachment styles (or two, depending on which theoretical model the researcher is working with) are associated with characteristics of psychological dysfunction. Roberts and colleagues (J. Roberts, Gotlib, & Kassel, 1996) identified an association between insecure attachment styles, low self-esteem, and depression. They report that:

Individuals who reported believing that others were less available when needed, feeling less comfortable becoming close to others, and worrying about abandonment and not being loved tended to endorse higher levels of dysfunctional attitudes, lower self-esteem, and elevated symptoms of depression. (p. 316)

Rholes, Simpson, and Oriña (1999) investigated how anger is expressed in insecure relationships. Their findings are particularly interesting because they determined that individuals with avoidant relationship patterns are actually more likely to express overt anger when under stress. Apparently, these individuals who otherwise tend to suppress their relationship related emotional responses will react with anger when placed in situations when they have to relate with or cooperate with individuals they otherwise would not want to be associated with. They found in contrast that individuals with ambivalent relationship patterns were more likely to express negative affect after the stressful experience. Their research was unusual because they structured

it to look not only at behavior during a stressful event but also to look at behavior directly after the event. In many ways this design duplicates Ainsworth et al.'s (1978) Strange Situation experiments which examined how children responded to their mother's after the experience of a stressful encounter with a stranger. Rholes, et al.'s (1999) research was also interesting because it has implications for how attachment styles affect long-term behavior in relationships. Behaviors associated with secure attachment patterns included trust, satisfaction with the relationship experience, and commitment work to deepen the relationship. In contrast, secondary compensating reactions to perceived threats to the self such as anger, neediness, and lack of trust work in the opposite direction to tear apart the relationship. The assumptions of the insecure attachment patterns regarding the anticipated behavior of the relationship partner become self-fulfilling prophecies.

Other studies have also found a correlation between insecure attachment styles and abusive behavior in men (Dutton, Saunders, Starzomski, & Bartholomew, 1994; N. Roberts & Noller, 1998). This finding presents an interesting contrast with findings from the research that individuals, secure or insecure, predominantly state a preference for relationships with individuals characterized as secure. (Latty-Mann & Davis, 1996) This research also found that securely attached individuals were more likely to rate their relationship partners as secure even though independent assessment indicated otherwise. As any family therapist is likely to attest, relationship longevity is not necessarily a sign of secure attachment.

An on-going debate among attachment researchers concerns the degree to which attachment theory can/should be applied to the everyday behavior of individuals. Researchers such as Ainsworth et al. (1978) and Simpson and Rholes (1998) favored a more narrow view of attachment behavior that considers only specific interactions that trigger threats to feelings of personal security. More recently, other researchers have considered attachment behavior as it pertains to latent dispositional variables that influence all aspects of relational behavior. These

researchers cite Bowlby's initial theories about working models that suggest that there is a lifelong continuity of attachment-related behaviors that affects both latent and activated behaviors.

Tidwell, Reis, and Shaver (1996) explored this question in a diary study of the day-to-day relational interactions of a group of college students. Unlike the vast majority of attachment-related research studies which have made use of self-report measures, they used a qualitative methodology to explore whether attachment styles influence natural social activity. They discovered that the participants in their study arranged their social lives differently based on their identified attachment styles. This implies that attachment styles influence much more than romantic relationships and indeed influence all aspects of social life.

As the scope of application of attachment theory has been extended there is also theoretical support for the idea that adults have multiple attachment-related working models. Collins and Allard say for instance that:

It is unreasonable to assume that a single, undifferentiated working model can effectively guide the full range of attachment behavior in adulthood. Multiple models of attachment are necessary for adults to function adaptively in diverse circumstances and to satisfy their attachment goals across a variety of relationships. (2001, p. 68)

They hypothesize that the activation of a model will depend on the social situation with some models being more accessible than others depending on an individual dominant attachment style. Some attachment theorists (Collins & Reed, 1994; Furman & Simon, 1999; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999) posit a hierarchical framework to the internal working models of attachment which includes a default dominant model while others (Baldwin, Keelan, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996) prefer an associational network model.

Furman (2001) examined the applicability of attachment theory to working models of attachment to friends. His question was with regard to whether the same processes observed in the attachment behavior of relationship partners could also be observed in less emotionally charged relationships such as friendships and whether these processes could be construed as

hierarchical. His study made use of the Friendship Interview which consisted of a series of semi-structured questions. Results indicated that the individuals in the study had default attachment styles that influenced their overall ways of behaving in relationships as well as specific models that were in effect in particular friendship relationships. They also concluded from their study that there is a correlation between internal working models of attachment and experiences in friendship relationships. Securely attached individuals are more likely to have secure relationships. When they do not, they are more likely to learn from the failures of their relationships and not repeat the same mistakes.

Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, and Koh-Rangarajoo (1996) conducted research with college students that revealed that students consistently maintained multiple relationship styles depending on who they were relating with. This included maintaining multiple patterns with their most important and romantic relationships. They hypothesize that individual attachment styles may be the cumulative social-cognitive outcome of the amount of experience each person has with each of the different types of relationships that they were engaged in. The researchers found confirming evidence that an individual's experience of a relationship can be influenced by their expectancy of what that relationship will be like. One of their studies, for example, demonstrated that evaluations of current relationships could be "primed" by reminding individuals of past relationship experiences. Primed individuals reported on current relationships in accordance with the priming that they were given.

Spinner and Ross (2001) also conducted research to determine if there is a difference between the general attachment patterns that individuals ascribe to and the specific attachment behaviors they demonstrate in individual relationships. Using the Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) four-category adult attachment measurement questionnaire and a subject group comprised of college students, they concluded from their results that relationship specific internal working models of secure attachments may be dependent on the quality of each relationship. They concluded from their research that adults form attachment patterns with many different kinds of

people and attached to them with multiple attachment styles. Additionally, they found that “the attachment orientations individuals report in response to specific attachment relationships can be quite different from general attachment orientations” (p. 761). Correlations between general and specific attachment styles were especially poor when participants were evaluating secure attachments. One of the interesting outcomes of their study was that the participants varied to a high degree with regard to who they identified as being attached to in their lives. Spinner and Ross concluded that researchers should not make assumptions about who their participants perceive as being attached to in their testing.

Working models arise out of emotional and cognitive patterns repeated over time. Selective attention determined by the goals and needs associated with each attachment style biases behavior and consequent interpretation of relational interactions. (Fraley, Davis, & Shaver, 1998) In a series of studies particularly relevant to my own study D. Miller and Prentice (1994) examined how memory is affected by attachment-related working models. Working models determine what actually gets stored in memory which means that individuals with different attachment styles will potentially have different memories of the same event.

In addition to expanding the scope of applicability of attachment theory, some theorists also challenge the assumption of stability of attachment behaviors in their research and theorizing. Some researchers favor viewing attachment behavior as a state that varies with the relationship rather than as a trait that preexists prior to relationship. Researchers such as Kobak (1994) ask us to pay attention to the relational aspects of attachment and to the adaptability of the individual’s attachment patterns to the relationships that they find themselves in. Kobak (1994) posits that the flexibility and openness to revision of attachment patterns may be the key determinant of their secure or insecure nature. Additionally he challenges us to examine “whether [attachment] styles are a product of the current relationship interactions or whether the relationship interactions are the product of the attachment styles” (p. 44).

***Attachment and personality.***



Attachment theorists posit that personality development must be understood within the context of the formation of relationship patterns with intimate partners, friends, and family over the lifespan. (Lopez & Brennan, 2000) Bowlby's position on attachment was that innate and evolutionary dispositions propel the infant towards seeking security in relationships. (This is a position also held by developmental psychologist Stern (1985).) The experiences gained in this process in turn develop into the working model that shapes throughout the lifespan and determines how relationships are negotiated and renegotiated.

... human personality is conceived as a structure that develops increasingly along one or another of an array of possible discrete pathways. All pathways are thought to start close together so that, at conception, an individual has access to a large range of pathways, along one of which he might travel. The one chosen, it is held, at each and every stage of an interaction between the organism as it has developed up to that moment and the environment in which it finds itself. (Bowlby, 1988, p. 64-65)

This comparison of attachment styles to personality development raises an important question for researchers on adult attachment. Is adult attachment better explained using already existing personality theories? In response, Shaver and Brennan (1992) conducted research to compare measures of adult attachment using the Hazen and Shaver (1987) single-item and rating scale to measures of personality using the NEO-PI self-report tool developed by Costa and McCrea (1992). The Hazen and Shaver assessment tool is theoretically based on the three-factor model of attachment while the NEO-PI is theoretically based on the Big Five theory of personality. Shaver and Hazen concluded that although there are significant and meaningful relationships between the Big Five personality traits and attachment styles, the two are not redundant. They found for example that subjects scoring as securely attached scored lower on the neurotic and extroversion scales on the NEO-PI than their insecure counterparts. Additionally, they found that there were no differences on the Openness to Experience scale between all attachment styles. Individuals scoring high on attachment avoidance also tended to score as less

open to feelings while individuals scoring high on attachment anxiety-ambivalence were less open to values. Most importantly, they note that the immaturity of the adult attachment measures with their less than optimal reliabilities make it difficult to fully explore outcomes.

Perhaps in response to Shaver and Brennan's observations regarding the weakness of adult attachment assessment tools, Carver (1997) developed the Measure of Attachment Quality (MAQ) self-report assessment tool. The MAQ is distinguished from other measures of adult attachment according to Carver due to "... an affirmative measure of appreciation of having a sense of safe haven and secure base" as well as having "distinct measures of two facets of ambivalence – worry and merger desires" (p. 881). Still using the three-factor model of attachment as his theoretical base, he chose to develop a new tool because he felt a necessity to construe attachment in broader terms than current attachment self-report tools focused on romantic relationships. His research then compared results using his tool to the abbreviated version of the NEO-PI, the NEO-FFI. His results were convergent with those of Shaver and Brennan. In particular he found that anxiety is negatively associated with avoidant attachment styles. (1997)

As a final note on the relationship between personality theory and adult attachment theory it should be noted that most personality theorists consider personality to be trait-based with personality traits impervious to change over the lifespan. In contrast, attachment theorists are increasingly viewing attachment style as dimensional and open to change, albeit only under exceptional circumstances, over the lifespan. This is an important distinction that surprisingly has received little attention in the literature.

### ***Gender differences in attachment and belongingness.***

Cross and Madson (1997) distinguished between the ways that men and women form social relationships in adulthood. They concluded from their research that women seek out interdependencies. Men, on the other hand, they concluded do not seek out close relationships preferring instead to develop independence and separation. In this sense, their work supports the

findings of Bellah, et al. (1985), cited earlier with regard to the “rugged individualism of the American male” (p. 23). Baumeister and Sommer (1997) challenged these findings. They proposed that Cross and Madson had misinterpreted their findings with regard to the desires of men to form social bonds. They countered that men, unlike women, prefer to form wider, more varied and more broadly defined social bonds. Women, they contend, tend to form a small number of relationships but those tend to be closer. Baumeister and Sommer further concluded that “both men and women pursue belongingness, but they pursue it in different spheres and (hence) with different strategies and by different criteria” (1997, p. 38).

Baumeister and Sommer go on to describe male social connections as dominated by hierarchies, status seeking and power seeking. They take a constructivist (as opposed to constructionist) perspective when they say that it is both culture and nature that drive this kind of behavior. (1997) Both Cross and Madson and Baumeister and Sommer also find that men desire to express uniqueness in their social relationships although each draws different conclusions from this finding. Cross and Madson conclude that the desire for uniqueness is part of the larger desire for individuality and isolation. Baumeister and Sommer draw the opposite conclusion.

Gabriel and Gardner (1999) conducted several studies to investigate the findings of Cross and Madson and Baumeister and Sommer. Based on these studies they conclude that both men and women have equal desires for interrelatedness but different methods and motivations for seeking out relationship. They agree with Baumeister and Sommer that men do indeed prefer to seek out relationship through collective identification with groups. Women, in contrast build their relationships primarily based on individual friendships. They conclude however that these findings “can readily be understood through a social roles interpretation of gender differences” (1999, p. 652) such as proposed by Eagly (1987). That is, the traditional roles which women have played such as child rearing have encouraged formation of individual relationships with other women performing similar tasks. In contrast, men have been socialized to operate in large groups such as hunting parties and war faring. Gabriel and Gardner propose that we stop thinking of

women as having greater needs for interdependence than men and rather to see both genders as having equal needs that are expressed in different ways. I will return to this theme in the next section of the Literature Review when I examine the differences between common-bond and common-identity groups as proposed in the research of Prentice (1994) and others and again in the findings section of this document.

In related research Seeley, Gardner, Pennington, and Gabriel (2003) also conclude that there are differences with regard to the types of social interactions that men and women value. They conclude that men and women may value their social interactions for different reasons associated with different belongingness needs and consequently may view the same social networks differently based on their ability to fulfill those needs. They distinguish between two types of group attachment: relational and collective. Relational attachment describes dyadic relationships with individual group members whereas collective attachment describes attachment to the group in general. (Relational and collective attachment will be described in detail in the next section). From their research they conclude that women value their group experiences solely on the basis of relational attachments. Men, on the other hand, they conclude, value their group experiences for both relational their relational and collective attachments. They note that these differences in attachment styles may lead to different group outcomes. Groups dominated by a relational attachment style, they argue, may be less stable than groups dominated by a collective attachment style. They conclude that “the importance that men place on a group’s identity may result in greater longevity and stability in the face of changing group membership” (1994, p. 260).

Supporting evidence for these findings can be found in Maas and Kuypers’ (1974) longitudinal study of adult lifestyle and personality. They present a cautionary warning that women appear to be more at risk for losing attachments in later life than men due to their almost exclusionary focus on their families. (It should be noted that their study concluded in the 1970s at a time when the majority of women were following more family-centric lives than are perhaps common today.) They cautioned family-oriented women to expand their circles of friends and

relationships early in adulthood beyond their immediate families as a balance against loss of familial relationships. Men, they noted were likely to have far fewer changes in attachments over the course of the lifespan and greater balance and variety of relationships which protected them against loss in later life. Men who had strong social relationships in early adulthood were likely to continue with the same degree of relationships throughout their lifespan. In contrast, the relationships of the women in their study were far more volatile and far more dependent on the vagaries of life. These findings appear to be in agreement with the conclusions of Cross and Madson, Baumeister and Sommer, and Gabriel and Gardner. If indeed, women tend to form relationships primarily as dyads, then those relationships are more likely to be vulnerable to the vagaries of life. If men however form social bonds as part of larger group structures, then men are more likely to be protected from loss due to the “strength in numbers” qualities of broad group structures.

The Early Birds throughout their history has been a predominantly, but never exclusively, male social group. The current makeup is approximately 66.67% male. As such, it appears to follow the model of social attachment proposed by Baumeister and Sommer. Whether it indeed does, and whether it also has the characteristics that Baumeister and Sommer equate with such social groups – hierarchical structures, power seeking behavior, an emphasis on uniqueness, and self-promotion – is a topic covered in the findings of this document.

***Attachment to friends and groups.***

Like many of the researchers already discussed, Pietromonaco and Barrett (1997) determined from their research that attachment behavior influences more than intimate relationships. Working models of attachment, they say, “show some characteristics of a general interpersonal style and thus exert broad, pervasive effects across all kinds of social interactions” (p. 1421). They go on to say that these generalized styles have commonality across a wide variety of relationships such as with strangers, same-sex best friends, professors, etc.

Prentice (1994) also examined emotional processes in groups. She applied attachment theory to her study of groups and has identified two forms of groups with distinct associated attachment styles that are particularly relevant to this study. She describes common-bond groups as those in which attachments develop primarily between individual members; in contrast, she describes common-identity groups as those in which individual members form attachments primarily to the group itself rather than to individual members. These two types of group attachments are not exclusionary in her view however one style is typically stronger than the other in any given group. She contends that the distinctions she makes about attachment within groups can reconcile the debate between theorists who posit individualistic assumptions about how groups form and maintain themselves and theorists who posit social identity assumptions about group formation and maintenance.

She proposes that the motivational locus for a particular group's cohesion and longevity differs depending on whether the dominant attachment is at the member or group level. She also proposes that groups will behave differently dependent on their dominant type of attachment. For example, she cites distinctions between whether a group is more concerned with equity or with equality. Common-bond groups, that is, those where the group is dominated by member-level attachments, will operate under principles of equity. In these types of groups fairness dictates that each member is rewarded based on their value and contributions to the group goals. In contrast, common-identity groups will operate under principles of equality where the rewards of group membership are distributed equally among members. She also contends that each of these two types of groups will handle conflict differently. Common-identity groups, she predicts, should handle internal conflict better because this type of conflict does not threaten the attachment bonds which are to the group rather than to any individual. With regard to external conflict, that is conflict between the group and some external entity, she predicts that both types of groups will be strengthened by the experience. All of these observations about common-bond and common-identity groups lead Prentice to conclude that common-identity groups are more likely to achieve

longevity because they are less vulnerable to ruptures of attachment that can occur at the individual member level. These groups are more resilient in the face of changes in membership and changes in environment.

Prentice notes however, that group attachment may not remain the same over time. It is likely, she proposes that groups that start out as common-bond groups may over time evolve into common-identity groups. They may start based on the strong attachments between two or more individuals. As she notes, “.... collections of individuals who have strong attachments to one another may be motivated to identify categories they share in order to give themselves a common identity” (1994, p. 492). I will return to Prentice’s theories of group attachment later in my investigations of the Early Birds. Several of her hypotheses regarding common-bond and common-identity groups will be explored further in the findings sections of this document.

E. K. Smith, Murphy, and Coats (1999) adhere to the findings of Collin and Read (1990), as described earlier, that individuals may have multiple working models of attachment that are dependent on the types of relationships that they engage in. They also adhere to the dimensional model of attachment described earlier in this section which posits that attachment behavior can be evaluated along two dimensions: social anxiety and social avoidance. Building from these theoretical positions they conducted research using self-report questionnaires to determine if there is a conceptual link between attachment in close relationships and group identification. They concluded that “group attachment is not simply the same thing as relationship attachment but is a largely independent component of people’s basic beliefs about themselves and others” (p. 106). They also found that measures of avoidant group behavior, which they described as “the extent of desire for closeness and dependence” (p. 107), were more closely correlated to positive group experiences while measures of anxious group behavior were more closely correlated with negative group experiences. Resultantly, they concluded that both attachment dimensions, avoidance and anxiety, were necessary to both assess and predict group behavioral outcomes. They concluded then that these findings supported their initial theoretical positions.

E. K. Smith, et al. (1999) also concluded that their findings represent a challenge to social identity theory and self-categorization theories which are premised on the belief that all individuals equally draw esteem, value, and identity from their group memberships. They note, for example, that avoidantly attached individuals may not experience this need for support from group environments.

Rom and Mikulincer (2003) have also conducted research on attachment styles within groups. They evaluated attachment within groups from two perspectives that are particularly relevant to my research. First, they examined attachment within groups from the perspective of individuals; second, they examined attachment as a group construct. With regard to attachment styles in groups from an individual member perspective, they noted that individuals who scored high on the anxiety scales on attachment ratings perceived of themselves negatively as a group member. This negative self-representation led them to see group interactions as threatening and to “appraise person-environment transactions in catastrophic terms” (p. 1231). Rom and Mikulincer concluded that anxiously attached individuals invested their energy in groups on security-love goals to the detriment of instrumental functioning. That is, anxiously attached individuals were more concerned with how the group members felt about each other and got along rather than with the tasks of the group. In contrast, Rom and Mikulincer determined that individuals scoring high on the avoidance scales of attachment ratings adopted deactivating strategies which manifested “in distancing from distress-eliciting events and frustrating attachment figures” (p. 1232). This leads avoidantly attached individuals to devalue the benefits of group interaction and to pursue self-reliant goals.

Rom and Mikulincer, following on from earlier work of Shaver and Mikulincer (2002), categorized anxiously attached individuals in groups as using hyperactivating strategies involving “heightened vigilance to threat- and attachment-related cues, reduced threshold for detecting threats and cues of rejecting, and distress exacerbation” (p. 1232). In contrast, they identified



avoidantly attached individuals as using deactivating strategies “which are manifested in distancing from distress-eliciting events and frustrating attachment figures” (p. 1232).

An interesting finding by Rom and Mikulincer with regard to avoidantly attached individuals pertains to their responses when necessitated to engage in cooperative group processes that they find distressful. In this case, they determined, the deactivating strategies break down and these individuals have extremely negative emotional experiences that resultantly detract from socioemotional functioning. Rom and Mikulincer also examined the effect of group cohesion on attachment patterns. They found that high levels of group cohesion reduced anxiety and triggered secure attachment behaviors.

Their findings are particularly important because they demonstrate that the group can have an influence on the attachment behavior of its members. I will return to examine group attachment from a social constructionist perspective and present an alternate perspective to that of Rom and Mikulincer with regard to group-level attachment styles in the analysis portions of this study.

### ***Literature Review Integration***

Postmodernist theorists and critics of contemporary society (Baumeister, 1997; Bellah et al., 1985; Bowen, 2004; Bruner, 1986; Cushman, 1990; Gergen, 1991; Geyer, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Inglehart, 1990; Levant & Kelly, 1989; Lifton, 1993; McAdams, 1997; Scheibe, 1998; Zurcher Jr., 1977) are telling us that our environs are dramatically changing. The globalization of the world economy and the technologies of social saturation supporting rapid access to information and with it access to different values and belief systems are contributing to a social complexity that is shifting at an ever increasing rate. Postmodernist theorists are further telling us that we must turn to a model of the self that is distributed, highly relational, sometimes contradictory, and always mutating as a response to this changing psychosocial environment.

Social constructionism (Baumeister, 1997; Berger & Luckman, 1966; Burr, 1995; Dachler & Hosking, 1995; Gergen, 2001b; Harré, 1986b; Hermans et al., 1992; Hosking & Bouwen, 2000; Sampson, 1985; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978; Watzlawick & Weakland, 1974; Wittgenstein, 1953/1958), as an “ology” with language and premises congruent with the requirements of postmodernist investigations, can function as a useful framework for providing meaning and direction to our experiences as inhabitants of the postmodern milieu. With its focus on the dynamic construal of relationships as the defining constituent of reality and its emphasis on narrative as metaphor for the self, it moves us beyond the limitations of the subject-object, dyadic logic of modernism that posits an unalterable, permanent, discrete, reality. As such, it frees us to explore the psychosocial dynamics of social processes as relational processes.

At the same time that the postmodernists are reminding us that the social structures that bound us together in the past and that gave a priori meaning to our lives are disintegrating, the adult developmentalist and the attachment theorists have built a volume of research that tells us that forming and maintaining loving relationships is important, indeed vital, to our physical, cognitive, and emotional well-being.

This confluence of events and knowledge points to the need for Western society to identify, form, and foster alternate relationship structures that can provide the same kinds of cognitive and affective sustenance that we as a society have historically received from our families, churches, and villages while at the same time providing the new kinds of support that are uniquely required in the postmodern milieu. It is not merely a matter of replacing one object of individual affective relationship with another. Rather, it is a matter of looking beyond dyadic relationships and exploring additional relational meaning-making structures that are more resilient to the vagaries of postmodern existence.

The disciplines of group dynamics, adult development theory, and attachment theory however have been slow to take up the challenge of responding to the psychosocial issues raised

by the postmodernists and social constructionists. There is a smattering of researchers and theorists – Gergen (1994), Wuthrow (1994) and Lawson (2006) albeit unwittingly, Friedkin (2004), Bettencourt and Sheldon (2001), Postmes, et al. (2005), and Fiske (2002) in the field of group dynamics; Piaget (Durkin, 1995), Kegan (1994), and Moshman (2003) in the field of adult developmental theory; and Prentice (1994), E. Smith, et al. (1996), and E. Smith, et al. (1999) in the field of adult attachment theory – who have taken up the challenge. But by and large, as this Literature Review has demonstrated, the vast majority of the research remains couched in the modernist subject-object paradigm.

Group theorists (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; M. B. Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Dindia, 2003; Ellemers et al., 2002; Kaplan, 1975/1976; D. T. Miller & Prentice, 1994; Sheldon & Bettencourt, 2002; Tropp & Wright, 2001; Turner et al., 1994), coming predominantly from the fields of sociology and anthropology have been better at exploring the impacts of postmodernism on social structures. Their pessimism however that looks more to the implications of the losses of traditional social structures, has offered little in the way of positive, practical speaking, forward-thinking alternative social structures. This, combined with a propensity to fragment their research into compartmentalized explorations of single factors has led to a density of research that may be more obscuring than illuminating.

The adult attachment theorists (Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998; Collins & Allard, 2001; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Hazen & Shaver, 1987; Lopez & Brennan, 2000; Mickelson et al., 1997; Simpson & Rholes, 1998) have remained entrenched in a view that the individual is the sole locus of attachment attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors. In their models the individual, apart from the cataclysmic impacts of trauma, remains a constant given with a sameness in relationship that ignores the volatility of postmodern relationships.

The adult developmental theorists (G. D. Cohen, 2000; Commons & Richards, 2002; Erikson, 1980; Hudson, 1999; Levinson, 1988; Loevinger, 1976; Sinnott, 2002; Stevens-Long & Michaud, 2003; Vaillant, 2002) have likewise continued to view postformal meaning-making as an

individualistic pursuit of the lonely psychosocial traveler. Whatever the ultimate goals of adult development may be defined to be, the continued romanticizing of the developmental process may be more isolating than social.

And perhaps most importantly, and most tellingly, each of these fields with their own richness of theory and research, have been slow to engage each other in cross-discipline dialogue. The adult attachment theorists have dabbled into group dynamics but still with the language of dyadic relationships. The social constructionists have “thrown the baby out with the bath water” and ignored what attachment theorists and other modernist perspectives are telling us about our needs, most likely a biological imperative, for relational connection.

What these fields of theorizing and research have failed to do, whether because of constrained perspective or failure to collaborate, is with any strength is to address the following questions:

- What, if any, alternate kinds of long-term relational structures can provide the psychosocial supports previously provided predominantly by family, work, and village?
- What will be the characteristics of these types of structures that will allow them to survive and indeed thrive in the uncertainty of the postmodern milieu in ways that have become increasingly precarious for traditional support structures?
- What will be the characteristics of the ties that bind members of these types of groups to each other in enriching relationships?
- And how will these types of enriching social ecosystems be experienced by their members and contribute to their adult developmental processes?

When a group such as the Early Birds is “discovered” which appears to be an alternate relationship structure that can thrive in the postmodern milieu, it is important to look deeply into its affective, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics. It is important to do so in a way that is congruent with postmodern and social constructionist inquiry so that we can carry forth our

learnings into the future. Doing so, presents the possibility of preparing us to not only survive but to also thrive in a future where only change itself is unchanging. It is with this objective in mind, that I present in the remaining chapters my approach to studying the Early Birds and my presentation of the outcomes of my study of this group.

## Chapter Three: The Research Method

### ***Overview of the Research Approach***

This study makes use of qualitative research methods, in particular *grounded theory* and *participant observation*. A qualitative approach was selected because my research interests lie with the beliefs, values, motivations and ensuing behavior of the Early Birds as seen as the manifestations of psychosocial meaning-making processes. My desire is to understand what it feels like to be an Early Bird and to understand from the perspective of participants why this group has been so resilient. This is not the type of question to which a quantitative study can adequately respond.

I considered several qualitative methodologies including heuristic and phenomenological methods but decided on grounded theory and participant observation as the best methods to serve my purpose. (Densin & Lincoln, 1994) I felt that the grounded theory methodology was appropriate because it offers the potential to apply rigor to the research through the use of computer modeling software that is generally associated with quantitative methods while continuing to provide the flexibility associated with qualitative methods.

Grounded theory was originally developed by two sociologists, Glaser and Strauss in the 1970s. The objective of a grounded theory study is to develop a general theory through the in-depth and rigorous investigation of data collected from a single event. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) This methodology is well suited to my purposes of deducing a generalized theory from observation of the Early Birds.

### ***The Research Population***

The subject population for this study is a group of tennis players who play at the Mt. Vernon Racquet Club in Mt Vernon, Virginia. The group meets on Monday, Wednesday, Friday,

and Saturday mornings at 6 a.m. to play tennis for approximately 1 hour. The group, by common agreement among its members, estimates that it has been in existence for over 35 years. There does not appear to be any official starting date for the group. I have selected this population because it has several characteristics that interest me and that will be of interest to both the professional psychological community and to the general public. The oldest member of the group when I first started this study was 82 with the youngest current member, myself, being 60. Many of the group members, but not all, would be considered to be high performers with careers that have continued into retirement. Some of the members of the group have been together for more than 25 years. The group has no formal structure; anyone can show up at 6 a.m. to play. Members typically arrive about 15 minutes early to either warm up on the tennis courts for a few minutes or use some of the exercise equipment such as the bikes and treadmills. Members are both men and women with about a current ratio of approximately twice as many men as women among the participants who were interviewed for this study. Each morning numbers are randomly drawn to determine who plays together. At present the group is using numbered dies and a pill bottle. In the past colored fuzzy bears have been used and even prior to that a process of spinning racquets. At present only doubles are played although there has been both singles and doubles played in the past. After tennis, the group meets informally in the player lounge for coffee, and on Saturday donuts or bagels. Conversation lasts for anywhere from half an hour to an hour.

The Early Birds have one structured event throughout the year. Once a year, typically on the first or second Saturday in December, the “Early Bird World Championships” are held. Round robin play is conducted that culminates in the awarding of the championship trophy and a polo shirt to the winner. Over the years this event has expanded to include presentation of the Lee Prichart trophy to the winner in honor of a particularly beloved past member who is now deceased. The “I know Fred Benson ...and you are not Fred Benson” trophy which consists of a broken racquet glued to a plaque beside a picture of a bodybuilder with Fred’s face glued on is

also awarded to the member with the lowest point score. In the very recent future the tennis club has begun to give out cash awards to the top three players.

I have observed as a relatively recent member to the group that members feel a strong commitment and friendship to each other. These characteristics, and others not yet known, warrant study. The research participants are, in my opinion, a psychologically healthy group. I base this opinion on observations of extremely low levels of conflict, openness to the addition and departure of members, ability to adapt to change, and low levels of organizational structure. I will elaborate on these points in the analysis of the data. I have designed a study that allows for identification and examination of the characteristics of the group that are particularly valued by the group members whether they may or may not have been initially valued by myself as the researcher. This design is in the spirit of fostering active participation from the study group. Gubrium and Holstein (2002) describe the research role of the active participant as "...the subject behind the respondent not only holds the details of a life history of experience, but, in the very process of offering them up to the researcher, constructively shapes the information" (p. 159). I anticipate that the examination of these characteristics will lead to the development of generalized theory about the characteristics of psychologically healthy social groups. I have also designed a study that will do this while providing minimum intrusion and perturbation to the participant group.

The research question explores the area of normal (as opposed to pathological) psychosocial group processes. It presents the possibility of discovering new ways of describing psychosocial normality with regard to group dynamics. As such, the research is not designed to validate or invalidate existing hypotheses about normal adult psychosocial group processes. Rather, it is designed to add to the existing body of knowledge regarding group processes. It is also designed to contribute to our understandings of what it is like to be part of a sustained group process.



### ***Participant Selection Process***

Because the research participant group is a group without official membership, the following steps were taken to identify those individuals who were asked to participate in the study and who were asked to sign an informed consent form. These activities occurred during the informal on-site after-tennis coffee breaks in the club meeting area.

First, over the period of several months I informally described the research project to individuals participating in morning tennis meetings. This group typically ranges from 5 to 15 people at any one time. I provided a typed handout describing the research project and the anticipated participation requirements as well as a consent form to each member in a brown envelope. The purpose of this approach was to provide opportunities for the participants to reflect on the personal impact of the study, discuss it among themselves, and ask any questions that they might desire. I informed the participants that at any time during the study they may determine if any or all of the research methods are unwelcome and ask for their termination from this study.

Over the next several weeks and months I received back about six signed consent forms. All of the members with the exception of one individual were very interested in the study. Most however waited until the actual interview to read and sign the form. One of the female members declined to be interviewed. When I inquired about her decision her response was “Oh, you’ve already got enough people. You don’t need me.” This response, while surprising to me, is consistent with observations of gerontological researchers such as Kenyon (2002) who notes a similar propensity in older female storyteller interviewees to denigrate the value of their own experiences. But as Kenyon also notes, we can only invite, never force participation, and it is up to each individual to determine how they will participate.

Due to unanticipated pressures from outside my research work, there was a break of several months before I actually started the interview process. (The participants wanted to be interviewed after tennis and there was not enough time in the mornings for me prior to going to

work.) There was however continual contact with the group. Once I did resume the research, several weeks were given over at the tennis club to allow the Early Bird participants to make recommendations for who should be interviewed. Because group membership is informal, there were several iterative steps before the final list was determined. I initially recommended that the list of those to be interviewed be restricted to individual who have been with the group for at least one year. I however let the group make the final decision about the participation list and in practice this turned out to be the case.

A provision was made to accommodate any objection that an individual member might make to the study as it was being conducted. Members of the group who decided to participate and sign the informed consent form were advised that they had the right to determine if the study should continue without the signed consent of any objecting individual(s). This provision was not needed as everyone who was playing on a regular basis participated in the interview process. Additionally, the group often discussed this study comfortably both during and after tennis and indeed were not hesitant to provide ample suggestions for content.

Participants did not receive compensation for their participation. They will however each receive a copy of the final research document as well as a copy of their own interview tapes if they desire.

At the suggestion of the participants, most interviews were conducted at the Mt. Vernon Health and Racquet Club usually in the early morning hours between 5 a.m. and 8 a.m. As it turned out, the nursery proved to be the most private location at that time of day and was used for all of the interviews with the exception of one member whose interview was conducted at his residence. The length of time devoted to the interview was at the discretion of the participants.

Great care was taken to maintain confidentiality of the interview materials and to not skew the incomplete interviews by talking about the research findings. This was not entirely successful. The Early Birds are a well educated, highly skilled, and highly curious group and my study often became “fodder” for joking and teasing between members. Nevertheless, I did notice

that there was no mention of the contents of the individual interviews between members and I was careful not to disclose any materials myself.

Following the individual interviews and my initial analysis of the data an opportunity was provided for group discussion of my preliminary findings. This was at the request of the Early Birds who were highly curious about the findings and desirous to discuss these as a group. A Saturday was put aside for discussion of the findings. This session was recorded and became another vital addition to the data.

Additionally, I maintained a personal log of observations for approximately three months. This activity occurred after most of the individuals interviews were completed and before the group interviews were held. I chose to do this participant observation activity later in the study when the participants were extremely comfortable with the research project and without self-consciousness about my observation. No impact appeared to have been made on the normal operations of the Mt. Vernon Health and Racquet Club as a result of my study.

### ***Interviewee Selection and Observation Log Results***

Sixteen individuals, who at the time of the start of the study represented all of the regular members, were approached and asked to participate in the study. *Regular* was arbitrarily defined as having shown up for tennis or for the after-tennis coffee table conversations at least a dozen or more times throughout a year. In practice, this group consisted of individuals who participated at least once a week during times when they were residing in the Northern Virginia area. Cutoff on length of membership was set arbitrarily at three years. One individual declined to be interviewed and the other 15 accepted. Fifteen individual interviews were conducted between January, 2006 and February, 2007. Since some member participation is cyclic due to having multiple residences the interview schedules were adjusted to accommodate this. My own professional work schedule also contributed to the extended period over which the interviews were conducted. Additionally, two of the interviews were reconducted due to a recording error when I inadvertently recorded

over their interviews. Portions of the “salvaged” initial interviews were combined with responses from the second interviews.

There were opportunities to extend the interviews beyond the group of regular attendees to individuals who have since moved away from the area or who are now too infirm to play tennis, or who are only very sporadic attendees. I decided not to reach out to these individuals due to the complications surrounding setting up the interviews and due to the fact that they would not be part of the group whose activities I was reporting on in my observation logs.

The observation log was maintained from December, 2006 through March of 2007. Entries into the observation log commenced with the 2006 Early Bird Tournament and concluded with the presentation of the research findings to the group and the group interview in March of 2007.

### ***The Research Methodology***

Grounded theory methodology emphasizes a continual spiraling between the data and the conceptualizations about the data. I have synthesized from Straus and Corbin’s text *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (1998) the procedure for conducting a grounded theory study which I have adhered to for this study.

**Choose a research problem and state the research question:** The critical distinction between grounded theory and other qualitative research methodologies is that the research question does not presuppose any theoretical position. The theory is drawn from the data as they are collected and analyzed. The research question is stated as a broad, open-ended question at the beginning of the research and then, provided that there are supportive data, develops theoretical focus as the research progresses.

**Establish a balance between objectivity and sensitivity:** The researcher is responsible for establishing a personal balance that leads to reasonable and impartial representation of the problem under investigation. This requires identifying the epistemological position and personal

assumptions and factoring these into the research process. I have described these assumptions in earlier sections of this study. Specifically, I have identified my postmodern and social constructionist predilections that have served as both filter and focus for both the Literature Review and the Findings sections of this study.

**Perform initial review of the literature:** The initial review is intended to assist with developing questions, initial concepts, and ideas for theoretical sampling. It is not used however to establish potential theories a priori to the data collection. The three primary areas that are included in the Literature Review – the postmodern psychosocial milieu, adult psychosocial factors, and the psychosocial dynamics of group cohesion – were selected based on my initial observations of the Early Birds and on my preexisting understandings of adult group psychosocial factors.

**Initial data collection:** Initial data collection in grounded theory may use any qualitative method to collect the data about the area of interest. Typically this is done through interviews and observations. For this study I selected three data collection methods: A short pre-interview questionnaire, individual and group interviews, and participant observation.

The individual interview method consisted of first asking participants to fill in a five item questionnaire consisting of: name to be used, age, number of years in the Early Birds, marital status, career before retirement, and career after retirement. The response to the name to be used field identified whether the participant wanted their own name or a pseudonym to be used. All of the participants chose to be identified by their real names. Participants were then asked to spend a few minutes describing their life histories. This typically took anywhere from 10 to 40 minutes. My original intentions and research design did not include this biographical material. However, given the ages of the participants, I followed the advice of Rubenstein who states, “In many years of qualitative research with elders, it has become clear to me that one can understand very little about personal meaning or experience without understanding the informant’s biographical context” (2002, p. 144).

Participants were then asked to narrate one or more stories either about themselves or about other members of the Early Birds that are important to them. The stories could come from any time in the history of the group and did not need to be first hand stories. At this point, when I was asking the participants to recall stories of the group I took great care to follow the exact text of the interview question in order to ensure that I was soliciting the same kind of information from each participant. The following question was stated verbatim to each participant:

Now I wonder if you could tell me a story or two about the Early Birds, something perhaps that you remember that brings up a feeling or a memory of some kind?

Schacter (1996) in describing the process of reminiscing concludes that:

... the emotional intensity of a memory is determined, at least in part, by the way in which you, the rememberer, go about remembering the episode. And the emotions that you attribute to the past may sometimes arise from the way in which you set out to retrieve a memory in the present. (p. 22)

This implies that the responses that I got from the participants could have been skewed for example if I had asked some of them to focus on the objective circumstances of the memory while asking others to focus on the feelings that the memories elicited. Asking the question the same way each time was an effort to minimize this variable in the research study.

Participants who volunteered to be interviewed was asked whether they wanted their interview to be kept in confidence and whether they would like their telling of it recognized in the final published documents. Those who wanted their stories identified were given the option of using their full name, initials, or first name only. All of the interviewees gave their permission to be referred to by name and I have subsequently identified responses by first name in the Findings section of this study. Some of the members of the Early Birds are engaged in government work and I have additionally expunged or masked small portions of the interview transcriptions that contained sensitive information. This action did not in any way affect the outcome of the study.

**Microscopic examination of the data:** This method is used to focus the researcher on the full range of plausibility, without taking any particular stance toward the data. In particular, microscopic examination requires that the researcher listen in great detail to what the interviewees are saying and how they are saying it. This prevents the researcher from preliminarily jumping to personal conclusions that cannot be substantiated by the data. The method consists of reviewing the data line by line, and sometimes word by word, looking for possible themes, motifs, and recurring patterns.

As described in greater detail in the next chapter, my initial coding, using the N'Vivo software, developed two coding trees: one for the content and another for the narrative framing of the interviews. Stempler (2001) describes two approaches to coding: *emergent* coding where the categories are derived from preliminary examination of the data and *a priori* coding where categories are defined priori to examination of the text. Consistent with the grounded theory methodology, an emergent coding approach was taken for the coding of the data for this study. The content data were first classified according to whatever patterns intuitively came to my mind. This initial classification was nonhierarchical, open, and unstructured. Much of this coding was informed by the Literature Review as well as my on-going studies. My next step was to then view clusters of excerpts from the data organized by these potential themes, motifs, and recurring patterns and make determinations regarding the further focus of the research and Literature Review. This was done from a wide variety of perspectives that are only practically possible with a software tool such as N'Vivo. Detailed descriptions of some of the coding trees are included in the Appendix.

**Questioning:** Concurrent with the microanalysis described in the previous step, I then began to formulate questions of the type “What is happening here?”. Three types of questions evolved from the microscopic examination: (a) sensitizing questions that led deeper into the problem and their relationship to the problem, (b) theoretical questions that led to connections

and comparisons, and (c) practical/structural questions that center on the practicalities of designing the details of the research project.

**Making comparisons:** Comparisons are made at the property and dimension levels of the data and involve looking for similarities and differences in the data components. The comparisons are abstractions from the data that move the researcher away from personal biases, assumptions, and personal perspectives. Comparisons also include returning to the Literature Review to search for similarities and differences in outcomes of similar studies.

**Theoretical sampling:** Theoretical sampling is a task specific to grounded theory. Here, based on the questions and comparisons that the researcher draws from the data, a variety of new and existing sources are explored with the purpose of providing insight with regard to the formulation of theoretical questions and initial concepts. At this point in the study I began to distinguish between data supporting or contradicting theoretical positions already a part of the professional literature and data supporting new theoretical positions extending beyond the current professional literature. In several cases I returned to the literature and to other reference sources to gain additional insights that contributed to the development of theories.

**Open coding and categorization:** As data continue to be collected, they are integrated into the existing data set. Using these data I began to look for thematic clusters and to group data accordingly. Along the way I added process notes and made use of other techniques such as relational data modeling (one-to-many, many-to-many, one-to-one, etc.) to begin the task of organizing the data. This entire model was maintained as a single N'Vivo data set. Next I began to categorize the data and to develop subcategories. This was especially important due to the volume of data drawn from over 50 pages of interview notes. Several iterations, concurrent with theoretical sampling, occurred before the data were ready to be reintegrated.

**Axial coding and paradigm building:** Axial coding occurs as the researcher begins to engage in theory-building. The data are brought together relationally and links are developed between categories. Out of this process the researcher begins to see structures and patterns.



Where gaps occur in the patterns, the researcher returns to previous steps to do additional theoretical sampling and/or to examine the data further. Relational statements are made and the data begin to structurally coalesce around the central paradigm. In the case of this study, I brought the initial codings and findings to a group meeting of the Early Birds and recorded the group discussions of the findings. I used the results of this meeting to confirm and refine my findings. Again, this was a process of engaging the participants as active members of the research.

**Integration:** At this point the organization of the data takes on the structure of a theory. The researcher discovers the central category under which the data are subsumed. Of critical importance at this point is the ability to trace any particular facet of the theory back to the actual data from which it has arisen. I made use of the diagramming techniques, conditional/consequential matrices, and other tools that are part of the N'Vivo software to logically organize the categories and subcategories, their relationships, and their underlying data. These models are included in the Findings section and in the Appendices.

**Presentation of the findings:** The researcher concludes the project by reframing the theory. This is done in a clear and logical narrative format that can be followed by both professional and the general public alike.

### ***Confidentiality and Security of the Data***

In addition to the steps described above in the methodology section, I also did my own transcripts and coding of the interviews to ensure confidentiality of some of the unavoidably sensitive material. I numbered each of the interviews and kept a separate card system with the actual names of the interviewees. Although none of the interviewees indicated that they wanted to keep their interview confidential, I nevertheless used special coding to assure that this information is kept separate from the to-be-published materials.

During the research process I provided informal feedback to the group as they requested it, typically during our after-tennis coffee break. There was enormous curiosity and a good deal of

“content coaching” which required a good deal of personal self-discipline about responses. Each of the participants will receive a copy of my PDE so that they can see how the material was used.

During the group interview the question of names used for the findings also came up. The following exchange further confirmed that the group was extremely open to the use of their first names as identifiers for quotations in this study:

[Liz] You’re not using names are you? [Laughter] Naming names are we?

[me] Well listen, let me ask a question. When I’ve been putting together the documentation in the document itself I’ve been using first names. Do you want me to give everybody different first names for this? I’m never using second names.....

[group] no, no!! [laughter]

[me] But I wanted to check with people. I’ll give everyone the section to read through .....

[Someone not Hendrik] Call me Hendrik!

[Hendrik] You can her Cleve and him Marty! [uproarious laughter]

[Mort] I don’t want to be Marty!

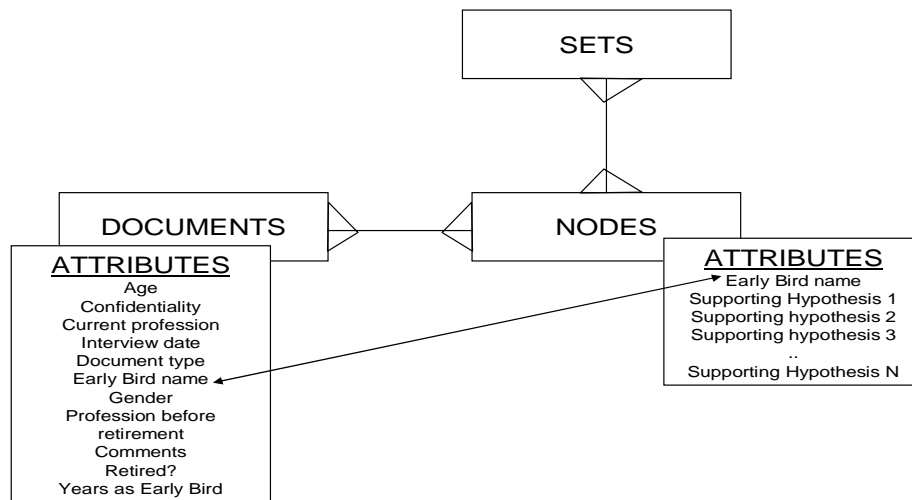
[?] No one wants to be Marty! [laughter]

[Ed] My nickname is squirrel, so you can .....

The study data were maintained on an IBM PC to which I am the only person to have access. Backups of data were done on a regular basis using a flash disk. During the course of the research project the data, both on paper and electronic media, were stored in a locked file in my home office. My home office is a separate location in my home and I am the only user of that space. All files and research materials were maintained there to minimize the risk of accidental exposure.

## ***N'Vivo Structuring of the Data Analysis***

Prior to the coding of the individual interviews, a structure was put in place within the N'Vivo software to organize the coding and analysis processes. The drawing below graphically illustrates the structure of the relational matrices.



**Figure 2: N'Vivo data coding and analysis structure**

N'Vivo supports three types of datum elements: documents, nodes, and sets. Because N'Vivo supports relational as well as hierarchical data organization, many-to-many relationships can be created as well as one-to-many relationships. That is, one document can be associated with many nodes; one node can be associated with many documents. One node can appear in many sets; one set can be associated with many nodes.

The data collected during the research process were stored in N'Vivo *documents*. For this study, this included individual interview transcripts, group interview transcripts, and observation diaries. N'Vivo *nodes* are typically used to store the coding schemes. For this study this included both the names of the themes identified during the coding process and the themes identified

during the Literature Review. N'Vivo *sets* are typically used to collect groups of themes together in a higher, more abstract, level of organization. For this study, sets were used to cluster themes confirming and disconfirming existing research and theories as well as to cluster themes supporting new theory development.

### ***Structuring of the Quantitative Data***

A small amount of quantitative categorical data were collected during this study in the way of questionnaires. Each interviewee was asked to fill out a small questionnaire prior to the individual interviews. N'Vivo supports linking quantitative data to the document elements via *attributes*. Each of the individual interview documents was linked to a set of attribute fields containing the questionnaire information. The following table describes the characteristics of each of the document attribute fields:

**Table 6: Structure of the document attributes**

Attribute	Description	Datum Type	Valid Values
Age	The age of the interviewee at the time the interview was done	numeric	number
Confidentiality?	Whether the interviewee wanted their identify to be kept confidential in the findings	Logical	Y or N
Current profession	The current profession of the interviewee at the time that the interview was done	Text	
Interview date	The date that the interview was done	date	mm/dd/yyyy
Document Type	The type of datum	Text	Individual interview Group interview Observation notes
Early Bird	Name that the interviewee wanted to be used for the findings text	Text	
Gender	The gender of the interviewee	Text	M or F
Profession before retirement	If retired, the profession of the interviewee prior to retirement	Text	
Comments	Any ad hoc comments added to the questionnaire form	Text	
Retired?	The retirement status of the interviewee from their own perspective	Text	Retired Not retired Partially retired

Attribute	Description	Datum Type	Valid Values
Years as an Early Bird	The number of years that the interviewee had belonged to the Early Bird group	numeric	

To supplement the somewhat limited quantitative data analysis capability of N'Vivo, the attribute tables were exported to MS Excel for further analysis and the calculation of derived data values. The following table documents these values.

**Table 7: Datum elements derived from the questionnaires**

Datum Element	Description	Calculation algorithm
Avg Age	The average age of all the interviewees	Count of attribute Age
Avg Male Age	The average age of the male interviewees	Count of attribute Age filtered by attribute Gender equal Male
Avg Female Age	The average age of the female interviewees	Count of attribute Age filtered by attribute Gender equal Female
Female %	The % of interviewees who are female	Ratio of count of interviewees filtered by attribute Gender equal Female divided by count of all interviewees
Male %	The % of interviewees who are male	Ratio of count of interviewees filtered by attribute Gender equal Male divided by count of all interviewees
Avg EB	The average number of years as an Early Bird for all interviewees	Average of attribute Age
Avg EB Male	The average number of years as an Early Bird for male interviewees	Average of attribute Age filtered by attribute Gender equal Male
Avg EB Female	The average number of years as an Early Bird for female members	Average of attribute Age filtered by attribute Gender equal Female
EB Year	The age of the interviewee when they joined the Early Birds	The attribute Years as Early Bird subtracted from attribute Age

### ***Emergent and A Priori Coding and Analysis Methods***

Consistent with the grounded theory methodology, emergent coding methods were used to initially identify the N'Vivo nodes used to code the documents. This was done by first reading through the individual interviews and observation notes several times while creating free nodes in the N'Vivo software and coding these to the documents. Periodically the list of nodes was reviewed to determine if consolidation of node names was required or if additional granularity was required.

After the initial emergent coding was completed an initial round of analysis was done to cluster the nodes into findings. This involved reading through the data coded at the nodes and drawing preliminary conclusions from the data. Findings were documented in the N'Vivo software by creating sets. The modeling capabilities of the N'Vivo software were used to document links between the findings and the nodes containing the supporting data. This step is critical in the grounded theory methodology in that it “grounds” the theory-building in the data. This process allows for tracing all findings, both supporting of existing theory and new theory, directly to the supporting data. An output from the N'Vivo project file is shown below to illustrate the modeling of the linkage of findings to nodes.





**Figure 3: Sample N'Vivo output modeling the relationship between nodes coded on the documents and linked to a finding and then to the theories it has relevance to.**

### ***A Priori Analysis Methods***

After the initial findings were coded, two separate and parallel a priori analyses were conducted: an analysis of the narrative styles describing the manners in which the participants

framed their interviews and an analysis looking for similarities and differences to the theoretical positions presented in the Literature Review. The first a priori analysis entailed conducting a narrative analysis by rereading the individual interviews and coding them based on how the interviewees told their stories rather than on what they said. This was an analysis of the narrative structures used by the interviewees. Narrative analysis requires its own methods for coding and analysis apart from those of grounded theory. I used the work of Gubrium and Holstein (1998) as the basis for my narrative analysis methodology and except where noted below I adopted their vocabulary and methods. I will begin with the Gubrium and Holstein definition of *narrative practice*:

We use the term ‘narrative practice’ to characterize simultaneously the activities of storytelling, the resources used to tell stories, and the auspices under which stories are told. Considering personal stories and their coherence as matters of practice centers attention on the relation between these ‘hows’ and ‘whats’ of narration, on storytellers engaged in the work of constructing coherence of storytelling. (p. 164)

This definition is important because it incorporates into narrative analysis not only the contents of the story lines but also the contextual framing that the teller places around the story. It speaks not only to what the story teller is talking about but also to how the teller has organized and framed the story within the local context.

This definition potentially adds complexity to the coding and analysis process. To address this potential complexity Gubrium and Holstein (1997) recommend using *analytic bracketing* to separate and focus the analysis into discrete and separately analyzed components related to the “how” and “what” of the narrative material. I followed this advice and developed two parallel coding analyses in the N’Vivo software for each of the interviews. One analysis maps the content of the stories while the parallel analysis maps the various ways that the stories are framed by the tellers. I have also organized the analysis of the findings to follow this bracketed approach.

Gubrium and Holstein provide a useful vocabulary for describing the “how” components of narrative analysis. Using their list of narrative elements, a priori coding was done for *narrative linkage* and *narrative slippage* as described below. These elements were stored in the N’Vivo software as nodes which were then grouped into a common set called *narrative analyses*. Each of the individual interviews was reread searching for instances where these narrative elements occurred.

Although my research study was intentionally designed to minimize the collectivization of the narratives by recording them in individual, private sessions, I expected to see convergence between individual stories and influences between story tellers based on my observations of the group prior to the beginning of this study. Gubrium and Holstein refer to this phenomenon as narrative linkage. As they note, “Telling one’s experience in the context, say, of a group that shares a relatively crystallized repertoire of story lines presents one with a set of discernable plots, offering ways of giving shape and substance to experience in those terms” (1998, p. 166).

Narrative linkages can operate as introductory comments that make comparisons to other participant’s stories or they can be embedded in the story itself. This second form is referred to as *narrative footing* because it tends to couch the story within the local context and allude to what is possible to relate within the culture. Narrative footings provide the listener with information about the perspective that the storyteller is going to take on the material.

Narrative slippage is a term that Gubrium and Holstein use to describe the differences that may occur in individual perspectives on the same events. There were several occasions in the story telling where Early Birds spoke to the same story but with individual differences in perspective. I found these stories most interesting and revealing of the stories-in-use of the group.

A second a priori analysis was done to determine which theories and research already described in the Literature Review were supported or disconfirmed by the study data. The Literature Review was read and bookmarked in MSWord to identify theories and research that appeared to have relevance to the preliminary coding. Document elements were created in

N'Vivo for each of these theories or research findings and were collected together into a set. The N'Vivo nodes and preliminary findings were then analyzed to determine if there was confirming or disconfirming evidence supporting existing theories and research. As needed, additional findings were documented in the N'Vivo software using the document elements. Finally, findings were clustered together in sets corresponding to the subsections of the Literature Review. Theories were linked to findings and then linked to nodes containing the actual data supporting the linkage.

### ***Emergent Analysis Methods***

Finally, an emergent analysis was done to determine if there were support in the data for new theory-building not covered by previous theorizing and research as described in the Literature Review. As will be elaborated on in detail in chapter 5 of this study, there was evidence supporting new theory-building. A comprehensive model was built in the N'Vivo software supporting this theory.

At this point in the study a group interview was held at which the preliminary findings and new theories were presented and discussed. The recording of this group interview was then coded and incorporated into the rest of the research data and the N'Vivo models.

## Chapter Four: Analysis of the Findings

In this section I present the findings and interpretive analysis of the findings drawn from the questionnaires, individual interviews, observation logs, and group interviews. I integrate these data with the Literature Review.

Social movement researchers Hunt, Benford, and Snow (1994), citing Blumer (1969) make a cautionary recommendation with regard to the analysis of similarities and differences in group members that is important to consider prior to the presentation of the following analysis:

There is a tendency to reify identity concepts. Researchers frequently imply that entire categories of people possess uniform identities. Further, focusing on ‘determinant’ structures implies that identities arise from a single dimension, for example, pathological instinct or psychosocial structural strain. Unidimensional arguments overlook a variety of identity components and complexities, especially how actors interpret, construct, and articulate identities. (p. 188)

My purpose therefore, even when presenting analyses of unidimensional factors, is as much as possible to speak in the language of *process* as opposed to the language of *artifacts*. That is, my attempt will be to avoid the subject-object reification emblematic of modernist, empirical research and instead focus on processes of becoming.

### ***Analysis of the Categorical Data from the Questionnaires***

Each of the participants filled in a short questionnaire prior to their interview providing the information described in Table 8. All participants gave permission to refer to themselves by their first names for the purposes of this study. The following table documents the questionnaire responses for each of the interviewees.

**Table 8: Interview questionnaire data results**

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years as Early Bird</b>	<b>Retired?</b>	<b>Profession before retired</b>	<b>Current profession</b>
Irene	67	F	6	retired	librarian	researcher/ writer
Rivers	66	M	5	retired	physician	retired
Hendrik	65	M	22	not retired	computer engineer	computer engineer
Cleve	61	M	20	not retired	physician	physician
Joann	68	F	31	not retired	Analyst	analyst
Richard	68	M	6	not retired	chemical marketing	painting - artistic
Bill	74	M	36	retired	Banker	tax professional
Dona	60	F	3	not retired	management Consultant	management consultant
Hart	78	M	20	not retired	forensic document examiner	forensic document examiner
Chuck	66	M	27	retired	physicist	physicist – retired
Mort	76	M	13	semi- retired	architect	Ornithologist
Liz	62	F	5	not retired	housewife	admin assistant

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Years as Early Bird	Retired?	Profession before retired	Current profession
Arleen	65	F	10	retired	writer/ development specialist	volunteer social worker
Marty	70	M	33	not retired	Sr staff US House of Representatives	Photographer
Fred	67	M	21	semi- retired	Writer	corporate executive

The following table summarizes the data from the questionnaires for the men and women members who were interviewed for this study:

**Table 9: Comparison of male and female members of the Early Birds**

	% of inter-viewees	Avg age at times of interview	Avg length of time as a member	Avg age at time of membership	Retirement status
All interviewees		67.5	17.2	50.3	retired: 5 semi-retired: 2 not retired: 8
Men	66.6%	69	20	49	retired: 3 semi-retired: 2 not retired: 5
Women	33.3%	64.4	11	53.4	retired: 2 semi-retired: 0 not retired: 3

I used these data to develop some retrospective models of the characteristics of the group membership. These models should in no way be construed as a longitudinal representation of the actual group composition. This study includes data for only a subset of the historical members of the group – those individuals who are current members. It does not include data for individuals who are no longer members due to having passed away, moved away, left the group, or in general being unavailable for interviewing.

Although this analysis of the questionnaire data reflects only information gained from the 15 interviewees and does not represent a comprehensive longitudinal view of Early Bird membership, it does however reveal several interesting characteristics of the group that have implications for an analysis of the current Early Bird membership and the psychosocial factors



pertinent to the group's longevity. First, from Tables 12 and 13 there is confirmation that indeed, the Early Birds are engaged in a long-term sustaining group process. Not only have several of the current members been in the group for over 20 years, but there has also been a steady influx of new members who also have subsequently maintained long-term memberships.

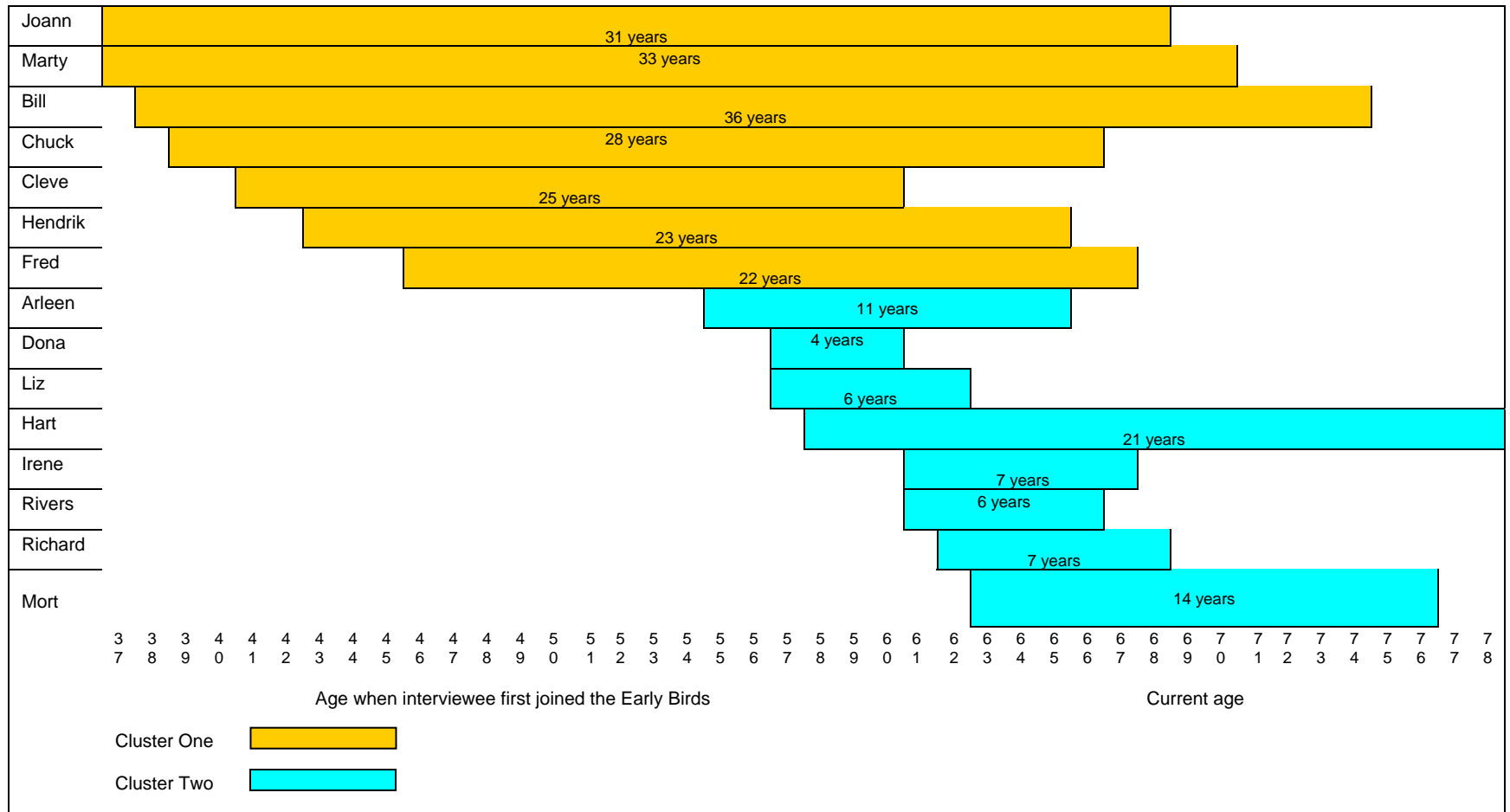
In Table 10 below, I charted the ages of members when they joined the Early Birds to the ages of the other interviewees at the same point in time. This chart is organized longitudinally to give an indication of how the group has grown over time. Again, because this chart only documents the current members who were interviewed, it does not provide information about individuals who have left the group over this period of time. Nevertheless, it does point out several characteristics of the current group worth mentioning.

First, the chart indicates that the current members have joined the group in a fairly steady stream over the last 35 years. At most, only one or two individuals have joined every two of three years. I will return to the implications of this observation when I present the Findings about group dynamics. Second, the average age of the group has been slowly but steadily moving upward. In 1986 the average age of the group was 52; in 2003, the average age of the group was 59. This chart also reveals that new members have generally been of a similar age to that of the current members. This of course makes sense given that the focus of Early Bird activity is on playing tennis and individuals are likely to be at first drawn to groups of tennis players with similar capabilities. As a result however, the average age of the group has been steadily going up. This trend may however be peaking. There have been one or two new members who have joined over the last few years that were not included in this study who are in their 60s. I anticipate that the group will settle at an average around the 60s watermark. Finally, the chart indicates that the group has become increasingly coed. Of the last seven members for example, four are female. I will return to an examination of this topic later in this study.

Table 10: Ages that interviewees joined the Early Birds compared to ages of other members and categorized by gender

Bill	38			41		43									52	53	54								61			64				68	69	71				
Marty				37		39									48	49	50								57			60				64	65	67				
Joann						37									46	47	48								55			58				62	63	65				
Chuck															44	45	46								53			56				60	61	63				
Hendrik															43	44	45								52			55				59	60	62				
Fred																46	47								54			57				61	62	64				
Cleve																	41								48			51				55	56	58				
Hart																	56								63			66				70	71	73				
Mort																									63			66				70	71	73				
Arleen																												55				59	60	62				
Irene																																	61	62	64			
Richard																																62	63	65				
Liz																																	56		58			
Rivers																																	61	63	65			
Dona																																			57			
year	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	
avg age				39		41				45					50	51	52							59			62				66	67	69					
min				37		37				39					43	44	41							48			51				55	56	57					
max				41		43				47					52	53	56							63			66				70	71	73					
range				4		6				8					9	9	5							5			5				5	5		6				

**Table 11: Length of time that each Early Bird interviewed for this study has been a member compared to age when they first became a member and current age.**



In Table 11 above, I charted the length of time that each interviewee has been an Early Bird along an “age line” to illustrate changes in the ages at which current members first started playing tennis with the Early Birds. This exercise revealed an interesting characteristic of the current group.

The current group can actually be segmented into two clusters of individuals based on the general ages at which individuals joined the group. The first cluster consists of individuals who all joined over the course of the first 10 years of the group’s existence and were in their late 30s and 40s. These individuals have been members for more than 20 years and are now in their 60s and 70s. The second cluster consists of members who have joined in their 50s and 60s, have been members for 5 to 10 years, and are now in their 60s and 70s. Table 11 as described earlier shows that the ages of this second group as they joined the group corresponded to the current ages of the first cluster. That is, as the first cluster of individuals aged, the ages of the new members of the group kept pace with this upward trend. This is consistent with what participants have told me about how the group has evolved. Several members from the first cluster have mentioned in conversation that the group used to play both singles and doubles. Now, as a concession to age, the group only plays doubles. As a result, individuals attracted to the group are likely to be older (younger potential members may want to play more singles competition) and consequently the average age of the group has been trending upward. Hart is the exception to this model and sits at the cusp between the two groups. Hart’s entry into the group in 1993 marks a change in the ages of new members. Hart, who entered the group when he was 57, was the first of the current members, to join the group at a later age.

Together, these data reveal that the current group’s longevity is characterized not only by long-term membership of some of its earliest members but also by a steady inflow of new members who now comprise 53% of the interviewees. I will return to a further investigation of the relevance of this finding when I present my own theoretical positions in chapter 5.

## ***Narrative Analysis of the Findings***

In this section I present my findings from the narrative analysis of the individual interviews as well as the observation log. This analysis will identify and prioritize what the interviewees said. Later sections in this chapter will provide the interpretive analysis of these findings.

### ***Summarization of the Findings from the Individual Interviews***

As described in the previous chapter, narrative linkage refers to commonalities across multiple interviews. High levels of narrative linkage indicate high levels of convergence across the responses from multiple interviews. That is, it indicates that the interviewees are thinking about the same things and give the same things priority in their responses. Describing the same events or the same people, for example, are instances of narrative linkage. High levels of narrative linkage are indicative of themes that are foremost in the thoughts, both conscious and unconscious, of a majority of the interviewees and considered important enough for the interviewees to comment on during the interview. Narrative linkage is a particularly strong indicator of convergent thinking in this study because of the relatively open-ended structure of the interview questioning. That is, the interviewees were asked only three very general questions during the interview and it was up to each interviewee to determine what was important enough to speak to.

Although several interviewees may speak to the same topic, there may not be convergence in the views presented. Narrative slippage indicates the degree to which individual recounts of the “same” events differ from each other. From a social constructionist perspective, high levels of narrative slippage indicate divergence of the meaning-making processes among the individuals who have shared the experience. As with narrative linkage, levels of narrative slippage are also especially important indicators in this study given the open-ended nature of the interview questions.

High levels of narrative linkage can be indicative of high levels of group cohesiveness and can be indicative of the factors binding a group together. Extremely high levels of narrative linkage however coupled with extremely low levels of narrative slippage can be associated with “group think” that is more characteristic of what we might characterize as cultish behavior.

To assess for narrative linkage across the individual interview notes, I created an N’Vivo assay report to identify primary nodes that had the highest number of individual interviews coded against them. This was accomplished by means of extracting an assay report generated from N’Vivo and then exporting to MS Excel for further analysis and for filtering out of secondary and derivative nodes. (The version of N’Vivo that was used for this study has somewhat limited capabilities for segmenting the nodes into categories and then filtering reports on categories.) I then further examined the interview notes coded against each of the nodes and made a determination of the level and type of narrative slippage among the responses. The results of this analysis are documented in Table 12 and Table 13 below. Table 12 documents the number of interviewees who spoke to each of the primary coding nodes. Table 13 summarizes the findings both for dominant themes and for levels of narrative linkage. Detailed descriptions of the findings follow the table entries.

Twenty-eight primary coding nodes were identified during the initial coding of the individual interviews and the observation log. Five of these nodes, representing 18% of the primary coding nodes, were mentioned by 50% or more of the interviewees: After-tennis Conversation, Good Will and Laughter, Competition, Extensive Travel in Life History, and Support in Time of Sickness. Table 12 also reveals that there were significant differences in density of coding across the interviews. Three of the 15 interviewees spoke to 50% or more of the topics coded on the primary nodes. In contrast, 2 of the 15 interviewees spoke to less than 10% of the primary nodes.

**Table 12 N'Vivo nodes sorted in order of number of interviewee mentioning the topic and sorted by number of topics mentioned per interview**

		9	16	4	8	20	5	11	19	1	6	18	7	10	3	2	total	%
1	After-Tennis Conversation	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	11	73.33
2	Good Will and Laughter	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	10	66.67
3	Competition	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	9	60.00
4	Extensive Travel in Life History	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	9	60.00
5	Support in Time of Sickness	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	8	53.33
6	First Experiences as Early Bird	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	7	46.67
7	Prototypical Member	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	46.67
8	Appreciation for Diversity	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6	40.00
9	Conflict	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	6	40.00
10	Ethical Behavior	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	6	40.00
11	Evidence of EB Embedded in	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	40.00
12	Isolated from Rest of Life	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	6	40.00
13	Early Bird World Championships	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	5	33.33
14	Growth	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	5	33.33
15	Aging - Maturing Process	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4	26.67
16	Ease of Coming and Going	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	26.67
17	Friendship	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	26.67
18	Health	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	26.67
19	Women vs. Men	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	4	26.67
20	Career after Retirement	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3	20.00
21	Group Stability	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	20.00
22	Leaving the Group	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	20.00
23	New Member Selection Process	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	20.00
24	Openness	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	20.00
25	Sense of Equality	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	20.00
26	Use of Humor to Deflect	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	13.33
27	Primary and Secondary Group	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6.67
28	Rejection	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6.67
	Totals	18	17	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	8	8	7	5	2	1	143	
	Percentages	64.2	60.7	50.0	46.4	42.8	39.29	35.7	32.1	28.5	28.5	28.5	25.0	17.8	7.14	3.57		

**Table 13 Nodes sorted by level of narrative linkage and categorized by level of narrative slippage**

<b>Node Name</b>	<b>Interviewees Coded</b>	<b>Dominant Theme</b>	<b>Level of Narrative Slippage</b>
Extensive Travel in Life History	13	Extensive history of travel both from early life and professional life. Many members are still traveling extensively in retirement.	Extremely low
Competition	10	A strong desire to excel and to test oneself without any negative aspects of competition such as self-abnegation or abnegation of others. Appreciation for the competence of oneself and the competence of others.	Extremely low.
Good Will and Laughter	10	Light-hearted joking and teasing. Balanced against the competition. Intellectual repartee is highly valued and comical events are prized	Extremely low
Prototypical Member	9	Determined to be Marty based on the observations made by the other interviewees. He has the characteristics of humor and playfulness as well as being competitive that are valued by the group members.	Extremely low
Support in Time of Sickness	8	Taking care of each other without infantilizing. Helpful but also allowing space for each individual. The aging process is bringing this aspect of the group's behaviors increasingly into the forefront.	Extremely low



<b>Node Name</b>	<b>Interviewees Coded</b>	<b>Dominant Theme</b>	<b>Level of Narrative Slippage</b>
After-tennis Conversations	8	Almost as highly prized as the tennis playing. An opportunity for both intellectual exchanges and a bit of joking. It serves as counterpoint to the competition of tennis.	Extremely low
Evidence of EB Embedded in Self	7	Large number of instances where the interviewees indicated that they would feel a personal loss if the group ceased to exist or if they would be unable to play. This sense of loss is significant enough that some individuals have adjusted their retirement planning.	Extremely Low
Appreciation for Diversity	7	The group perceives itself to be diverse because of the differences in professional careers of the members. Diversity however is contained within a fairly narrow demographic on middle and upper class professionals. The group prides itself on its diversity.	Extremely low

Node Name	Interviewees Coded	Dominant Theme	Level of Narrative Slippage
Friendship	7	The members uniformly consider themselves to be friends of each other. Many have known each other for over 25 years. Some of the members may desire more off-court contact and socializing. There are a few off-court friendships.	Medium to low; there is a small amount of divergence along the line of whether there is a desire for more off court contact
First Experiences as an Early Bird	7	Members could easily remember their first experiences with the group. Observations were uniformly positive and appreciative of the openness of the group to their entrance into the group.	Extremely low; however this may be due to the fact that members who were not feel welcomed did not remain in the group and consequently were not interviewed

<b>Node Name</b>	<b>Interviewees Coded</b>	<b>Dominant Theme</b>	<b>Level of Narrative Slippage</b>
Ease of Coming and Going	7	Members uniformly observed that they appreciated the ease of coming and going into the group. They uniformly observed that this flexibility with scheduling was key to their ability to remain a long-term member.	Extremely low
Growth	6	Members who described either explicitly or implicitly changes in their behavior or attitudes as a result of membership in the group uniformly described these changes in positive terms. Changes tended to be in the areas of improved ability to operate in a group environment.	Extremely low
Career after Retirement	6	Some of the interviewees described the role that their membership in the Early Birds played in their retirement. Observations varied with some members describing their participation as filling a void in their activity levels resulting from retirement and other members not indicating a void to be filled.	Medium to low; difference along the line of the role of the group in replacing pre-retirement activities.

<b>Node Name</b>	<b>Interviewees Coded</b>	<b>Dominant Theme</b>	<b>Level of Narrative Slippage</b>
Aging -- Maturing Process	6	References to aging were positive and self-affirming and without any sense of regret or dissatisfaction with age-related capabilities. Observations also expressed an attitude among members that their high performing behaviors and capabilities did not match what they perceived as society's diminished expectations of them as older adults	Extremely low
Conflict	6	Observations made by members indicate that conflict has been extremely rare among members. These events were described as being in-the-moment and not carrying over into the next meeting. Resentments did not accumulate. Conflicts with other groups such as the tennis club had significantly more energy in them and were sustained until a resolution of the conflict issue could be achieved.	Extremely low
Women vs. Men	5	The women described the group as a "men's group" and described a difference in attitudes and behaviors between the men and the women. The men did not identify any such distinctions and differences.	High; women see the group as a "men's group"; this is an invisible to the men

<b>Node Name</b>	<b>Interviewees Coded</b>	<b>Dominant Theme</b>	<b>Level of Narrative Slippage</b>
Ethical Behavior	5	Some of the members made observations that could be directly or indirectly interpreted as reflective of ethical behaviors of the group. These behaviors were described as spontaneously arising and were commentaries on how the members chose to behave towards each other and towards others.	Extremely low
Sense of Equality	5	Members who commented about equality between members uniformly observed that everyone was treated and accepted equally into the group. Women who spoke about equality observed that they were treated as equals by the men during and after the tennis.	Extremely low
Early Bird World Championships	4	Members who commented about the Early Bird World Championships uniformly described how much they enjoyed this annual event and how much participating and winning meant to them. The event was uniformly described as playing a significant role in establishing the group identity.	Extremely low

Node Name	Interviewees Coded	Dominant Theme	Level of Narrative Slippage
Health	4	Several of the members commented about the positive health aspects of regular participation in the Early Birds tennis games. They also observed that if they were not participating that they might not otherwise exercise as much.	Extremely low

Node Name	Interviewees Coded	Dominant Theme	Level of Narrative Slippage
Isolated from Rest of Life	4	Some of the interviewees commented that their experiences with the Early Birds did not carry over into the rest of their lives. They did not otherwise socialize with other members apart from playing tennis together. Some of these interviewees indicated a sense of regret with the limited social contact outside of the Early Birds.	Divergence of view depending on whether the interviewee took a short-term or long-term view. Those taking a short term, day-to-day, view saw little socializing outside tennis. But those taking long-term basis saw extensive shared experiences of major life milestones.

<b>Node Name</b>	<b>Interviewees Coded</b>	<b>Dominant Theme</b>	<b>Level of Narrative Slippage</b>
Use of Humor to Deflect	3	Some of the interviewees made observations that provided examples of how the Early Birds use humor to deflect or defuse excessive aggression or competitiveness. These observations also provided examples of how the group uses humor during the after-tennis conversations to avoid arguments arising from polarized points for view.	Extremely low
Openness	3	Interviewees who commented about the openness of the group uniformly observed that they felt that the group was very open and tolerant of each other. They observed both about the behavior of the group in general and also about their own experiences of receiving that openness.	Extremely low
New Member Selection Process	3	Interviewees making observations about the new member selection process uniformly observed that the group was extremely easy to become a member of and that there was no selection process for entry into the group.	Extremely low
Leaving the Group	2	The interviewees who commented about members leaving the group uniformly noted that individuals only left due to moving away from the area or due to sickness.	Extremely low



<b>Node Name</b>	<b>Interviewees Coded</b>	<b>Dominant Theme</b>	<b>Level of Narrative Slippage</b>
Group Stability	2	The individuals who made reference to the stability of the group all expressed a belief that the group would go on indefinitely independent of the individual current members.	Extremely low
Rejection	2	The individuals who made observations about individuals who were unwelcome in the group and who subsequently did not remain in the group uniformly described the situation as one in which the members did not explicitly ask the individual to leave but did behave towards the individual in ways that communicated that the individual was not welcome. There were no observations made about individuals being explicitly asked to leave the group.	Extremely low
Primary and Secondary Group	1	The one observation categorized on this node described an us-them relationship between the Early Birds and the tennis club. Absence of comments about other groups however indicates that in general an us-them dynamic is not a factor in the group's cohesiveness	Not applicable

The dominant themes coded at these nodes as well as any issues of narrative slippage are presented here in order of narrative linkage from high to low. Findings for these nodes will be returned to again in later sections of this chapter when I present the implications of these findings both in support or rejection of existing theories as well as in support of my own theoretical positions. I have arbitrarily limited the discussion in this section to themes that were presented by at least two of the interviewees.

*After-tennis conversations.*

Every morning after tennis the members who do not have other commitments gather for a cup of coffee in the player lounge. On Saturdays, the club provides donuts or bagels. Of the interviewees, 73.33% mentioned the after-tennis conversations. Invariably, these observations were expressed with extreme fondness. Richard's observations are typical of those of the rest of the group:

Um ... I think. I think I've enjoyed the after tennis as much as anything. Sitting around, having coffee, and I think as people got to know each other more they kind of loosened up and there's a lot of joking and a lot of joke telling and people like Cleve always seem to arrive with a couple of new jokes.

The after-tennis conversations focus on a variety of ad hoc topics that range from political issues and the wide variety of cultural events available in the Washington DC area to computer-related discussions. After-tennis conversations allow for alternate relational balances to form, such as those between conservatives and liberals which are an inevitable differentiator in a Washington DC social group, and which can be counterpoint to the competitive pairings on the tennis court.

Several of the members are in their 70s and an hour of tennis is enough, and in some cases more than enough, exercise for them in the morning. Arleen made the following comment during her interview which reflects on how the changing average age of the Early Birds is also changing the balance between the tennis and the after-tennis social behaviors in the group.

You know ... I think for me the social interchange is probably the most important part.

As my tennis ability goes downhill, my desire to come out here and talk gets greater ...

[laughter from both]

It is important however, least the more leisurely social aspects of the group's activities be given too much importance, to remember that 60% of the members commented on the competitiveness of the group and their enjoyment of the competition. It is the balance between the competitiveness of the tennis and the after-tennis conversations that is vital to the longevity of the group. Marty noted in his interview the contradictory but also complementary nature of the relationship between the competition of tennis and the socializing afterwards:

And that's sort of a reflection of the contradiction if you will of the group. Because we're not competitive ... you know, personally we're not competitive. On the court, you know we're competitive. We want to win. But if you don't win, so what. You finish after a great set and you go up and have bagels or donuts and hey, you forget that you ever played. So its ... it's a contradiction but it works.

Marty's observation reflects on what is one of the factors contributing to the longevity of the group. After-tennis conversations allow for multidimensional relationships to form that due to their multiple points of connection are more resilient to the kinds of relational ruptures that might jeopardize the longevity of the group.

***Good will and laughter.***

At any time that one of the interviewees commented about how much they enjoyed being an Early Bird or the fun they experienced with the group I coded these entries on the node Good Will and Laughter. Of the interviewees, 66.67% made reference to enjoyable experiences as part of the group. Indeed, it is this characteristic of the Early Bird's that was the primary motivating factor for this study. It was my strongest impression when I first began playing tennis with the Early Birds and remains so now, over three years later. Of all the wonderful comments that the interviewees made about the group, Fred's observations best sum up the responses:

And of all the groups of which I have been a part, professional or personal that I can ever remember, this one stands out as having a default position of pleasure ... the ... the most common visage, facial expression in this group through tennis is a smile. And if you think about it, if you look around the court, people are always smiling about something. And that's a good feeling.

This sense of camaraderie and playfulness is not just a characteristic of the current group members. It is distinctive that when the interviewees spoke about their early remembrances of the group these remembrances predominantly had a humorous tinge to them. Take for example the remembrances of Bill who has been an Early Bird member for over 36 years as recounts a remembrance of Al:

I remember one morning, Al came in at 10 minutes after 6. The teams had already been set. Play was in full progress on two courts, perhaps three, I don't remember. And he stepped out from the door and looked at everyone and threw his racket down on the floor and said, 'let's spin'. And it was just the attitude, the way he threw back his shoulders and the towel was like a roman toga. [laughter] He was a funny man. [more laughter] He has long since left us. And as far as I know he's still alive down in Florida with his girl friend who was equally funny but she would never play tennis.

The Early Birds have a historical remembrance of themselves as a humorous and fun group to be a part of and maintain that characteristic in their current behaviors. It is indeed interesting that the two themes, Competition and Good Will and Laughter should be among the most often referenced themes in the individual interviews. The balance between these two behavioral characteristics of the group is one of the major and more interesting factors contributing to the group's longevity.

### ***Competition.***

Instances where the interviewees commented about the experience of competing against each other during the morning tennis games were all coded on a node labeled Competition.

Competition was commented on by 60% of the interviewees. This in itself is not surprising. After all the Early Birds, many of whom are retired or partially retired, are a tennis playing group who are willing to get up around 5 a.m. on 4 mornings a week for an hour of tennis. Those interviewees commenting about competition had an extremely high level of similarity in their responses and consequently an extremely low level of narrative slippage.

The Early Birds thoroughly enjoy the competitive nature of the morning tennis experience. They enjoy demonstrating their skills and they enjoy winning. They also enjoy almost as well the good play of the other team across the net and are free with their complements. What is distinctly absent from competition among the Early Birds however are the darker aspects that sometimes accompany competition. There is no hostility, for example, mentioned in the interviews, or any sense of self-denigration as a result of playing poorly. Nor is there any recrimination against partners who play poorly or any self-aggrandizing associated with playing well. Liz, felt so strongly that the way we compete is special, that after her interview she sent me an email the next day with the following comment that she felt compelled to add to her interview:

While pulling overgrown ivy from my azalea bushes, I thought of something I should have discussed during our interview. Allow me to expand – once the matches have been played and our EB group has risen to The Rectangular Table for discussion, there is never a mention as to who beat whom, who had a bad day, etc. It is (to use a metaphor) "What happens on the courts, stays on the courts!" The camaraderie then begins to flow.

Perhaps it is a "sign of the times" or perhaps even a "sign of age" that competition is seen among the Early Birds from the same perspective by both the male and female interviewees. There is a great deal of similarity, for example, between this quote from my own self-interview and the one from Marty's interview that follows:

Um ... what I have absolutely loved about playing is that you know some times I have been just a god awful player. But it's okay. And then sometimes I'm really good and that's okay too. It's as a group that we compete. And I just love playing doubles with this

group. And I have learned how to keep the ball in play and you know how to make the play actually more pleasurable. But no one gets really upset about how you are playing. And then the ... when we come together afterwards and we sit around the table, now the square table, and have coffee and talk and stuff. It's just I mean...boy, it's really just so nice.

And from Marty:

And that's sort of a reflection of the contradiction if you will of the group. Because we're not competitive ... you know, personally we're not competitive. On the court, you know we're competitive. We want to win. But if you don't win, so what. You finish after a great set and you go up and have bagels or donuts and hey, you forget that you ever played. So its ... it's a contradiction but it works.

What is clear from the interviews and my observations of the group is that competition is a vital component of the Early Bird group experience. Early Birds like to win. Competition for Early Birds however is associated with feeling good about oneself without the need for, or desire to, make others feel bad. Where competition is most in the forefront of the minds of the Early Birds is with regard to the Early Bird World Championships, an annual “tournament” that will be described later in this section.

*Extensive travel in the life history.*

The Washington D.C. metro area is traditionally a highly transitive part of the U.S. The political-military complex centered on the capital draws a mixture of government and military populations that rotate with changes in government. None of the Early Birds are native Washingtonians. Even Bill who has “lived in the same house for 40 years” had a childhood of high mobility that still impacts his behavior and attitudes as indicated in the following comment from his interview:

Oh wait, there is one other thing. In that my father was in the military when I was a kid and as a result we lived in a lot of different place. This was eight grammar schools, four

high schools, that sort of thing. No place longer than two or three years. When I moved into the house in Alexandria I still get itchy feet every three years. My wife doesn't understand this but she has finally gotten to it.

Sixty percent of the Early Birds made reference in their life histories, which were told at the beginning of their interviews, to extensive travel. For many of these individuals it was due to a family military history. But for others like myself who had equally extensive travel in their histories, it was due to career decisions. The fact of extensive travel in the history of the members is interesting given the long periods of time that members have been part of the Early Birds.

Even though members have resided in the Washington DC area for an extended period of time, for many of the members travel still continues extensively. Marty who is a photographer is often away on a project; Cleve is a musician and travels for engagements from time to time; both Fred and Irene have dual residences with Fred in Maine part of the time and Irene in Hungary part of the time; I travel from time to time for my work.

The organization of the group, as will be elaborated on later in this section, allows for members to be absent for extended periods of time without disrupting group processes or breaking the bonds between members. At a recent picnic with both Early Birds and other members from the tennis club, one of the men at the party who plays with a group at 7 o'clock in the morning commented to me that his group was dying because members were moving away. This group always calls each other to arrange for play and if any member is absent has to scramble to find a replacement. The Early Birds on the other hand, simply accept whoever is there at the time and then "make do". Marty made this comment during his interview that we did on the day of a large snow storm when only three of us showed up for tennis. It reflects the differences in attitudes and behaviors that have contributed to the longevity of the Early Birds.

And ... like this morning people showed up because you know there's somebody else there. And there's nothing written about it. There is no pressure to come. And its ... it's not a matter of being obligated to the group. But you do it because that's what you do.

And also I guess you know that there are going to be other people who may be making the sacrifice to come through the snow. And um ... but also when you get here and there are only three people you don't have a lot of bitching and moaning saying 'boy ... oh, I came and why didn't anybody else come ... come'.

The extensive travel, both in the past and in the present, also contributes to the attractiveness of the group to the members. It indirectly contributes to the longevity of the group because it affords the members topics for conversation that go beyond the bounds of the interpersonal group dynamics. That is, the group members do not need to look solely to their own processes for topics of conversation. The rich and varied backgrounds and current activities of the members outside the bounds of the group activities provide a wealth of materials for conversation. This, combined with the wider perspectives of the group members gained as a result of experiences with a variety of social environs and cultures contributes to an overall attitude of openness and free social exchange that is reflected in the descriptions of many of the primary nodes.

***Support in time of sickness.***

I used this node to capture any observations made by the interviewees with regard to caring for each other. It cannot be ignored that the Early Birds are on average collectively increasing in age. Illness and sickness are increasingly a part of the landscape. Altogether, 53.33% of the interviewees described instances either where they were the recipient of support or where support was given to others.

Hart who at the time of his interview was 78 has had several life-threatening experiences that have actually occurred while playing tennis. He remembers one of these events as follows:

Aneurism. I had an aneurism up here. [Points to left part of head] And that was prior to that. And luckily it wasn't too serious though I went to the hospital about 10 in the morning after having played tennis. And ah, that was ... I was playing and I hit the ball and it went 'wonk'. I said 'That's not right.' But it went back to the opposite side and it



came back. And I hit it again. And it went 'wonk'. And I said that's not right. And it came back again and I hit it once more. 'Wonk.' And I said what the heck is going on? So I went over and sat down ... for awhile. Went home and took a shower. Went to the hospital.

In the three years that I have been an Early Bird Hart has also had a heart attack that occurred while we were playing tennis together. Again, Hart continued playing until we were done and then left and checked himself into the hospital. And, in what can only be described as typical Early Bird fashion, Hendrik commented upon his return that his game had improved because he was now more careful and accurate with his ball placement.

As with the findings coded as Good Will and Laughter, caring for each other is not just a recent behavioral characteristic of the group. Joann, who in the earlier days of the Early Birds was notorious for beating the men in singles play, recounted the following event from the earlier days of the group:

Ah, speaking about ... I was deathly ill one time in the hospital. I could not even lift my head up from the pillow. And that Saturday morning I had hepatitis and all kinds of stuff. Saturday morning, the Early Birds after they played, they all walked ... trooped into my room with their tennis racquets. Handed me a ball and said, 'We challenge you now!' [laughter]

This recount, too, is another instance illustrating the good hearted, yet caring, nature of the relationships among the Early Birds. This attitude was reflected in several of the other interviews. My own self-interview reflects a common sentiment among the Early Birds about the way we take care of each other:

But it's interesting how people take care of each other. We don't get all glomming on fussy. We just ... there is just this sense of an adult taking care of an adult. We don't infantilize each other.

For the Early Birds then, caring for each other is an integral aspect of their relationships yet not the dominant characteristic of their relationships. That is, the Early Birds do not exist as a group for the purpose of taking care of each other, yet caring for each other is a “given” group norm that contributes to the bonding of the members to each other.

***First experiences as an Early Bird and new member selection process.***

Of the interviewees, 46.67% when asked during their interviews to recall stories about the Early Birds chose to talk about their memories of their first time playing with the group. These observations were coded as First Experiences as an Early Bird. Twenty percent of the interviewees also made observations from the perspective of a current member looking outward at potential new members. I coded these observations as New Member Selection Process. In all cases these observations were very positive. They were also vividly present in memory as demonstrated by this observation from Fred who at the time of his interview had been with the group over 20 years:

And Claude [the club tennis pro] was very ... very helpful, and kind of got me started and he recommended that I come to the Early Birds. So I came one morning and watched them play. And was frankly very concerned that their playing level was far above mine. I was just beginning and not ... I couldn't serve and I couldn't do much of anything. So I brought the racquet the next time around. And two guys, Lee Prichart was one of them and Hart was the other, both went out of the way to welcome me, bring me on the court, introduce me to people. And I said to everyone 'Hey, basically I'm just starting so work with me.' And they did.

The women interviewees, with the exception of Joann and myself, described their first experiences with the group as a question of being accepted by a “male group”. Irene made the following observation about her first experiences playing with the group that is both illustrative of the hesitancy that some of the female members initially felt as well as the positive experiences that female interviewees experienced upon joining the group.

Umm, I was a little hesitant at first. I had been playing a lot of tennis with Liz and some other, other women uh ... in the evenings but ... and one of the reasons I was hesitant, it looked like mostly like a guy group, Although Joan, I don't know, I can't remember her last name, but Joan seemed to be the one woman in the group. She had sort of, kind of broken the gender line ... [laugh] ... and the first time I came on the court Marty just put his arm around me and said, you know, kinda ...welcome. [laughter] ... and so I felt very comfortable right away with the group. I didn't feel like I was kind of intruding.

It is interesting that while there were distinct differences in perceptions of their first group experiences along gender lines; uncertainty about being accepted was common across all of the interviewees. Richard recognized this universal experience when he made the following observation during his interview:

Which means any new person joining the club can get a game of tennis. You know ... which is kind of nice to be able to say that. Because if you are a stranger from outside and you want to play, you are going to have to screw up your courage and call somebody on the list as opposed to the Early birds where you can simply show up and be instantly welcomed in.

It is also significant that while the interviewees all talked about their first time walking onto the court to play with the Early Birds, their observations, did not go beyond this to describe a period while they were waiting to be accepted into the group. Indeed, quite the opposite was the case. Cleve made the following comment during his interview that is illustrative of the openness of the group to new members.

Well I see this group going on and on. And ah ...it's very interesting, there's a couple of new people have come in and you got probably to talk to some people who have just joined. And everybody is kinda ... people watch us from the side you know and they ... and the next thing you know they will start coming in and then they will come back. But

that's how you join. You figure well this person's been here about four times they must be one of us. [laughter]

Richard also made a similar observation about how new members are received into the group which is further illustrative of the openness of the group to new members:

No ... I mean it is ... it's a very interesting group which is probably why you are doing this little study because it's sort of organic... it um ... it's very welcoming. Very often a group like this tends to be sort of close knit and is a bit suspicious of outsiders. But in this particular case, almost anyone who comes along is ... is totally welcome. You know you feel like, 'oh ... come on, come on and play you know ....' It's one of the nice things about it.

If groups are to survive for decades, they must find ways to sustain and refresh their membership. Earlier, I presented the data indicating that the Early Birds have steadily acquiring new members at the rate of about 1 or 2 every 2 or 3 years and that the average time as a member at the time that the interviews were conducted was 17.2. The openness that the Early Birds have shown to new members is a significant contributing factor to the longevity of the group. This openness, I further believe, permeates the relationships between the members and further contributes to the longevity of the group. I will pursue this theme further in later sections of this chapter.

#### ***Prototypical member.***

Earlier, in the Literature Review I presented the self-categorization theories of Hogg and Knippenberg (2003) and their hypothesizes about the prototypical group member who embodied the characteristics most highly valued by the group members. I will present my findings specific to self-categorization and social identify theory in the next section of this chapter. Here, I will begin the descriptions of what the interviewees said about the person who I have identified as our group's current prototypical member.

The Early Birds are a leaderless social group. There is no president and no official membership requirements apart from belonging to the tennis club. Yet at the same time one of the current members of the group was mentioned during the interviews far more than any other member. That person was Marty. Other past members such as George S., Lee P., and Al B. were also mentioned by the interviewees. I coded instances where an interviewee described Marty in a fashion that seemed to suggest some special qualities of that individual as Prototypical Member. The data revealed that 46.67% of the interviewees brought up Marty in their interview in this manner.

The vast majority of the references to Marty referred to several of his characteristics that have already been described above as important to the group: his competitiveness balanced by playfulness, his sense of humor, his caring for others, and his passion for the group. For example, consider what Hendrik says about Marty's competitiveness compared to what was described earlier in this section about the competitiveness of the group:

But there is competitiveness between us. You know ... it's just ... its ... it's balanced.

It's balanced. It isn't like we're making money from it. Um ... and the interesting thing is that are a number of our members who lose control with it. And then there are people and Marty is one of the key ones who really is very competitive but it's .... He's more comfortable aggressively losing on the court than he is aggressively winning. Technically he's the best player out there. He's just a wonderful athlete. Yet he almost always loses unless .... Unless there is somebody who he really wants to beat and then ... then it comes out.

And again, from Richard describing Marty's sense of humor:

Um ... the tennis has always been you know a lot of fun. There is a lot of sort of talking back and forth. Nobody ever takes it seriously. There is a lot of laughter. And you know people like Marty keep us sort of laughing as well. And um... it's just a lot of fun.

And this time from Liz describing how Marty keeps contact with people and maintains a sense of caring:

But that's the way Early Birds are. I mean, and they call people back. And Marty, is, I think it is Marty who keeps in touch with people who haven't been here and always notifies them 'well, if you can't come every day we are having the Christmas tournament' and they come back for that.

Perhaps most significantly, Marty is the person who first comes to mind for many people when asked to recall stories of the group. Indeed, one of the first stories that I was told when I began playing tennis with the Early Birds was with regard to Marty and Joann. As I have mentioned earlier, the Early Birds are not nostalgic. This story however seems to be told to every new member and in many ways embodies many of the group characteristics already discussed. Over the first few months that I began playing tennis with the Early Birds it was told to me independently by several individuals.

In the early years of the group when the average age of the members was younger, the members played singles as well as doubles. At that time Joann was the only woman who played with the group and was a formidable singles player. Joann continued to play tennis into her late pregnancy for her sixth child. As the story goes, in her ninth month she was playing Marty and beat him. As Marty described the story in his interview:

And she showed up ... she was nine months two weeks pregnant. And we walked onto the court and she said 'If I go into labor will you take me to the hospital?' and I said 'Only if I'm ahead.' And she said 'no seriously', I said 'Only if you concede.' And she said 'never' and she beat me that day.

And as Joann continues the story in this excerpt from her interview:

So... I then .... Other people had probably talked about the fact that I played tennis when I was pregnant with my last child. And ... and I would beat them. And I think the reason I beat them because when they saw this .... pomp, pomp, pomp ... coming across the

court they would just burst out laughing and they lost their concentration. So I played 'til the day she was born. And so now when I go to parties with Marty and my daughter Michelle is there. She says 'I beat you before I was born!' [laughter]

The question of course that comes to mind when describing a prototypical member is with regard to whether a group such as the Early Birds would remain together or remain the same if that individual was absent. I will return to this topic when I present my own theories later in this chapter.

### *Appreciation for diversity and sense of equality*

Forty percent of the interviewees remarked during their interviews about the diversity of the group. I included on this coding node instances both of where the interviewees commented about the diversity of the group as well as instances where the interviewees described the group as special or unique. These observations were closely aligned to the observations of the interviewees regarding the equality of the members with each other. Twenty percent of the interviewees commented about the equality of relationships among members.

The interviewees uniformly expressed their appreciation for what they perceive to be a high level of diversity and uniqueness in the group. Cleve, for example, who is our only African-American member and our only professional singer, made this comment during his interview:

Well it's something that I belong to. You know ... just a bunch of people who are probably just about as different as you can get. And then yet we have one interest. You know and mine is playing tennis and getting exercise and stuff like that. And we all meet at this one spot. You know this ...

This finding is actually an interesting one given that the group is predominantly comprised of professional white males past 60 years of age. Hendrik made this comment about the diversity of the group which captures both the similarities and the differences in the group:

We have ... Hart's a lawyer, Marty is a PhD, Rivers is an MD. I guess Mort must have a PhD at this point or the equivalent in terms of his research background. Um ... I'm

Masters level, you're Masters level working on PhD. Chuck is a PhD ..... Chuck's a PhD physicist.

Being perceived and experienced as diverse and unique is extremely important to the Early Birds and offers several advantages to the group members which contribute to a sustained group process. Each member by association, for example, basks in the accomplishments of the other members. Further, the diverse enough, but not too diverse cross section of members contributes to stimulating conversations that intellectually invigorate the participants and draw them together in relationships. Most of the members have had intellectually stimulating professional careers and the satisfaction that comes from stimulating repartee on the tennis court followed by equally stimulating conversations afterwards over coffee are powerful binding forces for the group.

In addition to appreciating the diversity of the group, the interviewees also expressed their appreciation for the sense of equality among the members. Equality among the members is experienced as an absence of credentials for the sake of credentials. That is, none of the members expend energy reminding the other members of “who they are”. Nor is there a sense of any one member attempting to dominate the other members. Marty’s observation is typical of the feelings among members:

But you don’t see anybody trying to really exceed and say ‘ah ... you know ... and this is the way I’m going to score points’ because nobody scores points with this group outside of playing tennis. But ... ah ... and nobody is trying to one-up. And I think that’s very significant. I think you have a level of ... and it’s an unspoken relationship. Nobody says ‘oh he’s this, he’s that ....’

Equality also translates into equality across genders. I will go in depth into gender differences later in this chapter when I compare findings from this study to previous research on gender-specific differences in group behaviors. At this point it is sufficient to point out that there are no concessions made for the women members or, for that matter for the men, when it comes



time to play tennis in the morning. Numbers are randomly drawn for tennis partners and it is not uncommon to find three men and one woman on the court together or three women and one man. In neither case is anyone made to feel uncomfortable.

The combination of an appreciation for diversity coupled with a deep sense of equality among members is a strong factor contributing to both the longevity of the group as well as to the satisfaction that the members feel with this group experience. I will explore further in later sections of this chapter.

### *Conflict.*

I coded on this node any instances where an interviewee made an observation about conflict or arguing among the members or conflict between the members and some other entity such as the tennis club. Forty percent of the interviewees brought up this topic in their interviews.

The Early Birds do acknowledge that there have been some differences of opinion between members. The after-tennis conversations can get quite lively as Richard observed during his interview:

And then sometimes we'll shift to you know world affairs and you know politics and there are some pretty red-faced arguments go on with that which is kind of fun [laughter] cause people get quite a worked up. And we do have ... we do have some opposite ends of the political spectrum. Although the old military conservative end um ... see he's left and gone to... gone to Florida now and so we miss him. Gosh I forget his name now.

Intellectual disagreements however do not lead to personal disagreements. The Early Birds have been remarkably adept at using humor and other deflective techniques to avoid conflict. I agree with Mort's observation that this ability to repair relationships is one of the most striking characteristics of the group.

I can't imagine anybody having a more diverse set of points of view than this group. And yet, thinking back on it, I just don't remember anybody getting angry, you know angry

and staying angry because somebody contradicted them or had a different point of view or something of that sort. And that's a very unusual quality, you know, I think...

Marty also made the following observation which describes what I have observed among the members both on the tennis court and afterwards:

Nobody deals with the personalities. Ah...you know ... They are there but you shrug your shoulders and it's just part of the whole thing.

The self-repairing quality of interpersonal relationships is one of the more important factors contributing to the longevity of the group. The group does not lose members because of irreconcilable disagreements between members. Nor do such disagreements cause splits of the group into factions. Further, because the members do not fear the threat of conflict, there is openness of opinions that leads to lively after-tennis conversations further contributing to the interest of the group to its members. I will return to this topic later in this chapter when I present my own theoretical positions.

### ***Ethical behavior.***

How a group treats its members can provide important insights into group dynamics. Forty percent of the interviewees made some sort of observation during their interview that reflected an awareness of a moral or ethical obligation to the group and to a certain form of preferred group behavior. An examination of these observations is particularly interesting in a group that has no formal obligations to each other. Ethical behavior in such cases arises organically out of the implicit agreements between members. Joann noted in her interview what is implicitly understood among members:

It's a... it's a ...you gotta have a certain kind of camaraderie when you get up that early in the morning. Especially when you are retired and don't even have to, you know some of them ... there's a certain amount of dedication there, you know.

There is no group unless people show up to play tennis. It doesn't matter who shows up but it is important on any given day that someone shows up. In the three years that I have been a

member, for example, there has always been at least two other people besides myself at the net at 6 o'clock. On Saturdays it is common to have 10 or more members present. So while there is no rules-based commitment to the group, there is what I would call an ethics-based commitment to the group.

Marty sums up this shared responsibility to each other in this observation from his interview:

And I think that's also a reflection. It's not a matter of you know you HAVE to be there because the group is depending upon you. You're there because you want to be and ... and but that's what you're doing.

The group also has implicit norms regarding behavior within the group. I have noticed for example that when after-tennis conversations become particularly heated, there is always an awareness of when to back off and simply let things be. Again, this is an instance of the members allowing space for each other.

Cleve made a particularly interesting observation about an individual who has come to play with the Early Birds from time to time but who has been so difficult that he has been subtly pushed out of the group.

I know there was ... we had a guy who used to come to the Early Birds. Really, really loud guy. We don't even know his name. But anyway. He came. He ... from ... he moved out of town so very periodically he will come back into town and come in the morning and everybody's irritated 'cause he's just talking and running his mouth. And although we are in there, there is some understanding. That you don't bring all of this noise. [laughter] We just... this guys going and ... everybody's like 'oh my god, what is he ....

Cleve's observation is significant for a variety of reasons. First, it identifies an informal group norm regarding how much psychological space each Early Bird is expected to take up. There is an implicit understanding that enough space is made for everyone. Also, it identifies the

means by which the occasional unwelcome member is excluded from the group. I am not aware of anyone ever being asked to leave the group. Still, there is a subtle shunning that I have seen with this one individual that effectively eliminates the individual from the group.

This implicit respect that the members have for each other is an important factor in the longevity of the group. Individuals are much more likely to participate in a group where there is space for their own self-expression and where they are not bombarded by the psychological demands for attention of others. The implicit self-regulation that is required to maintain a balance between having one's own needs meet and respecting the needs of others is a theme that I will return to later in this chapter.

*Evidence of Early Birds embedded in self.*

During the interviews and as I was coding them I became aware that many of the interviewees in one way or another indicated that they would feel a sense of loss if the Early Birds ceased to function as a group or if they ceased to be a member. I coded these instances as evidence of EB Embedded in Self. Altogether 40% of the interviewees in some fashion indicated in their interviews that they would experience a sense of personal loss without the Early Birds as part of their lives. Cleve acknowledged this feeling that I found common to so many interviewees in his interview as follows:

But a good group. I ... I treasure you know being accepted as part of that group. And I think it is a significant part of all of our lives really.

For some of the interviewees such as Fred this sense is so strong that it has impacted major life decisions such as where he and his wife will retire. For some of the other members who are retired, single, widowed, or divorced, the group also represents a significant part of their social network. Chuck who is a retired physicist, made this comment which is at once indicative of his own sense of embeddedness in the group as well as an acknowledgement of the embeddedness of others:

So it has really been an important aspect of my retirement I guess is what I would really.

I probably need much more than I did before I retired. I mean Fred, he'll probably tell you this but he says, 'We would move to Maine but this is just such an important part of my life that I hate to give it up.' And a lot of people say that they don't want ... the only reason they stay around here anymore is the tennis. Well sooner or later those people usually move because other things become more overwhelming.

It is interesting that a group which meets for a few hours early in the morning three or four times a week and who otherwise have very little contact with each other should have such strong bonds. This has something interesting to say about the beneficial influences of positive group experiences in general. It is perhaps not so much the volume of contact with others but the quality of that contact that is so important to us as meaning-making entities. Still, I am reminded of Bill's final comments as he concluded his interview:

Oh, I think that the idea of your studying this particular group is absolutely fantastic. If it benefits you that's good. But the mere thought that the group of these people who have nothing in common except their affinity to play tennis and trade insults with each other year after year is worthwhile looking at for any sort of purpose is interesting.

***Friendship and isolated from rest of life.***

A collective examination of these two nodes is required due to their complimentary nature. Of the interviewees 26.67% made observations about friendship; 40% of the interviewees also made observations about their experiences with the Early Birds as being isolated from the rest of their life.

It is an interesting characteristic of the Early Birds that there are relatively few day-to-day social interactions among members apart from the morning tennis games. Hendrik, in his interview made the following observation which describes the typical relationship between friendship in the group and socializing outside of morning tennis:

And there are friendships formed here that are probably very unique and very different.

Do we get together socially a lot? No. See, we did at one time, I think try to do that. And I don't think it was terribly successful. Because in a social environment with spouses present it is very different from the relationship that we all have sitting around the table where we're just good friends.

There are a few exceptions to the relative isolation of the tennis friendships from the rest of the member's social lives that are worth noting: Many of the members attend Cleve's music concerts twice a year. Joann and her husband have for the last five years had an annual picnic for the members and the rest of their tennis friends from the club. Significant birthday parties such as Marty's 70<sup>th</sup> and recently Bill's 75<sup>th</sup> also have brought invitations to the group.

Even though there is relatively little day-to-day social interaction among member, if one takes a generational view of the social interactions among the group members another picture begins to form. While the Early Birds may not spend much time together on a day-to-day basis, they do come together socially for the major milestones of their lives such as birthdays, marriages, and now funerals. There are social bonds built over time around the sharing of these major life events. Joann took this broader perspective during her interview and made the following observation:

The overall thing is that we have been through everything together. I mean we have gone to each people's ... each other's weddings, each other's baptisms, and now we have started to go to funerals. You know .... So it's a very bonded group in that way.

Additionally, there are a few friendships that have evolved beyond the domain of the morning tennis. Most notably, Cleve and Marty have established a particularly close bond. Marty and Cleve have a particularly close bond in part due to an incident that Cleve, who is also a cardiologist, describes as follows:

... my good friend Marty called me up one morning and said he was eating breakfast and he got nauseated and he was eating oatmeal and his stomach was upset and I sort of

diagnosed over the telephone that he was having a heart attack ...[laughter] so I got him over to the hospital and stuff like that ... so ah...

Cleve goes on to say this about his relationship with Marty:

And I think Marty... was the first person that I ran into. And he and I met over there. He was a photographer and he knew I did some music. And we struck up a relationship. And you know he is my best friend and we have done several music and photo projects over the years. And from that I guess I got a chance to know all of the rest of the people there.

Rivers a retired physician with an avid interest in civil war history and Chuck, a retired physicist, who has developed an interest in photography, have also begun to pair together for outings to civil war sites and for other activities.

Although the Early Birds don't spend much time together apart from morning tennis, they do refer to each other as friends. Indeed, for many of the retired members or members who have lost a spouse or are single, participating in the Early Birds has been an important opportunity for friendships that they might not otherwise have opportunities to experience. Liz's observations are typical of these members:

And then gee, I guess I started playing with Early Birds six or seven years ago and have enjoyed every minute of it. Um ... I have three children, John, Amy and Brian. And ... Jack died in 19 ... 2000. And it's been a great source of making friends with new people and I have really enjoyed it, meeting everyone and playing.

For some of the members who have traveled a great deal during their lives, tennis has been a lifelong means of quickly gaining friends in new social environs. Chuck commented about this in his interview.

Um ... I have always used tennis as a way to make friends when I have moved around.

And I typically go out and take lessons somewhere and then I get introduced to people in the club and I start to meet people.

The opportunity that the Early Bird's afford for friendship without a great deal of social obligation is an important factor in holding the group together. There is an easiness about these relationships that does not require a great deal of emotional or social commitment. Yet at the same time this easiness is based on a mature set of expectations of each other. Marty captures this implicit understanding about the nature of the commitments to each other in this observation from his interview:

And ... nobody has ever brought baggage to the table. Which is probably as significant as anything. You know if somebody has a health problem people will be concerned. But nobody brings personal family problems... nobody says woe is me and ....

I will return to this theme later when I present my own theories at the end of this chapter.

***Early Bird World Championships.***

Once a year on a Saturday early in December, the Early Birds have the annual Early Bird World Championships. This "tournament" results in the awarding of the Lee P. memorial trophy and a polo shirt embroidered with the year of the championship. Over the past two years the tennis club has begun to add a cash award. Altogether, 33.33% of the interviewees, men and women alike, commented about the tournament during their interviews. Fred, for example, described in his interview the evolution of the tournament and how the passing of one of the early members has changed the dynamic of the group:

Oh, a little bit on the tournament. I mentioned that. We did start that ... I think it's been 12 ...12, 15, years ago, I remember. But ...when I was still with Weyerhaeuser I had access to all these Weyerhaeuser goodies, the balls and things like that. And we would use those as prizes. So it was initially the Weyerhaeuser tournament which we didn't keep for long.

...

But that ... I think that was one of the strongest bonding events we have. People really began to look forward to that. We had goodies for Christmas ... there were holiday



season and made a big fuss about the winners and the trophy. But the trophy and that event after Lee died, further solidified the group in a way that I think was an unexpected when we started. We started for fun but it became a real thing to people and people planned their travel around it. And ... it's been a lot of fun ....

Fred is quite right in his estimations of the importance of the tournament as a binding factor. Many of the Early Birds indicated in their interviews how they looked forward to the tournament each year. As such, the tournament serves as a focal point in time for the group and functions in many ways as a reunion. The 2006 championships, for example, saw the return of one member who had been absent for most of the previous year. Additionally, the tennis club itself has become increasingly involved with the festivities providing brunch and cash prizes for winners furthering the celebratory nature of the event.

It is interesting to see how this single event has galvanized into a binding ritual among the Early Birds. Chuck's observations about the tournament illustrate just how important the event has become for some members and how much they value winning the event:

And then I was having, I was kind of, I don't know, things weren't going well and I was feeling kind of low. And then one year I won the tournament. Because I had the right, I had the right partners and I didn't screw it up. And so having that Early Bird trophy on my mantle for a year was an enormous [laughter]. So it's amazing how much it can mean when you win of course. [laughter]

For a group with only this single rules-based event in its culture, the Early Bird World Championships are an especially powerful binding ritual both because of their power to bind current members to the group as well as their power to draw in new members who are attracted to the camaraderie of the existing group. As such it affirms and celebrates the group contributing to its longevity.

***Growth and health.***

Of the interviewees, 33.33%, including myself, observed that their participation in the Early Birds has resulted in some sort of personal development, especially in the area of improving their capacity to relate to others. I coded these observations as Growth. I also coded on this node instances in the interviews where the interviewees were reflective about behaviors of themselves or the group that suggested that mature social processes were evolving within the group. On a closely related node, Health, I also coded any observations about physical health and well-being. Altogether, 26.67% of the interviewees observed about the health advantages of playing tennis with the Early Birds. Both nodes are described together here due to the close relationship between these two nodes in the interviews.

The Early Birds are generally a health-conscious but not health-obsessed group. It is not uncommon to see some of the Early Birds arriving at the gym a half hour or so before tennis to work out on the exercise equipment prior to playing. Several of the interviewees observed that coming to the gym to play tennis was both an opportunity for social interaction but also for exercise. Marty's observation about the exercise benefits associated with belonging to the group is probably true for a vast majority of us:

One of the things and I've never really thought about it. But ... and I don't know how your survey shows it... how much would people exercise if this club didn't exist. And um ... you know because I had a treadmill in my bedroom ... it was a great clothes rack.

Quite recently several of the members, at the directions of their doctors, have concentrated even harder on improving their physical strength and endurance. Hendrik made the following observation during his interview that may bear watching over the coming years in the group:

Though I think this process ... these things that we are going through now where people are caring about improving its going to change the dynamics quite a bit. It's changing it already. You can see it already. So ... and I don't know that it's ... I don't know that it's for the bad. I mean what it means is you've got people who are still growing and are still

trying to improve. And that's not ... that not bad at all. So ... some of them have been told by their doctors that they need to. [laughter] So they may not be doing it ...the choice to do so may not have been initially theirs but .... [laughter]

I do not entirely agree with Hendrik's observations about future changes in the group dynamic. It is impossible however to totally ignore the fact that as members increase in age they will need to work even harder to keep in sufficiently good health to play tennis with the group. Those who do not may have to find alternate means of staying engaged with the group. Indeed, I have noticed that Hart, one of our older members and someone who has experienced several life-threatening health episodes, will sometimes only play one set of tennis and then move to the lounge to wait for the rest of the group to finish.

The social interactions of the Early Birds, both on and off the court, provide opportunities to learn and test new social behaviors. For some members like Rivers, participation in the Early Birds is also an opportunity for intellectual exchange. Something so pragmatic as getting advice on computer operations can be an experience of personal growth and a basis for appreciation of others:

Like Mort told me a couple of weeks ago about defragging my hard drive. I didn't know that you had to do that. So I did that. Found the program as he described it. Took me awhile to get into it. And my computer worked on defragging itself for 45 minutes. There must have been just a huge amount of trash in there you know that had to be taken off. Because it hadn't been done in five years. It's an old laptop. [laughter] So it's a part of the learning process. It's the interactions in the morning.

Irene made this observation during her interview that is reflective of my own feelings about how participation in the group has contributed to my personal growth:

Well, I did talk about how the play has affected how I play, in terms of attitude you know, that it is just a game, and that when you're playing with a partner its more useful to say,

you know, good shot, you know be very supportive especially when you're partners playing well and not to get down on them when they don't.

This is not a new phenomenon among the members. Hendrik made an interesting observation during his interview that is reflective of how competition has historically played out among the members and how they have adapted their behaviors to keep conflict in balance.

There are...there are a number of people here who are enormously competitive to ... to the point of self-destruction on the tennis court. We ... we you know now have the joke about blood in your eye. It's a joke because it's real. [laughter] And it's also very interesting that um ... and it is a very competitive group. And it's very interesting that many of the people who do the best are the people with patience and the people who are not in a hurry to win. Whereas the people who are in a hurry to win almost always do themselves in. There are people there who you can hit the ball back and forth with and you know that after three times of receiving the ball they are going to do something bizarre that is going to cost them the point. Works like clockwork.

This observation is interesting for a variety of reasons. First, it does reveal the extent of the naturally competitive nature of many of the members. However, secondly, it also reveals how the members have come to use humor and self-awareness as means to temper their own competitive tendencies. Learning how to temper one's own competitive tendencies with humor and other defensive mechanisms is an essential factor in the longevity of the group. While I doubt that any of the Early Birds would cite self-improvement as their primary purpose for maintaining a membership, nevertheless, the opportunity to feel good about yourself and to feel that you are somehow enhanced as a result of your group participation may be an unconscious motivation for sustained membership.

***Aging and the maturing process and career after retirement.***

Many of the interviewees expressed uncertainty when they were filling out the pre-interview questionnaire when they came to the questions about their retirement status. Were they

retired or weren't they? Ten of the 15 interviewees at the time of their interview identified themselves as either not retired or semi-retired even though the average age of the Early Birds is 67.5. Twenty percent of the interviewees spoke during their interviews about their postretirement careers as they intersect with their participation as an Early Bird. Additionally, in a closely related node, 26.67% of the interviewees made observations about the ages of the members during their interview.

Many of the Early Birds have found satisfying careers after retirement that keeps them quite busy and productive. This is true for both the men and the women. The postretirement careers of many of the Early Birds are particularly significant due to the high levels of professionalism and accomplishment that have been achieved. Mort, for example, who among other things had a successful career as an architect, works at the Smithsonian Institute and has become an accomplished ornithologist. Arleen, who had a successful career as a senior contributor to international development efforts for women, describes her satisfaction with retirement as follows:

And I do a lot of volunteer work in the jails, I run a living sober group, and I do lots and lots of, I sponsor lots and lots of women, just out of jail ... And I love retirement because I am now working as a volunteer social worker at UCM and also at Sunrise.

Hart, who had a successful career at the FBI, continues to work as a handwriting expert even into his late seventies. Fred, who was an executive at a paper company, has now started his own consulting firm.

Several of the members have used their retirements to turn to artistic pursuits. Marty who was a senior white house staff member now has an accomplished career as a photographer. Richard who was a chemical company executive is now pursuing a career as an artist and indeed is achieving success accompanied by enormous personal satisfaction as described in this observation that he made during his interview:

And so since then I've been doing tennis on you know Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and sometime Saturday but mostly not. And um ... going to art school and painting, and getting myself into galleries and umm ... generally having a really nice time ...

[laughter] ... And that's about where we are today. My art career is blossoming. I'm doing more and more. I've got a solo show coming up this year. And um... um, I've had a number of successes in terms of getting ... getting paintings juried into competitions and so forth and so that's quite satisfying....

There are other Early Birds such as myself, who are not yet retired but are preparing ourselves for postretirement careers and have hope for successes comparable to other Early Birds. Cleve, for example, who is a successful cardiologist, is reviving his Nashville singing career and has recently released an album. For my own part, completing a doctorate in my 60s is also a matter of achieving professional success later in life. Retirement for the Early Birds is not the cliché retirement to a senior citizen community. For many of the members it has become an opportunity to pursue second or third careers that are less what they “should” be doing and more what they “want” to be doing.

Aging in general is approached by the Early Birds with relative indifference. Overwhelmingly, the Early Birds, at least in the conversations and in what they have revealed in their interviews, have an attitude towards aging and that is rather matter of fact. There are no jokes about age for instance as we are playing tennis. Nor are there any mentions of aches and pains in the after-tennis conversations. There are responses and words of encouragement when someone is hospitalized but there is no complaining about age-specific infirmities. This observation from Marty's interview reflects the general impression of how the Early Birds respond to the aging process:

Ummmm ... I guess the most striking thing about the group. If you come in from the outside and you've never seen this group before you would never have any idea of their

ages. And that's always been. And ... all of us as we've gotten older you still don't have the perception of age because I didn't know what their ages were before.

One of the dominant characteristics of the Early Birds is the overwhelming amount of time that is spent in the present moment. The table conversations do not delve into the past. Nor are the after-tennis conversations about the activities of children and grand children. The Early Birds are not living their lives through their children nor are they living off their past accomplishments. This observation from my own interview reflects this view:

If I have ever seen a group that is in the present and not looking towards the future but just totally in the present its the Early Birds.

This characteristic of the Early Birds is actually quite significant to the continued longevity of the group. The group remains interesting to be with not because of past accomplishments but because of current ones. This makes the group attractive to outsiders like myself. Had the group spent its time reminiscing or complaining about their aches and pains I would not have been drawn to the group when I first joined three years ago. The group refreshes itself with new members because the current members are so interesting to be with. I will explore these themes further when I present my own theories later in this chapter.

***Ease of coming and going.***

Of the interviewees, 26.67% made observations about the ease of coming and going from the group. This is not surprising. As mentioned earlier when I presented the findings regarding the extensive travel both in the past and in the present of the majority of the members, a social group that makes provisions for extended absences should be very attractive to this group of individuals. Indeed this is the case. This observation from my own interview describes my experiences returning to the group after an extended period away:

But with work and things quite often I will be gone for like a couple of months that I don't play and I will come back again. Which is another absolutely brilliant thing about the Early Birds. You get a little bit of ribbing when you come back and you haven't been

there for awhile. And that seems to be more Mort than anyone else who is really very concerned about all of us as members. And you get a little teasing but you are completely welcomed back. And the first thing that someone does is ... you know hit a shot right at ya. I mean you just jump right back in.

Even for the group members who are retired and not traveling the option to be gone for a while is highly appealing. Chuck made this observation during his interview reflecting his appreciation for the flexibility of the group schedules:

One thing is that you could always come back. You just whenever you go, you could go away. If you went away for two days you could come back. You go away for two months you come back. And you just show up. And you're welcomed back. And ... nothing has to be arranged.

Yet even though the members universally express an appreciation for the ease of coming and going, there is also an implicit sense of commitment to the group to hold it together. Cleve made this observation during his interview that is reflective of the subtle pressure that is sometimes placed on members to “show up”:

And ... I don't ... because of my work schedule ... I don't go as much as I used to but people are always checking on you know 'where are you?' You get a word from somebody ... they asked about you this morning. It's very important. Why aren't you there this morning? Or, they ... 'there were 11 and you would have been the 12th.' And people asked about you and so when you show up they give you a little ribbing you know 'where have you been?'

This obligation to show up and support the group however is not based on a rules-based sense of obligation, but rather on a far subtler sense of community that Marty described in his interview:



And I think that's also a reflection. It's not a matter of you know you HAVE to be there because the group is depending upon you. You're there because you want to be and ... and but that's what you're doing.

The ability of the Early Birds to stay together for such a long time without rules-based participation is one of the more interesting characteristics of the group. It seems contradictory, but not having to show up on any single day seems to be one of the contributing factors to showing up year after year. I will return to an examination of this topic later in this chapter when I present my own theoretical positions.

***Women vs. men.***

Of the interviewees, 26.67% made observations pertaining to gender differences in the group. All of these interviewees were women. None of the men made any references to the group that could be construed as recognizing gender differences in the group.

These observations are some of the more interesting ones about the group dynamics. As I described earlier, four of the last seven new members to the group have been women. One third of the interviewees were women. Of the interviewees, Joann has by far had the longest history with the group. Another woman who declined to be interviewed for this study was also a long-time member but has now left the group.

The women interviewees overwhelmingly described the group as a men's group. As mentioned earlier, Joann has always had a reputation as a formidable tennis player. Even so, Joann in her language during her interview used language that implies a gender split in the group:

Well nothing sacred... nobody ... you know you're ... you're just ... you can't have a thin skin around here. The guys will make fun of anything. You know ... and that's all. It's a very supportive group. But no bones about it they will let you know, you know ... [laughter].

Arleen was by far the most vocal in her observations about the gender differences in the group. Arleen, after a lengthy explanation of the differences between women's and men's groups, made the following summarizing observation:

So, it could be ... that because there are no ... there aren't really a lot ... women are secondary to this group. That there isn't ... you're gonna ... that's one of your observations?

But while the women describe the group as a men's group they also describe the group as being completely open and accepting of them as members. Indeed, some of the interviewees expressed pleasant surprise at how welcoming the male group was to them. Irene made the following comments in her interview that point both to her concern with the gender of the group and her process of being accepted into the group:

Umm, I was a little hesitant at first. I had been playing a lot of tennis with Liz and some other, other women uh ... in the evenings but ... and one of the reasons I was hesitant, it looked like mostly like a guy group.

And the first time I came on the court Marty just put his arm around me and said, you know, kinda ...welcome. [Laughter] ... and so I felt very comfortable right away with the group. I didn't feel like I was kind of intruding.

I will return to a discussion of gender differences later in this chapter when I compare my findings to existing theories of group dynamics. The differences in perceptions of the group along gender lines are a cultural artifact that may not have a great deal to do directly with the longevity of the group. The openness and complete acceptance into the group of women may however be a "marker" of the kinds of groups that are more likely to be long lived. I will return to this line of reasoning when I present my own theories later in this chapter.

### ***Openness.***

In addition to the fun and playfulness of the Early Birds, one of its other defining characteristics is its openness to new members. Openness to new members is critical to the

longevity of a group and the Early Birds have been very successful in attracting individuals to the group that, once having joined, choose to remain for decades. Twenty percent of the interviewees made observations that I have categorized as instances of describing openness towards others and particularly to new members. These observations included both descriptions of being the greeter of new members and as well as being the recipient of those greetings.

Many of the interviewees expressed their pride with regard to their personal openness and warmth towards new members. Hart, for example, expresses here his feelings of personal satisfaction with his role of welcoming new members to the group:

I think I was here to greet them when they arrived here. And I was very positive about getting more players, I wanted more people. So ... and the other guys wanted more people. They wanted to play every morning. And sometimes, you know, Australian doubles game was our ... we would have those. So anyway... and that's pretty much it. I mean since then I have pursued this.

This was a sentiment also expressed by Richard who, while he didn't identify himself as one of the primary greeters of new members, expresses here his appreciation of the openness of group:

No... I mean it is ... it's a very interesting group which is probably why you are doing this little study because it's sort of organic... it um ... it's very welcoming. Very often a group like this tends to be sort of close knit and is a bit suspicious of outsiders. But in this particular case, almost anyone who comes along is ... is totally welcome. You know you feel like, 'oh ... come on, come on and play you know ...' It's one of the nice things about it.

I draw here from my own self-interview this observation that describes my own first experiences with the group and the experience I had of the openness of the group to new members:

And I called her and talked to her and she said. 'Oh yeah, you just show up at 6 o'clock in the morning and you start playing with us. And that's all you have to do.' And I said, 'oh what the heck'. And I showed up one morning and sure enough I walked in, didn't know anybody. I can't remember who was around. I remember Joan was there. Probably Marty was there, Mort was there. But all I remember is ... um ... just being welcomed completely. It was just really ... I can't imagine anything easier to happen.

The Early Birds take great pride in their openness to new members as well as to their openness to the views and values of their fellow group members. This openness has been a major contributing factor to the sustained membership of the group. Openness is reflected not only in the inclusionary nature of the new member process but is also reflected in the ease of coming and going within the group once an individual is a member. The group lets the individual be whatever type of member they choose to be. Whether that means showing up every morning or only showing up once a month, is not constrained by expectations of the other members.

***Group stability.***

One of the questions that arises for any group is whether it will survive beyond the participation of its current members. The Early Birds, as already described, have a history that extends beyond the participation of its earliest members. Twenty percent of the interviewees made references to the longevity of the group beyond the participation of its current members. Overwhelmingly, these observations expressed the opinion that the group would survive its current members. Fred for example, made this comment during his interview:

But still there is a continuity. There seems to be a core of players that ... on whom you can always rely. They are going to be there. There will be enough of us to keep the thing going.

Cleve made a similar comment during his interview:

Well I see this group going on and on. And ah ... it's very interesting, there's a couple of new people have come in and you got probably to talk to some people who have just

joined. And everybody is kinda ... people watch us from the side you know and they ... and the next thing you know they will start coming in and then they will come back. But that's how you join. You figure well this person's been here about four times they must be one of us. [laughter]

Over the past three years that I have been a member of the group there was an instance when a financial disagreement with the tennis club management placed the availability of sufficient tennis courts for morning tennis in jeopardy. (The group typically reserves three courts even though only four or less individuals may actually show up and the club wanted to limit the number of courts to one or two.) Additionally there have been from time to time rumors of the club being sold which has contributed some anxiety. Chuck made this comment during his interview that reflects how important the group is to its members and the personal loss that would be experienced if it were to cease to exist:

Anyway ... it has worked for me and I guess occasionally when it starts to be threatened or we worry about it getting threatened or something like we did a year ago or something. Most of us don't know what the alternatives might be.

In general however, the members do not worry or concern themselves about the continuation of the group or of its composition. The group is whatever it is. Its members enjoy their group experience. This does not include worrying about whether the group will or will not continue to exist.

#### ***Leaving the group and rejection.***

There have been instances where individuals have been, as best described, “pushed away” from the group. One of the interviewees commented on these instances. Additionally 20% of the interviewees commented about the process of leaving the group.

I have already described the instance that Cleve recounted about the individual with a particularly abrasive personality who was “shunned” until he left the group. Cleve also made the following observation during his interview that I have not been able to follow up on that indicates

that there has been at least one instance in the past where someone left the group after a personal conflict. The rest of Cleve's observation reflects the more common instance where an individual, once they join the group, remains with the group for an extended time:

But it's basically I haven't seen too many people actually leave the group unless they moved out of town. I heard of one guy getting angry at something and quitting. But most of the people unless they leave town this is a home for them really.

Joann also made this comment during her interview that reflects the self-selection process that occurs when people first begin to play with the Early Birds:

It's ... if people come in sometimes they come in and they don't buy into you know...the whole modus operandi of this group because we have our quirks ... then they just sort of drift away you know.

Over the three years that I have been a member there have been one or two instances of individuals who have come to play with the group and who have then stayed for a few times and then not returned. This may in part be due to the level of tennis but may also be due to a lack of interest in the individuals who are currently members. In the case of rejection, it is significant that the Early Birds did not comment in their interviews about rejecting other members. Apart from the instances already cited, there was a complete absence of negative stories or of complaints about being rejected themselves. Apart from some of the comments about the differences between the participation of men and women, there were no instances in the interviews of anyone complaining about being mistreated or in any way rejected by the other members. Nor were there stories of other individuals in the past being mistreated or rejected. Members of social groups of course have the option to "vote with their feet". However, even so, it is quite remarkable that there is so little negativity in the history of the group.

*Use of humor to deflect.*

Humor has been spoken of frequently in this study as one of the predominant characteristics of the group. Humor is a well-refined mechanism among the Early Birds used to

deflect away from conflict or disagreement. Of the interviewees, 13.33% made observations which I interpreted as instances of acknowledging how the group uses humor to deflect potentially conflictual behaviors. Fred, for example, made this observation during his interview that demonstrates his awareness of how the group manages its own competitive tendencies:

So there is ... there is competitiveness between each other. Though one of the things that happens with the repartee is that it ... it keeps it from getting unpleasant. It's not so competitive that it gets unpleasant.

A story that Marty told during his interview about a time when Senator Lowell R. played with the group is also indicative of how the group has used humor to temper aggression. It is also indicative of the extent to which the bantering and repartee go within the group.

And one day ... and Lowell Richards was six foot four or five and he was a giant. And I hit a ball as hard as I've ever hit it. And it was going right to his stomach and he put his racquet up and dropped it over the net. And he 'ho, ho, ho' he laughed. And he said 'Come here kid'. And he brought me over and he grabbed me by my shirt and he pulled me up so I'm standing on my toes. And he said, 'The last time I missed a shot was like about 20, 30 years ago. Ho, ho, ho'

The very next point I hit the same shot and it hit him right in the stomach. And I walked over to the net and I said 'come here kid'. And I grabbed him by the shirt and I pulled him down and I said, 'the last time I missed hitting somebody in the stomach was the shot just before that.'

I have seen this kind of behavior frequently among the group and indeed am often personally engaged in similar sparring with both the men and the women members. Tennis as a sport, especially in doubles play, offers opportunities to the members to playfully challenge each other. When this type of sport is combined with a use of humor to deflect tension it provides a safe haven to express managed aggression.

One of the more interesting aspects of the repartee among the Early Birds is that it is targeted at both the men and the women equally. This is a precedent that has been set from the earlier years of the group when Joann was the only female member of the group but also one of its best players. Joann made the following observation during her interview that demonstrates the equality of the repartee:

Well nothing sacred ... nobody ... you know you're ... you're just ... you can't have a thin skin around here. The guys will make fun of anything. You know. And that's all. It's a very supportive group. But no bones about it they will let you know, you know ...  
[laughter]

The sparring between members serves many purposes in the group all contributing to the group's longevity. Besides being a key means to deflect the aggression associated with the competition of a tennis match, it is also an outlet for the competitive tendencies of individuals who may not have other outlets for such tendencies. Cleve, who has a demanding career, made an observation during his interview that suggests the value of the group as a means to deflect the tensions present in the rest of the member's lives:

So actually I get ... if I don't play tennis I get nervous. And I mean ... for us ... for me it's getting up at 5:15 in the morning and showing up at 6 to 7. And sometimes I'm on call and up all night and I really make an honest attempt to get there although physically I can't do it because I've got emergencies going on. But I do think about it you know...  
so...

In conclusion, it is appropriate to say that the individual Early Bird interviews have provided a rich view of what is important to them. In the following sections of this chapter I will delve into how these findings relate to current theories as previously described in chapter 5 and how they pertain to my own theories of group behavior.



### ***Analysis of Responses Related to Past Members of the Group***

Parallel to coding the primary nodes I also coded for those instances when an interviewee made observations about one or more individuals who are no longer members of the group. This included references to individuals who have passed away or who have moved away from the area. These observations are significant for several reasons. First, they are indicative of the degree to which the Early Birds are in touch with their past. Second, from a social constructionist perspective, how we construe the past is indicative of how we construe the present and the future. We construe our pasts in manners that “make sense” of the present and the future. Therefore what the Early Birds have said about past members should provide additional insights into present group meaning-making processes. Third, The Early Birds were unanimously supportive of this study and provided freely of their time and openness to my questioning. In many ways this study has become the de facto historical record of the group. While a separate, independent effort will document the group’s history, it is still important to honor the stories that the Early Birds have told about past members by integrating them into this study.

Of the interviewees, 66.67% made one or more observations about individuals who are no longer with the group. These observations included references to Lee, Al, Gertrude, Bill B, George, Lowell, Cliff, and Bud. Cliff and Bud have left the group over the last three years that I have been a member and are now living in other parts of the country. The other past members left the group before I arrived. Several of them are now deceased.

After completing the primary coding and analysis of the interviews I then performed a separate coding of these primary coding nodes against the coding of the past member observations. Doing this provided the opportunity to assess the degree to which the primary coding nodes are reflected in the observations about the past members. The remainder of this section provides a comparison of the findings from the original coding nodes to the observations about past members. Table 14 summarizes the findings.

**Table 14 Coding instances for observations about previous Early Birds mapped to primary nodes**

<b>Observations about previous Early Birds</b>	<b>Coding Instances</b>
Good Will and Laughter	11
Competition	5
History	5
Isolated from Rest of Life	3
Support in Time of Sickness	2
Sense of Equality	2
After-Tennis Conversations	1
Friendship	1
First Experiences as an Early Bird	1

The primary coding revealed that Good Will and Laughter as well as Competition were dominant themes that the interviewees spoke to. This was also true of what the interviewees said about previous members of the group. Good Will and Laughter revealed particularly strong remembrances. In many cases recall of a competitive experience were told from a humorous perspective. This story told by Joann is indicative of the coupling of these two themes:

Ah ... just one other, one other anecdote, that was kind of funny. We were playing with ... I was ... in the days when we used to play singles. I was playing ... we used to play singles and then play doubles. I was playing with George who has since passed away. And somehow he hit himself with the racquet at one point so he was bleeding on his ... on his eyebrow. And then as he was crossing over we had the things that wind up the tennis ... the nets you know and ... and he hit it and his shorts ripped. And so he comes off the court. With the bloody ... playing with me singles ... with his bloody head and his

ripped shorts. And someone says, 'Well you can tell your wife that you put up a fight!'

[laughter]

Hendrik also had a remembrance of playing tennis with George that is similar to Joann's.

Well the most embarrassing memory, it was when I was about 12 years old I saw a cartoon in the New Yorker. And it's tennis. And one fellow has served, and he has hit his ... its doubles, and he has hit his partner in the back of the head and the partner's teeth are about three feet in front of him. And the caption is 'sorry'. And I for some reason thought that was just ... that cartoon has always amused me. Well I did that to George.

[laughter] And I was really working on my serve and I had a lot of power but not a lot of accuracy. And I caught him literally in the back of the head. And you know, you should be very remorseful and sorry and I was. But all I could do was think about that cartoon and laugh. [laughter] And so ... but that's ... that's one of the more significant memories. George was a wonderful person. Just absolutely wonderful person. Helped me a lot in an enormous number of ways. Terrible tennis player ... but wonderful person.

This story told by Bill was so vividly told that it should be included in this study simply for its visual impact. It also illustrates the historical linkages for the coupling of competition and humorous behavior that is characteristic of the current group:

But ah ... there was a guy named Al here, I've forgotten Al's name. But he was one of the old guard. A ... kind of a grumpy guy. But grumpy in a way that just made you laugh. And ... he was one of the sparkplugs of this place who would always do something that would just make people roll over laughing. For example, if he missed a shot and it was three feet inside the line. He would just wait and then just call it very robustly 'Out!' And the way he did it would just make everybody laugh. And all three courts would be laughing.

The previous members who were remembered were often those individuals who made others laugh. This was often the case for individuals who did not see themselves as particularly

humorous but who enjoyed the humorous contributions of others. Mort, described himself in this manner:

Um ... I think, you know, one of the things that, another thing that pops in my head are, are the jokesters that we have. You know, we lost one in Bud's moving and Cleve comes with his jokes and so forth. And I'm not a ... I don't remember ... I've never been a joke person. I don't ... rarely remember them and ... I don't really concentrate on doing jokes. But I've enjoyed ... You know it's interesting because ... I don't think I was with people who joked around very much for many, you know, for most of my working career. The ornithologists don't joke around very much. [laughter]

Caring for each other was also an important theme in the remembrances of past members. Lee's death has left a strong impression on the group and indeed in many current members' opinions contributed greatly to pulling the group together. Fred describes here how the Early Bird World Championships came to be a memorial to Lee and his family:

But that ... I think that was one of the strongest bonding events we have. People really began to look forward to that. We had goodies for Christmas ...there were holiday season and made a big fuss about the winners and the trophy. And when Lee ... there's one ... Lee died, ah ... this group rallied around Rita as much as if it had been a church group, they were a family group. Everybody stayed with her, and stayed at her house and talked to her and kept calling her. I called her. Several people did for months later, afterwards, just checking in on her, seeing how she was doing. Marty has continued that.

But the trophy and that event after Lee died, further solidified the group in a way that I think was an unexpected when we started. We started for fun but it became a real thing to people and people planned their travel around it.

It is also interesting that during his interview Marty chose to describe Lee's passing using a humorous story. It is important that he chose to remember a friend in such a way rather than

choosing to comment on the more saddening aspects of the end of life. Again, this is a reflection on how the Early Birds use humor to frame their remembrances:

You can talk about Lee when he was in the hospital. He was in a long-term care facility. And we knew he was dying. And so one day after tennis we simply went collectively in our tennis shorts to the nursing home. It's right over here on Collingwood. And it shocked the whole place. And what I did was I brought a bag of tennis balls and we had the metal cans at the time. And we walked in the room, didn't say a word. Dumped the cans on his bed. And I said 'Let's go.' And so we stayed for a few minutes.

Equality among members is a valued characteristic of the current group and has its roots in past group behavior. The group has actually had some rather distinguished members. In addition to the congressman who has been mentioned earlier, there has also been a vice presidential candidate among the past members. Additionally, Bud was the project manager for the first lunar lander. And as noted here by Bill, several of the other members of the group had illustrative military histories but chose not to distinguish themselves from the rest of the group based on their accomplishments:

Ah, ah ... didn't know much about him. Didn't know he [Al] was an honored war veteran or anything. Never mentioned it Ah, Al, just went along And Lee he never said much about anything. He was kind of a war hero too. But they always were here at the appointed time.

Marty spoke about the equality among members when he recounted this story about Lowell:

Lowell ... the senator used to play tennis with us. And ... it was generally between marriages. And ah ... he'd show up and the one significant thing is and I guess it is also a reflection of the Early Birds. He wasn't treated as a senator. And that was probably why he kept coming back. Because everybody gave him as much abuse as anybody else.

What has been described so far in this section indicates that there is a high level of congruence between how the Early Birds describe themselves in the present and how they remember past members. There is a departure from this congruence however when some of the interviewees described their off-court remembrances of previous members. Many of these remembrances indicate that there may have been more off-court socializing and friendships in the past than there are currently. Once again, this story from Hendrik recounts an instance from a humorous perspective:

One of my wife's favorite stories is that ...when we moved into our current house. She grew up in Old Town and is used to ... very highly decorated houses with ... ah, with crown moldings and things like that. And George had spent his life in the construction business and so he volunteered to help me put up the crown molding. And it's very frustrating business and my wife thought it was hysterical with the two of us being sort of yielding to each other about how we were going to do this.

But we really ... he was terrific. We did a great job. And we have ... the living room and dining room have great crown molding which I could not have done by myself. So ... George was a really a very fine person.

Hart also described his relationship with Al and Lee apart from playing tennis that indicates a much closer relationship to members in the past than he may now have with current members:

Oh ... ah ... during, during that ... early midterm, while Lee was still alive he was kind of a Saturday morning yard sale person. So every once in a while I'd jump in the car and ... he and Al and myself. Al driving his own car. Because when he got tired of it he went home. So ... we'd drive around and see what we could find. Ah ... Lee was into real estate. I was kinda ... had time on my hands. So I, he needed help once in awhile. So I'd help him with his rentals. Needed painting or something or a floor picked up or whatever. I'd help him with that. And ah ... we got pretty close, pretty close.

Arleen also made this cryptic statement during her interview that indicates that there may have been more socializing among group members in the past:

What other kinds of stories can I think of? I remember years ago when we used to go to the parties, that ah, I can't remember his name now ... oh, Irve ... has anybody else mentioned them? Irve and ...

As mentioned earlier, there are some close personal relationships in the current group. Most notably, Marty and Cleve have become very good friends. Rivers and Chuck also seem to have become buddies and spend time together. The annual events such as Cleve's concerts and Joann's picnic may also be bringing the group together outside of playing tennis. The current limited interaction may only be a cultural artifact. What this tells us however is that it is not the off-court relationships that are holding the group together. Rather, it is the factors arising from the interactions during and after tennis that are holding the group together. This is an important distinction to make.

These findings tell us that the current members of the Early Birds see themselves as being a great deal like previous members. The historical references do not point to an organizational transformation or anything that would suggest that the early group members were in any way different from the previous members. The characteristics that the current members value among themselves – humor, competition, caring for others, etc. – are the same values that they remember and value in previous group members.

What we are speaking about here is tradition. Tradition plays an important role in the longevity of the Early Birds. Not only does the group have traditions, but it also has the right traditions to support group longevity. That is, the psychosocial characteristics of the group that are treasured in memory and alive in the present are of such a nature that they contribute to group cohesiveness and group resiliency. They are traditions that bind, not divide. I will return to this theme later in this chapter when I present my own theoretical positions.

## ***Findings Supportive/Non-Supportive of Previous Research and Theoretical Positions***

Throughout the Literature Review I reflected from time to time on the potential implications of certain lines of research and theorizing as they might apply to this study of the Early Birds. In this section I present my findings that address the reflective questions posed in the Literature Review. The responses in this section are dependent on the data supplied by the research participants and extracted from my observation logs. That is, what is and what is not elaborated on in the following sections is dependent on what was spoken to by the participants as they discussed their experiences as Early Birds and what I observed in day-to-day activities. Therefore not all research and theories and reflections on the research and theories presented earlier will be elaborated on in this section.

Each finding in the following sections is preceded by a table listing the findings as documented in the N'Vivo software and the nodes that were coded to the findings. This mapping allow for tracing the findings directly back to the research data.

## ***Findings Supportive/Non-Supportive of Postmodern and Contemporary Perspectives on Social Life***

The Literature Review described several perspectives on contemporary group and social structures and the challenges of maintaining cohesive social relationships in the postmodern milieu. This section compares those perspectives to the findings from this study.

**Finding:** The organizational structure and social behaviors of the Early Birds are consistent with many of the characteristics that Lifton's associates with Proteanism.



**Table 15 Findings consistent with Lifton's theory of proteanism.**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
Early Birds are comfortable with their level of commitment to each other	Ease of Coming and Going
	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Good Will and Laughter
	Isolated from Rest of Life
	Use of Humor to Deflect

Lifton's (1993) descriptions of proteanism were presented earlier in the Literature Review pertaining to the postmodern milieu. He describes the psychological characteristics of proteanism as follows:

These include strong tendencies toward mockery and humor for 'lubricating' experiences, emotions and communities that are "free floating" rather than clearly anchored, preference for fragmentary ideas rather than large belief systems, and continuous improvisation in social and occupational arrangements and in expressions of conciliation or protest. (p. 92)

The Early Birds described themselves in ways that are highly consistent with Lifton's description of free-floating proteanism. During the interviews they spoke frequently and consistently to how easy it was to become a member, how it was possible to be gone for a period of time and to return again, albeit with some teasing, to full membership and perhaps most significant to Lifton's theories, how the Early Bird group experience, while vital and integral to their senses of who they were, was confined to one small, albeit essential, portion of their lives and did not integrate with other aspects of their lives. They also spoke to how humor, bantering and teasing were an integral part of Early Bird existence.

Memories of their first experiences with the Early Birds were particularly powerful and vivid for many of the participants who consistently spoke to ease of entry into the group. Fred for instance described his first experiences with the Early Birds as follows:

So I brought the racquet the next time around. And two guys, Lee P. was one of them and Hart was the other, both went out of the way to welcome me, bring me on the court, introduced me to people. And I said to everyone 'Hey, basically I'm just starting so work with me.' And they did ... and I felt a part of the group from the very first day. And this is ... I thought was a very unique thing.

Mort also had these vivid and warm memories of his first experiences:

I played tennis here for about 10 years before I joined Early Birds. And I joined Early Birds because one of the people I played with was Cliff Nunn who I played with during the day. Cliff used to play a lot of tennis and I played with a group that Cliff substituted in and stuff. And Cliff suggested that I, you know, try Early Birds and stuff and had done that for, you know, a number of years actually before I actually did it. And then I finally got into Early Birds.

Mort also commented about how the Early Bird group experience was insulated from the rest of the members' lives yet at the same time deeply personal:

And it's like this group of people come together and share sometimes intimate thoughts and, you know, opinions that they wouldn't go around spouting to anybody. And yet they leave here and ... not a lot goes on ...you know, there is very rarely that there are things going on. I think that is sort of interesting.

This view was similar to Arleen's who commented about one of the other members:

I've probably known Joan 20 some odd years and I don't really know other than that ... I mean I once met her on a subway. Other than knowing what her career was and something like that. I don't know any personal things about Joan.

Several of the Early Birds also commented about a type of teasing and bantering that Lifton would most likely describe as protean. Members of the Early Birds use teasing as a means to defuse tension and to mute competitiveness. Indeed, the Early Birds take great pride in their ability to both give and take barbs. Hendrik, for example, in his interview commented that:

And the humor ... I mean, you know, the repartee on that ... those courts is ... very good. [laughter] It's not a place for the faint of heart and for the thin skinned ... so there is ... there is competitiveness between each other. Though one of the things that happens with the repartee is that it ... it keeps it from getting unpleasant. It's not so competitive that it gets unpleasant.

In my observation log from an entry dated February 3rd, 2007 I noted that:

Joann and I did a high five this morning. We played together this morning and we won. We played two sets and beat the guys twice (once when Fred pulled a muscle and we had to finish early). It was really satisfying. I commented to the group about how important competition is to everyone and how we enjoy winning and everyone wholeheartedly agreed that we are a very competitive group and that this was important to us.

In sum then, the Early Birds demonstrate, both in their behavior and in the ways that they speak about themselves, characteristics that Lifton characterizes as protean. Given that Lifton describes proteanism as a characteristic of the postmodern milieu these findings provide evidence that the Early Birds are a representative postmodern social organization.

**Finding:** Although the Early Bird social structure more closely models what Bellah, et al. (1985) refer to as a community of memory rather than a lifestyle enclave, neither description is a particularly successful description of the Early Birds.

**Table 16: Findings both affirming and disaffirming Bellah, et al. (1985) theories of lifestyle enclaves and communities of memory**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
Early Birds have a set of shared mythological stories and themes with high narrative linkage	Support in Time of Sickness
	Good Will and Laughter
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Competition
Early Birds are comfortable with their level of commitment to each other	Ease of Coming and Going
	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Good Will and Laughter
	Isolated from Rest of Life
	Use of Humor to Deflect

Bellah, et al. (1985) in their commentary on American society described two contemporary social structures. They defined the lifestyle enclave as a phenomenon of midlife represented by the country club, the gated community and other socially engineered social structures. It has two segmental characteristics: first, it involves only a segment of each individual member's life concerns – leisure and consumption; and second, it is segmented to include only members with the same lifestyle. In contrast, they described the community of memory as less a social structure than a social experience. They described the community of memory as a community that keeps its past alive through the stories that it tells about itself. These stories embody the values and core beliefs of the community

The Early Birds have some characteristics of both of the social structures that Bellah, et al. describe and not all of the characteristics of either. The data presented in the previous finding with regard to the insulation of the Early Bird member experiences from other facets of their lives, as well as the fact that the Early Birds are a social group meeting at a private health club, could well be interpreted as supporting Bellah et al.'s somewhat pejorative description of a lifestyle

enclave. On the other hand, Bellah et al. describe characteristics of the lifestyle enclave that are not in agreement with the data from this study of the Early Birds. I suspect, for example, that the Early Birds would take great exception to be described as engaged in a “narcissism of similarity” as Bellah et al. describe the lifestyle enclave. (p.73)

At the same time, the Early Birds describe themselves in terms that Bellah et al. associate with a community of memory. The values embedded in the stories that the Early Birds tell about themselves, the deep value they place in their relationships, the caring they show for each other and the high level of inclusion in the group are far more indicative of what Bellah et al. calls a community of memory. In particular, the stories concerning caring for each other are at odds with Bellah et al.’s descriptions of the lifestyle enclave. Joann’s story that she recounted during her interview is illustrative of how the Early Birds hold each other in memory:

Ah, speaking about ... I was deathly ill one time in the hospital. I could not even lift my head up from the pillow. And that Saturday morning ... I had hepatitis and all kinds of stuff. Saturday morning, the Early Birds after they played, they all walked ... trooped into my room with their tennis racquets. Handed me a ball and says 'We challenge you now!' [laughter]

These findings lead me to believe that Bellah, et al. descriptions of contemporary social structures are not adequate to describe the social organization of the Early Birds. The Early Birds appear to be a structure not anticipated by Bellah, et al.

**Finding:** The behaviors and results of analysis of the narratives are consistent with Zurcher’s predictions of the types of alternate organizational structures that are most likely to exist in postmodern society.

**Table 17: Finding indicating that the Early Birds are structured in a way that is congruent with the postmodern milieu**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Bird social structure is adaptive to the postmodern milieu	First Experience as an Early Bird
	Ease of Coming and Going
	Isolated from Rest of Life

As cited earlier, Zurcher, writing in 1977, predicted that “...the individual will increasingly become challenged to organize his or her life around transience, to endure discontinuities and disjunctions, and to withstand ego-flooding from an environment explosive with sensory simulation” (p. 158). Both observations and accounts from the interviews are consistent with Zurcher’s predictions.

The Early Birds have structured their morning tennis and conversations in such a way that it is extremely easy for new members to join and for existing members to participate whenever it suits their schedules. Many of the Early Birds, as predicted by Zurcher, have discontinuities and disjunctions in their lives that keep them away from the group for extended periods of time. Members such as myself who are working at pre-retirement jobs experience periods of time when we are unable to attend except for weekends. Several of the members like Fred and Irene have multiple residences and segment their time during the year with months away from the group. Chuck made an observation during his interview that sums up what I consider to be one of the most significant qualities of the Early Birds – the open-ended nature of the relationships:

One thing is that you could always come back. You just whenever you go, you could go away. If you went away for two days you could come back. You go away for two months you come back. And you just show up. And you're welcomed back. And ... nothing has to be arranged.

A few of the members are more consistently present and these members informally take turns carrying the numbers and conducting the number drawing process. At 6 a.m. the person with the numbers counts the number of people present, places the numbers in a bottle and begins shaking it loudly. Reminiscent of Pavlovian trained dogs; members converge at the net post and are handed out numbers. The total number of members present on any given day seldom results in 4, 8, or 12 so informal “rules” have been adopted to allow the greatest number of participants each day. No-ad scoring is used and after the first set winners remain on the court and individuals who are waiting then join in for the next set. This structure increases the likelihood that on any given day each member will get at least one set of tennis. It also distributes talent randomly because of the number draw which also makes it easy for a member to return after a long absence away from playing tennis. These informal structures also make it easy for new members to join in. The randomness of the selection process also negates any inconveniences caused when a member does not show up. Additionally, the randomness of the draw also prevents competition for partners which again may make entry and leaving awkward for members.

Hendrik, one of the members like myself who has professional commitments that sometimes makes attendance at Early Bird tennis difficult, made the following comment about the selection process that is indicative of its importance to defuse potentially conflictual or overly competitive situations which might affect membership levels:

... you can see in people's reactions with the numbers they get and the partners they draw that they really care about whether or not they are going to win. They really care about whether or not they are going to win. [laughter]

The Early Birds have resisted adding any additional structure to the group in the way of rules. Occasionally an instance will occur that might propel one or another member to suggest a “rule” for the group. These are always shouted down by other members. An instance occurred on Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> of 2007 that I recorded in my observation log that is illustrative of the manner in which the Early Birds resist adding structures to the group:

Rivers and I were players five and six so we had to wait to play. The doubles players took almost 45 minutes to finish a set so there wasn't much time to get another set in. Mort suggested that we have a rule that limits the length of the first set. Everyone started to laugh and said 'No rules!' This isn't the first time that this has happened and it always has the same funny ending.

These findings describe a social structure that is highly adaptive to the needs of contemporary society. Early Bird rules are minimal and simple and thus rule knowledge or lack thereof is not a barrier to participation. Members openly accept new members. Members can come and go without recrimination and without loss of critical organizational knowledge and skills that may inhibit reentry; and, members have organized their activities – playing tennis – in such a way that psychosocial dynamics such as competition have a minimal effect on group processes.

**Finding:** There are similarities between how the Early Birds describe themselves and how members of the small bible study groups studied by Lawson (2006) described themselves.

**Table 18: Finding indicating that the Early Birds share characteristics with bible study groups researched by Lawson**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds share characteristics of other contemporary social groups such as the bible study groups researched by Lawson	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Ease of Coming and Going
	Group Stability
	Support in Time of Sickness
	Good Will and Laughter
	Friendship

While Lawson might grimace at having the small bible study groups he researched described as postmodern (given the high degree of relativism of postmodernism) there is a high



degree of similarity between Lawson's description of the bible study groups and the observations being made here about the Early Birds. The N'Vivo models in the appendix provide graphic illustration of the high level of overlap between the positions taken by the postmodernists described above and the finding from Lawson's research. Lawson identified nine behavioral themes that ran through his participants: (a) stable group membership and leadership, (b) common experiences and suffering that led to openness and commitment to each other, (c) a consistent schedule and a slow pace of the bible study that helped when people missed a session, (d) flexibility in responding to group member needs and life changes, (e) common purpose and commitment, (f) real value found in participation, (g) qualities of the leader, (h) continued openness to new members, and (i) diversity of personalities and backgrounds enriching the group experience.

Like the bible study groups, the Early Birds also have a highly stable membership. Of the 15 members who were interviewed the average number of years with the Early birds was 17.2. The member with the longest number of years of participation was Bill who remembered being with the group for over 36 years. Several of the members mentioned in their interviews that once people become members of the Early Birds they typically don't leave except for extraordinary circumstances. For example, Joann, one of the members with a long history in the group states:

But it's been a pretty solid group for the 31 years I've been playing. You know ....

People ...the only reasons they stop most of the time is if they die or move away, you know ... so it's been quite a ....

While I highly doubt that the Early Birds would describe their experiences together as "common experiences and suffering" nevertheless there is a high degree of narrative linkage around the topic of caring for each other in all of the Early Bird interviews. This is at least in part age-related and will be discussed in later sections of this study. However, caring for each other is an especially powerful theme that permeates the Early Bird culture. Altogether 53.33% of the individual interviews made reference to caring for each other. Cleve's comments are typical of

the group in general and indicate a level of caring that corresponds to Lawson's observations of his bible study group participants:

... but one thing I've said about these guys that if something is wrong with anybody they are like one big family you know ... if somebody is ill, you know you get an email, if somebody is in the hospital or everybody is calling ....

Lawson also indicated that a consistent schedule as well as flexibility in meeting individual member needs were important factors contributing to group longevity. This is also a characteristic of the Early Birds. As described earlier, both the simplicity and stability of the Early Bird organizational structure – show up at the net on a Monday, Wednesday, Friday, or Saturday morning at 6 a.m. with a racquet and draw numbers to play – provide just the right level of structure to support member needs.

Lawson's bible study groups had an easily identifiable shared purpose and value in participation. For the Early Birds purpose and value are perhaps less objectively defined but nevertheless equally dominant factors. Early Birds like being Early Birds. They have shaped their lives around being Early Birds. Forty percent of the interviewees commented on how highly they valued membership. Even more often members mentioned that they valued not only the enjoyment they experienced playing tennis but equally as much the enjoyment they experienced with the after-tennis conversations. Ed, who participated in the group interview but who was not a participant in the individual interviews kicked off a burst of conversation during the group interview reflecting this view:

[Ed] Let me throw in just one other thing. I kind of get a kick out of how people come to the table afterwards and want to sit around and talk. I think that's as big a drawing card as the tennis.

[Arleen] Yes ...

[Liz] Yeah ...

[Arleen] Yeah, I mean at one point I have said if I drop out due to health reasons, I would just like to show and talk.

[laughter]

[Liz] yes...yeah

[Arleen] And keep in touch. See people.

[Irene] Yeah there are some, what ... Fred when he was injured ... came for a cup of coffee....

[Liz] Yes, he came for a cup of coffee....

[Mort] Rivers has come for ....

[Rivers] yeah, I've done that.

[Marty] and Kelly used to come and he just finds it too early now ....

[Liz] oh yeah now ....

Lawson's research indicated that the qualities of the group leader were an important factor in the group success. The bible study groups that he researched had formal leadership. No such role exists in the Early Birds. Indeed, the Early Birds pride themselves on the equality of membership and the lack of formal roles. I would like to propose however that what both groups have is leadership that is appropriate to the needs of the members. What the Early Birds have rather than formal leadership is what I refer to as the prototypical member. The prototypical member is the member who most exemplifies the values and qualities of the group. I will elaborate in depth on this concept later in the section where I evaluate findings related to social identity theory.

Openness to new members as well as an appreciation for diversity of viewpoints and personalities are core characteristic of both the bible study groups and the Early Birds. Several of the Early Birds indicated in their interviews both how fresh in their memory their own entrance into the group was as well as how they too were eager to accept new members. Equally as often members commented about the diversity of the group viewpoints, professions, and histories.

However, these behaviors must be framed within social context. For both groups, the bible study group and the Early Birds, openness and tolerance for diversity are more realistically framed within the parameters of normal social interaction within their communities. Both groups I suspect would have their valuing of openness and diversity challenged by the entrance of a new member with a heroin addiction or a convicted pedophilic. From my own observation log dated Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007 a comment made by Rivers while we were waiting in the players' lounge for our turn to play is perhaps closer to the reality of the situation:

Waiting in the lounge Rivers commented about how similar our demographics are ... described the group as white middle class men. This is a men's group. Even though everyone says that we are different I guess we are different within a very small scope of variance.

Nevertheless, the openness and appreciation for diversity of the Early Birds, and for that matter the bible study groups, should not be treated too harshly. As will be explicated on in detail in later sections, openness, appreciation for others, and tolerance are key components of the successful longevity of the Early Birds.

In addition to the characteristics identified by Lawson, the Early Birds also exhibit two distinct characteristics that are not included in Lawson's descriptions of the bible study groups. These differences are important distinctions that differentiate between the two types of social groups. The Early Birds repeatedly in the interviews, and as I have documented in the observation log, identify themselves as highly competitive. Additionally, the Early Birds acknowledge and indeed take pride in a high level of bantering, teasing, and mental sparring. These themes will be returned to in later sections.

In general however, the high level of convergence between the findings from both of these studies of what appear outwardly to be very different types of social groups is compelling. It speaks to relationship-building and relationship-sustaining processes of a more generalizable type than have been addressed in the previous research and theorizing on social structures and

group dynamics. I will return to these comparisons later in this study when I present my own theories of group relationships.

In conclusion, what the Early Birds have revealed to us is that it is possible to form meaningful, supportive, long-term social relationships in the postmodern milieu. While that social structure may be positioned within the context of what within the wider demographics could be perceived to be a privileged lifestyle, nevertheless, the Early Birds have found a way to organize themselves that is both highly satisfying to its members and sustainable.

Like the small bible study groups studied by Lawson, the Early Birds have developed a group structure that is an effective response to the disintegrating forces of the postmodern milieu. One must ask however one qualifying question: “Is this social structure an evolutionary adaptation to the postmodern milieu or is an anachronism, resisting the trends within the larger social context?” The data clearly show that the Early Birds behave and describe themselves in language that is congruent with postmodern theorists such as Lifton, Gergen, and Zurcher. In particular, openness to new members, appreciation for diversity, and a “free-floating” organizational structure give the group the resiliency required of postmodern social structures. The Early Birds represent the future, not the past.

### ***Findings Supportive/Non-Supportive of Theories of Group Behavior***

**Finding:** The organizational structure of the Early Bird’s conforms to Brewer’s (2003) description of an association rather than an aggregation.

**Table 19: Findings supporting the position that the Early Birds form an association rather than an aggregation**

<b>Finding</b>	<b>Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis</b>
The Early Birds behave in ways that are highly cooperative and conflict free	Conflict
	Competition
	Friendship
	Support in Time of Sickness
	Good Will and Laughter
The Early Birds have a set of shared values with high narrative linkage	Appreciation of Diversity
	Sense of Equality
	Support in Time of Sickness
Early Birds have a set of shared mythological stories and themes with high narrative linkage	Support in Time of Sickness
	Good Will and Laughter
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Competition

Brewer (2003) as described earlier in the Literature Review distinguishes between two kinds of social groups based on the kinds of commitments that the members make to each other. He describes aggregations as rule-bound and centered on cooperative activity supporting preexisting group needs. Aggregations require sacrifice from members as the price for belonging to the group. Commitments to such groups are made in explicit statements such as “I declare” and “I consent”. In contrast, in associations members take their defining cooperative activities to be valuable in themselves. In associations commitments arise out of internalized commitments to shared values and beliefs and do not require the types of explicit commitments of aggregates.

The findings clearly support categorizing the Early Birds as an association rather than an aggregation. Cooperative behavior among the Early Birds is based on a spontaneous enthusiasm

for the shared experience of playing tennis together. This spontaneous enthusiasm is supported by a flexible governance structure that allows members to easily come and go and that has a minimum of rules for obligating behavior. An entry from my observation log dated February 7<sup>th</sup> 2007 is descriptive of the absence of obligated behavior within the group:

Marty said something interesting this morning. There were only three of us for tennis this morning – lots of snow and ice – and we landed up playing Canadian doubles. He commented that we don't complain about other people not being there or how they should be there. Rather, we just get on with whoever is there. This is interesting. We really don't put that kind of pressure on each other.

Internalized commitments to a shared set of values is indicated by a high level of narrative linkage around the themes of appreciation for diversity, a sense of equality among members, and especially a support and caring in time of need. The manner in which the members support each other is highly indicative of association-like behavior. Caring is not based on “shoulds” and “coulds” arising out of a predetermined sense of social obligation. Rather it arises spontaneously out of the internalized values shared by the members. Fred's comments about the way that the Early Birds care for each other is as indicative of the level of caring as well as the way in which caring is done:

I would say this, it doesn't happen often because it's not the way participants in the Early Birds are built, but if one of us did have a problem that another could help with professionally or personally, I don't think we would hesitate ... well I think we would hesitate to ask. But if that question were ever asked, I think the person being asked would stop what he or she is doing and just go do it and be very quietly helpful in sorting things out.

I will return to a deeper analysis of the distinctions between aggregations and associations when I present my own theories in the next chapter.

**Finding:** There is supporting evidence in the behavior of the Early Birds for Shotter's (2003) social constructionist model of social life that is built on Prigogine's (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984) model of *dissipative structures* and Shotter's model of "an ecology of self-sustaining orderly centres of activity, interactively embedded within a more disorderly flow of surrounding activity" (2003, p. 161).

**Table 20: Findings supportive of Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds have the characteristics of a dissipative social structure	First experiences as an Early Bird
	Ease of Coming and Going
	Openness
	Historical Group Membership

Prigogine's theory of dissipative structures posits that sustainability of a group structure requires that the group maintain continuous interaction with its surroundings chaotic environment. In the Early Birds this behavior is reflected in what I call the "Nearly-Early Birds". These are the informal contingents of individuals now playing tennis in the 7 a.m. and 8 a.m. slots who tend to be younger and/or more athletic. These individuals will occasionally play with the Early Birds and often form a resource when a fourth is needed to fill out a doubles match. They will occasionally join the after-tennis conversation and share social greetings. Often Early Birds will reciprocate and join to be a fourth for one of the Nearly-Early Birds. When outside social events occur such as weddings, housewarming, or the annual summer picnics, these groups will intermingle socially. Many of the Early Birds have historically come in to the group from this contingent source of resources. Mort was one such person who described his entry into the group as follows:

I played tennis here for about 10 years before I joined Early Birds. And I joined Early Birds because one of the people I played with was Cliff who I played with during the day.



Cliff used to play a lot of tennis and I played with a group that Cliff substituted in and stuff. And Cliff suggested that I, you know, try Early Birds and stuff and had done that for, you know, a number of years actually before I actually did it. And then I finally got into Early Birds. And I saw the friendship and the camaraderie and I sort of expected that there'd be something, that that might carry on beyond the group, but it doesn't ...very much ...you know, or very slightly ....

The Early Birds are indeed conscious of the fact that they are being observed by other club members on the perimeter who are considering whether they should join. Cleve made this observation in his interview which is indicative of the fluidity of the group boundaries and of its dissipative structure:

Well I see this group going on and on. And ah... it's very interesting, there's a couple of new people have come in and you got probably to talk to some people who have just joined. And everybody is kinda ... people watch us from the side you know and they ... and the next thing you know they will start coming in and then they will come back. But that's how you join. You figure well this person's been here about four times they must be one of us. [laughter]

This fluid relationship with the unstructured “chaotic” environment represented by the rest of the tennis club members is one of the key reasons why the Early Birds have been able to maintain a steady level of membership. I asked the Early Birds during our first group interview if there had ever been a time when they thought that the group would dissolve and got these replies from members.

**Finding:** There is evidence that the Early Birds predominantly use maintenance-by-suppression patterns of behavior to maintain harmonious group dynamics.

**Table 21: Findings suggesting that The Early Birds use maintenance-by-suppression techniques to maintain harmonious group dynamics**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds use maintenance-by-suppression techniques to manage disagreements	Conflict
	Using Humor to Deflect
	Good Will and Laughter
	Competition
	Ethical Behavior

Kaplan (1975/1976) distinguishes between two emotional maintenance styles in relationships. Maintenance-by-suppression describes a process by which the relationship partners maintain their relationship by suppressing direct communications of mutual feelings. The partners avoid explicitly stating their feelings and deflect negative affect into indirect strategies. In contrast, maintenance-by-expression describes a process by which relationship partners use direct communication of feelings as part of the maintenance process. The partners talk about the relationship. Kaplan contends that this latter form of maintenance is most effective over the long term with regard to maintaining overall relationship satisfaction.

The Early Birds show characteristics of maintenance-by-suppression relationship maintenance styles. Suppression techniques are used on a regular basis to maintain relationships on an individual day-to-day basis. Humor is one of the primary mechanisms that is used to deflect conflict. It is also a mechanism to make emotional contact. Humor is a highly regarded commodity among the Early Birds. Members are implicitly expected to be willing to be the focus of barbs and witticisms. A rather forceful serve, laughter, or an equally witty response are the behaviors that are modeled by the members. The Early Birds are aware of how they use humor to regulate group dynamics. Hendrik observed in his interview for example:

So there is ... there is competitiveness between each other. Though one of the things that happens with the repartee is that it ... it keeps it from getting unpleasant. It's not so competitive that it gets unpleasant.

The political debates that occur fairly regularly during the after-tennis conversations are also a potential point of conflict. Many of the members currently are or have been well positioned in the federal government and the military and have well articulated positions on just about anything of a political nature.

In spite of the acknowledged competitiveness of the members and the diversity of intensely held political perspectives, true arguments have occurred with exceptional rarity. In the three years that I have been a member of the Early Birds, for example, I have never seen a disagreement between two or more members that lasted beyond sparring points of view at the lounge table. Early Birds know when to back off when it comes to argument and disagreement. I have observed that when a particularly intense view is presented in the after-tennis conversations that the response is invariably to drop the subject and to move to another topic. In an almost Socratic manner, Early birds present divergent viewpoints and then agree to disagree. Intellectually this process is reframed as good fun and as a love of diversity in the group. Richard made a comment during his interview that is both typical of the types of disagreements that might arise occasionally among the Early Birds as well as being indicative of how the members reframe these instances:

And then sometimes we'll shift to you know world affairs and you know politics and there are some pretty red-faced arguments that go on with that which is kind of fun [laughter] cause people get quite a worked up. And we do have ...we do have some opposite ends of the political spectrum.

Forty percent of the members did describe in their interviews instances where arguments or misunderstandings occurred apart from political disagreements. When these occurred however, as described in the interviews, they were typically handled by one of two deflecting mechanisms:

either letting the event blow over or using humor to deflect from the disagreement. Additionally, Early Birds do not complain about each other. This is a universal. As an example there was snow and ice one morning and only three of us showed up for tennis. I made the following comment in my observation log dated Feb 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007 that is indicative of Early Bird norms:

Marty said something interesting this morning. There were only three of us for tennis this morning – lots of snow and ice – and we landed up playing Canadian doubles. He commented that we don't complain about other people not being there or how they should be there. Rather, we just get on with whoever is there.

The Early Birds do complain however, and sometimes a great deal, about nongroup circumstances that impact the group. The replacement of our round coffee table with a cumbersome rectangular one has been fodder for numerous complaints. This too is a deflective technique that directs social tensions away from intragroup processes to external agents. This theme will be returned to later in this section when findings related to social identity theory are analyzed.

In the abstract and in generalized terms the Early Birds easily express their affirmation of the group and of each other. During the interviews the Early Birds were effusive in their praise and admiration for each other and the group experience that they share. Five of the 15 members who were interviewed commented directly during their interview about how much they valued their experiences as an Early Bird. Only one of the interviewees spoke in a mildly negative way about other members and this was related to a personal preference regarding which partner that person preferred to be paired with in the morning tennis sessions.

Describing the Early Birds in terms of maintenance-by-suppression is a somewhat misleading representation of their group dynamics. The term maintenance-by-suppression seems to imply one of two things: either that there are suppressed psychosocial tensions that are not being addressed, that are being deflected, and that will at some later date explode into anger and conflict; or, that relationships are so superficial that they do not trigger psychosocial tensions in

need of resolution. Neither of these two options is in evidence in the long-term Early Bird relationships. While it is true that this social group occupies only a small portion of each of its members lives, it nevertheless represents a very important part of their lives. Consider what Fred says about the importance of this social group to his life:

I will also privately ...tell ... well I'll tell you ... it's not private. When we considered last year moving full time to Maine and we sat down and made our list of the pros and cons one of the biggest cons was leaving this group of people.

Additionally, there is no evidence whatsoever either in the individual and group interviews or in my observation logs that gives even a suggestion of suppressed psychosocial tensions. I would conclude instead that there is something missing from Kaplan's theories. There is something missing that can provide an explanation with regard to why some social relationships require either more or less of maintenance-by-suppression or maintenance-by-expression techniques to maintain their equilibrium. I will return to this discussion in chapter 5 when I reframe several existing theories within the context of my own theories of group dynamics.

**Finding:** A dialectical definition of relationship maintenance best suits the description of the Early Bird social processes.

**Table 22: Findings indicating that the Early Bird long-term relationships can most effectively be described in dialectic terms**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Bird relational maintenance processes can best be described from a dialectical perspective	Health
	Previous Early Birds
	Early Bird World Championships
	Aging and Maturing Processes

As cited earlier,, Dindia (2003) identifies four possible definitions of successful relationship maintenance. The most minimalist definition of relationship maintenance defines a

relationship as successful as long as it is not terminated. Second, a steady-state definition defines a relationship as successful if it retains the same fundamental characteristics throughout its period of existence. Third, a dialectical definition, as opposed to the steady-state position, allows for the possibility of a relationship changing over time as it adapts to changing tensions. Finally, a fourth definition places an emphasis on the repair processes that occur over time that keep a relationship healthy.

Per Dindia's recommendations that researchers should clearly identify their definition of relationship style as it is being applied to their research, I evaluated the data to determine which of the four definitions would be most useful in describing the Early Birds. I concluded that the dialectic definition was most useful. There is evidence in the data that changes have occurred in the governance structure of the Early Birds over the decades. There is also evidence that in many ways surprisingly little has changed.

None of the interviewees provided during their individual interviews a clear sense of exactly how the Early Birds came into being. Bill's interview indicated that the group actually evolved out of some members who got together to play doubles with the same partners every morning. His description of a historical moment in the group is reflective of the organic manner in which the group evolved into being:

We'd come over at 6 o'clock and everyone else who was here at 6 o'clock would be down stairs in what is now the tanning room drinking coffee. That was obviously the coffee room in those days. They wouldn't even be on the court, they wouldn't be upstairs. They would come over to drink the coffee. And I like to drink coffee. And I would come and drink my little coffee. And Bater would tag along behind me and he wouldn't drink coffee. All he wanted to do was play tennis. And one morning he finally erupted. And he announced to the world that he had come to play tennis and not to drink coffee and I could make up my mind. And this was in the face of everyone in the coffee slash tennis room. [laughter] And we all got up to play tennis on the same court. [laughter]

A few of the members who have been with the group for more than 20 years indicated in their interviews differences in how the group has organized itself as it has evolved. There has been a very slow evolution of increased structure in the service of accommodating changing member needs and in modestly improving efficiency. At the present time, for example, the group always begins tennis at promptly 6 a.m. and then finishes between 7 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. The process for picking partners has also evolved from a somewhat convoluted and noisy racket spinning process to the handing out of randomly drawn numbers. Age has also had a small impact on the structure of the group. In the past both singles and doubles were played by the group. Now only doubles are played as a small concession to age.

Perhaps the biggest outward change to the group has been the addition of the Early Bird World Championships as an annual group event. As described earlier in this chapter in interview quotes from Fred and others, the championships have become an important binding ritual for the group. Fred, during his interview also observed with regard to the almost accidental, organic way in which the tournament has evolved into the ritualistic event that it has become:

But the trophy and that event after Lee died, further solidified the group in a way that I think was an unexpected when we started. We started for fun but it became a real thing to people and people planned their travel around it.

During his interview Richard used the word *organic* to describe the evolution of the group:

No... I mean it is ... it's a very interesting group which is probably why you are doing this little study because it's sort of organic ...

This is a useful way to look at the natural evolution of the group. The Early Birds have continued to evolve as a group to match changes in its memberships and changes in relationships. That group indeed, has demonstrated a graceful capacity for adaptation to the increasing age of its members and the increase in number of members that has occurred steadily over time. Consequently a dialectical approach to evaluating the group is essential.

Perhaps one of the most striking pieces of evidence in support of the evolutionary progress of the group is the recent health and fitness campaign that many of the members have engaged in. This has been coupled with a keen interest by many members in improving their tennis skills. Hendrik during his interview made an interesting comment about these changes that will bear watching over the next few years:

Though I think this process ... these things that we are going through now where people are caring about improving its going to change the dynamics quite a bit. It's changing it already. You can see it already. So ... and I don't know that it's ... I don't know that it's for the bad. I mean what it means is you've got people who are still growing and are still trying to improve. And that's not ... that not bad at all.

In general, I would conclude that the dialectical perspective is most useful for the evaluation of social groups with long-term harmonious relationships.

**Finding:** The Early Birds have successfully resolved any dialectic tensions between the need for individual and group needs fulfillment. These findings are supportive of Self-Determination theory.



**Table 23: Findings indicating that the Early Birds demonstrate psychosocial behaviors supportive of self-determination theory**

<b>Finding</b>	<b>Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis</b>
The Early Birds in their behavior and attitudes demonstrate a highly synergistic balance between meeting individual and group needs that is consistent with self-determination theory	Conflict
	Women vs. Men
	Competition
	Early Bird World Championship
	Ease of Coming and Going
	Ethical Behavior
	Support in Times of Sickness
	Friendship
Key Need: Interesting and enjoyable companionship	Good Will and Laughter
	After-Tennis Conversation
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Support in Time of Sickness
	Sense of Equality
Key Need: Expression of personal competency	Women vs. Men
	Health
	After-Tennis Conversation
	Aging and Maturing Process
	Career after Retirement
	Competition
	Early Bird World Championships
	Support in Time of Sickness
	Appreciation for Diversity

As described earlier, there are two views on the relationship between the satisfaction of individual and group needs. One view sees the fulfillment of these two needs within the group in dialectical relationship; the other sees fulfillment of these needs as uncoupled from each other and as independent variables. Findings from the Early Birds support self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) which posits that there is a synergistic relationship between these needs. There does not need to be conflict between needs for interpersonal relatedness and individual needs for autonomy. These needs from the self-determination theory (SDT) perspective complement each other.

There is a great deal of evidence from the interviews as well as my observation notes supporting the premise that needs for autonomy and relatedness are synergistic within the Early Birds. The Early Birds in their interviews and as noted in my observation log acknowledge three core needs that are fulfilled by their group membership. First, there is the need for interesting and enjoyable companionship; second, there is the need for expression of personal competency; and third, there is the need for uniqueness and a sense of being valued as special. These needs are fulfilled through a synergistic process that balances autonomy and relatedness.

Early Birds repeated commented on two aspects of their group experience that were highly enjoyable. First, that the group was fun to be a part of on the tennis court, and second, that they enjoyed the after-tennis conversation as much as the tennis. Fred made the following comment indicative of the satisfaction that the members get from their membership:

The ... the most common visage, facial expression in this group through tennis is a smile. And if you think about it, if you look around the court, people are always smiling about something. And that's a good feeling.

Fun for the Early Birds takes on a special characteristic. They place a high value on quips, puns, and creative associations. Fun for the Early Birds is associated with being intellectually and emotionally stimulating and stimulated. The personal joy associated with this type of humor is

built out of relationship. Joann made the following comment that is emblematic of the synergetic interplay between members:

Well nothing is sacred... nobody ...you know you're ... you're just ... you can't have a thin skin around here. The guys will make fun of anything. You know. And that's all. It's a very supportive group. But no bones about it they will let you know, you know ...  
[laughter]

Having an opportunity to demonstrate personal competency is an important component of Early Bird group dynamics. Members indicated their satisfaction with both the opportunity to demonstrate skills playing tennis as well as their skills as joke makers and intellectual dialoguers. Several members commented in their interviews with regard to how competitive they were and how much they enjoyed the level and type of competition in the group. Indicative however of the synergistic relationship demonstrated by the Early Birds between the fulfillment of individual and group needs, several of the Early Birds observed that the competition between Early Birds always remains nonadversarial. This extract from my observation log from Feb 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007 is indicative of the group attitude towards competition:

We played some incredible tennis this morning. I was playing with Mort against Cleve and Hendrik. Some of the shots were amazing and I really felt so satisfied about it. It was nice to be able to play as hard as you can and not be anxious about losing. I think that's when it's the most fun – when we all really push each other. You can compete and you know that no one is going to be a hard loser even though everyone wants to win. Days like today really motivate me to try harder.

Forty percent of the interviewees mentioned in their individual interviews how highly they regarded the diversity of the group members. By association, then this allows members to be equally diverse and special. Being unique and special is clearly very important to the Early Birds. Interestingly, it is also coupled with a shared value that members place on equality among members.

At the same time that members acknowledge their own competitiveness and express their satisfaction with the level of competition in the Early Birds, there is also a strong sense of group loyalty that sometimes takes on mythological status. Several of the members described during their interviews instances when either they or another member had continued to play even when stricken with affliction. Marty commented about one such occasion as follows:

But although it's not competitive so that you know you say I've got to win today. George Striker had a heart attack and finished the set. Several of these ... the players over the years have had serious injuries and finished the set. And ... so it's almost a contradiction in terms. But its ... you don't let the group down. Or who knows why you do it. And you know George Striker was as nice a guy as you could know. But boy when it came to tennis. He was stubborn enough. 'I'm going to finish the set'.

Another instance from my own interview has particular relevance to me because it still remains so vividly in my memory:

I can remember this one time that really seems like it happened yesterday. Hart and I were playing together and he really seemed all of a sudden to be not okay, moving slower and kind of having a funny look on his face. But we finished the set and I even think we won. Then he left early – didn't stay for coffee. I found out a week or so later that he had actually had a heart attack while we were playing. These guys are really nuts! But I love them so much and life would be so different without them.

This finding stands in opposition to the research conducted by Sheldon and Bettencourt related to self-determination theory. They drew the conclusion that informal social groups are characterized by perceptions of greater autonomy and distinctiveness among members accompanied by lower levels of group identification. Clearly the Early Birds have an extremely high level of identification and commitment to their group membership as well as equally strong perceptions of autonomy and distinctiveness. This discrepancy is in part because the Early Birds have incorporated their value of diversity into their group identification.

Other findings of Sheldon and Bettencourt including their conclusion that commitments are highest when participants perceived their group to be highly distinctive from other groups and when they felt that they had close friends within the group are congruent with data from the Early Birds. I will return to a more detailed analysis regarding the dynamics individual and group needs fulfillment both in the next section pertaining to findings related to adult development and then again when I present my own theories in the next chapter.

**Finding:** Early Bird entitativity has arisen out of intragroup relationships rather than intergroup relationships.

**Table 24: Findings indicating that Early Bird entitativity arises out of intragroup processes in a way congruent with the research of Gaertner and Schopler (1998)**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds entitativity arises out of intrapersonal processes	First experiences as an Early Bird
	Evidence of EB Embedded in Self
	Group Stability
	Early Bird World Championships
	Good Will and Laughter
	After-Tennis Conversation
	Appreciation for Diversity

As described in the Literature Review, there are competing views with regard to how groups achieve entitativity. Findings from the Early Birds favor Gaertner and Schopler's (1998) view that group identification arises out of intragroup relationship and is uncorrelated with increased intergroup relationship. Gaertner and Schopler concluded from their research that groups draw their sense of identity from the relations between the individual members rather than from the collective relationship between the group and other groups.

As I reviewed the interview notes and my observation logs I noted that there were only two instances where the responses were with regard to intergroup dynamics that might be construed as contributing to Early Bird entitativity. These events involved disagreements with the health club with regard to opening times, court usage, and membership fees. Interestingly, each of these was only reported by a single person indicating low narrative linkage. One story came from Hendrik who recounted a time when the Early Birds had a disagreement with the health club with regard to increased membership fees:

Well one of the reasons that we have the donuts and we have the bagels is because in about 1985 the club had originally had a setup where playing early got you a financial break. We didn't play as much. Well the club wasn't making a lot of money. So someone made the decision that everybody was going to pay the same and the rates were going to go up. And the Early Birds were absolutely furious about this. And when we had the meeting about it, um ... it was a pretty intense meeting.

...

And he [Marty] pushed him so hard that Pete had to make some concessions to us. Marty almost got thrown out of the club based on that. But one of the concessions was donuts on Saturday mornings. So that it ... that's how all of that started. Um ... and we've enjoyed it ever since. I mean it's now 21 years. Nobody's challenged it. Early Birds get donuts on Saturday mornings. [laughter] It's now a tradition. [laughter] I'm sure they've put it in the club's budget.

Clearly, these are the types of events that can bind a group together and indeed are the types of events commonly studied by social identity theorists. In the case of the Early Birds however they do not appear to be particularly important as defining moments in their history. As I reviewed my observation notes, for example, I found no instances of reminiscing about past arguments with the club or other members who are not Early Birds. There has been an on-going

complaint about the loss of our preferred round table in the break room but even this has not been framed in us-them language.

What does appear to be important to the Early Birds are the events within the group. By far, the vast majority of the material that could be construed as being particularly relevant to enhancing entitativity pertained to intragroup events. This material had good narrative linkage indicating that it was a shared memory taking on many of the characteristics of a transactive memory. I will return to a closer examination of transactive memory later in this section.

There are two threads that run through the interviews and my observation log that are particularly powerful examples of how internal group processes have contributed to the sense of groupness that is so apparent among the Early Birds today. The first thread is with regard to how the Early Birds take care of each other in times of need. A high number of Early Birds described during their interviews times when they were ill or injured and how the Early Birds responded to them. These stories were told with great affection and appreciation and were repeated by several members from different points of view. Eight of the 15 members interviewed commented at some time during their interview about instances where one or more Early Bird came to the assistance of another Early Bird in a time of need.

The second thread running through the narratives with suggestions of entitativity is with regard to the Early Bird World Championships. Several of the members mentioned during their interviews how important the annual event was to them. Fred made the following comment during his interview. His observations are particularly interesting because they indicate how the Early Birds have intuitively linked the two strongest binding forces together into a powerful, single ritual:

But that ... I think that was one of the strongest bonding events we have. People really began to look forward to that. We had goodies for Christmas ...there were holiday season and made a big fuss about the winners and the trophy. And when Lee ... there's one ... Lee died, ah ... this group rallied around Rita as much as if it had been a church group,

they were a family group. Everybody stayed with her, and stayed at her house and talked to her and kept calling her. I called her, several people did for months later, afterwards, just checking in on her, seeing how she was doing. Marty has continued that.

But the trophy and that event after Lee died, further solidified the group in a way that I think was an unexpected when we started. We started for fun but it became a real thing to people and people planned their travel around it. And ... it's been a lot of fun ...

I will return to an analysis of these themes later when I present my own theoretical positions.

**Finding:** The incremental addition of single members over time has been an important factor in retaining Early Bird group characteristics.

**Table 25: Findings indicating that Early Bird membership has increased slowly in single member increments which has contributed to the preservation of existing group social structures**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
Early Bird membership has increased over the years by the addition of individual members in a fairly steady stream	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Historical membership data
	Group Stability

As described in the Literature Review, Van Maanen and Schein (1979) determined that groups are more likely to survive over time when members enter the group in small numbers rather than as groups themselves. This has been a characteristic of the Early Birds. New members have entered the group and left the group one at a time and occasionally two at a time or close to the same time. Additionally, there has been very low group volatility. In the three years that I have been a member for example, there have been two members, Bud and Cliff, who have moved away. There have been two other new members, Liz and Irene, besides myself. This later piece of information is particularly interesting because even though I have the impression that they have joined the Early Birds within the last two years they indicated on their interview questionnaires



that they had been members for more than five years. This discrepancy is interesting because it indicates that individuals may consider themselves in hindsight members before other members consider them members or before they begin to participate on a regular basis. Unfortunately, I did not capture sufficient data to explore this anomaly in greater depth.

**Finding:** The Early Bird social structure and behavioral patterns most closely corresponds to Fiske's (1991) definition of an equality matching model.

**Table 26: Findings indicating that Early Bird social structure most closely corresponds with Fiske's (1991) definition of an equality matching model**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds social structure corresponds with an equality matching model	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Sense of Equality
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Competition
	Ethical Behavior

Fiske (1991), as described in the Literature Review posits that there are four fundamental types of social structures: communal sharing, authority ranking, equality-sharing, and wage-based. The equality matching model is characterized by an egalitarian relationship between equals who maintain a strong sense of separation and individuality. One-person, one-vote describes decision-making within this model. According to Fiske, a need for justice, equality, and fairness propels individuals into equality groups. The Early Birds fall into this structure.

Several of the Early Birds commented during their interviews with regard to how equal everyone treats each other in the group. There was a sense in these comments that this was a welcome relief and differentiator with regard to their membership. The majority of the Early Birds, both men and women, has had or currently hold professional credentials that of necessity were gained through competition. Chuck, for example, who has a very successful career as a

physicist and who continues in retirement to stay connected to his field made the following comment whose views were shared by several others:

The other thing is I think, you know, everybody is kind of equal in a way. Though people have a variety of very interesting careers and professions. We're kind of equal. We don't have any relationship outside of this group that would make for a hierarchy for us to deal with inside the group.

The appreciation for equality among members is coupled with an equally valued appreciation for the group's diversity. There is an appreciation of each other's talents that comes through in the interviews that is totally devoid of any trace of personal competitiveness or jealousy. Equity and fairness are also reflected in the behavior of the Early Birds during tennis play. Numbers are randomly drawn, for example, to determine who plays with whom every morning. There is never any complaining about partners. Additionally, quite often there are an odd number of individuals present in the morning and not everyone can initially play doubles. In these cases, the group makes a point to play what is called no ad scoring to ensure that as many people as possible get to play a full set of doubles each morning. Together these findings present a picture of the Early Birds as maintaining an equity matching social structure in accordance with Fiske's (1991) definition.

**Finding:** While the Early Birds are a leaderless group, there have been and continue to be charismatic members who are prototypical of the values of the group. This finding is consistent with social identity theory and self-categorization theory.

**Table 27: Findings indicating that the Early Birds have prototypical members which are consistent with some aspects of social identity theory**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds prototypical members do not match the predictions of social identity theory	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Competition
	Good Will and Laughter

Social identity theorists such as Hogg and Knippenberg (2003), as cited in the literature review, hold that group members have shared prototypical self-concepts based on ingroup similarities regarding beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and feeling. Group members who are most prototypical are hypothesized to be the most liked and most socially attractive. (Hogg, 1992, 1993) Furthermore, social identity theorists posit that leadership and influence in groups with high levels of prototypicality is associated with the leader's conformity with the prototypical icon. Members more highly value the communications of those in the group who most closely conform with the prototypical icon and construct a charismatic leadership personality for that person which to some extent separates that person from the rest of the group.

This is perhaps one of the more interesting characteristics of the Early Birds. The Early Birds have a history of charismatic members throughout the entire time of the group's existence. These charismatic members are not viewed by the group as leaders per se but rather assume an implicit role congruent with what Hogg and Knippenberg would describe as the prototypical member. Characteristics already described regarding the entire Early Bird group as well as characteristics that will be described in much greater detail when I present my own theories in chapter 5 are personified by these members. These characteristics include a keen use of humor and intellectual repartee, an interesting past and current career, survival of a life threatening illness through the support of another member, living in the present with openness to new members and new experiences.

Based on the number of times that current members recalled instances involving past members during their interviews, I have identified three individuals who appear to have taken on the role of prototypical member. Lee P., whom the World Early Bird Championships trophy is named after, played an important role in the group. Lee played with the group in the 1980s and was mentioned by the members who were playing with the group at that time. George S. was also mentioned a great deal by the Early Birds during the individual interviews. When I asked the group during the group interview to describe George's importance to the group, an interesting mix of responses resulted. First, everyone who knew George uniformly agreed that he was the worst tennis player who has ever played with the group. Yet at the same time everyone also agreed that he was "brilliant, very understated, and the consummate gentleman". It became particularly interesting however when Hendrik began to reflect during the group interview on why certain individuals were remembered with such fondness by the group:

[Hendrik] I would say this. I would say that everybody here is a strong enough personality. And as we lose them in terms of being members of the group you'll find people will talk about them in the same manner that they talked about Lee and George. You hear Bud L. jokes all the time. You hear Cliff N. jokes all the time.

[Bill] I still refer to Bernice calling balls out.

[Hendrik] That's exactly right.

[Marty] And she's been dead for probably 15 years.

[Arleen] ten years ...

[Irene] oh really ...

[Marty] It's got to be ...

[Mort] More than that ... it's more than 15 years Marty...

[Marty] And we can still remember her calling balls out.

[Hendrik] I would almost say it's a method... it's ... manner... it's almost a method of mourning people who are lost from the group.

[Liz] yeah

[Marty] That's interesting

[Irene] yeah, that's an interesting ...

Based on the number of times that he was mentioned in the individual interviews and my own observations, Marty currently fills the role of prototypical member. During the group interview I posed the concept of the prototypical member at the same time that we discussed George and Bill. Immediately the group uniformly responded with "Marty" confirming my own evaluations. When I described however Hogg and Knippenberg's view that prototypical members can become isolated from the group, there was a unanimous response that this was not the case among the Early Birds. This is also congruent with my own observations of the group.

It should be noted, by the way that subsequent to the group interview Marty has received a great deal of good hearted ribbing with regard to his being identified as the prototypical member. This ribbing is on an unconscious level quite serious however. It is essential to optimal group dynamics because it functions as an antidote to any damage I might have done to group dynamics by explicitly differentiating Marty from the rest of the group. I believe that the ribbing will continue, perhaps for years, as a means to maintain one of the core group values of equality and nonhierarchical status.

The teasing will also continue to ensure that Marty is not in any way separated from group processes. This is where my findings are in disagreement with Hogg and Knippenberg. With regard to their contention that the prototypical leader becomes separated from the group because of the special role that they play, I have found that this is not occurring in the Early Birds. The importance that the Early Birds place on equality and openness precludes the exclusion of any member based on a differential role.

**Finding:** There is no evidence in the Early Birds of depersonalization or of ingroup-outgroup tension which are hypothesized by social identity theory to be a characteristics of highly cohesive groups.

**Table 28: Findings from the Early Birds do not support the hypothesis of social identity theory that depersonalization is a characteristic of highly cohesive groups**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
Depersonalization does not appear to be a characteristic of the Early Birds	Good Will and Laughter
	After-Tennis Conversations
	Appreciation for Diversity

Social identity theories focus much of their attention on intergroup relationships. Thoits and Virshup (1997) , for example say that it is in a group member's interest to highly value their own group, and therefore to work for the betterment of their group, while devaluing out-groups. These theories also posit that cohesion occurs when group members become depersonalized as they increasingly conform to the prototypical icon. A high degree of depersonalization from this perspective is positively correlated with group cohesion. This conformity extends to the emotional domain.

While the Early Birds demonstrate a high level of cohesiveness, I have found no evidence of either depersonalization or of ingroup-outgroup tension. The lack of ingroup-outgroup barriers is one of the keys to the longevity of the Early Birds and runs counter to social identity theories.

The Early Birds do share several common beliefs that have been reflected in the interviews and my observation logs. As described throughout these findings, the Early Birds collectively share an appreciation for the repartee that exists both on and off the court. They appreciate the equal way in which every member is treated including equally being open, man or woman, old or young, to teasing and joking. They share a common sense of how important the group is to each of them. They share a common expectation that if any of them is ever in need of help that the group will be there to support them.

But do these shared beliefs constitute depersonalization? I think not. The Early Birds share an appreciation and respect for their differences. This is one of the core values of the group.

Many of the members have careers in retirement that are more intellectually and creatively demanding than their pre-retirement careers. They bring this work along with their personal beliefs and values to the after-tennis conversations without fear of reprisal or censure. This sample from my observation log dated Feb 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007 is indicative of the highly personalized yet totally informal way that the Early Birds go about enriching each other's lives in a way that could hardly be called depersonalized. It also reflects how the Early Birds have taken an active role in his research study:

After-tennis conversations were great too. Marty's created a new photo book that is amazing and Mort has just come back from vacation in Hawaii. It was great to hear his observations about birds in the area. We had an interesting conversation about the enclaves on Hawaii where people have gone to retire and really do nothing at all except socialize together but have no other activities in their lives.

**Finding:** Using the Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (2002) taxonomy for characterizing the social identity of group structures, the Early Birds fall within the no threat-high group commitment category and demonstrate some, but not all, of the characteristics that the theorists associate with this category.

**Table 29: Findings indicating that the Early Birds are a no threat-high group commitment group and express some but not all of the characteristics that Ellemers, et al. associate with this type of group.**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds demonstrate some, but not all, of the characteristics of a no threat-high group commitment category	Appreciation for Diversity
	Good Will and Laughter
	Group Stability
	Conflict
	After-Tennis Conversation

Ellemers, et al. (2002) characterize no threat-high group commitment groups as primarily concerned with affirming and expressing their identity at a group level. This type of group, they contend, is motivated to positively differentiate itself from outgroups by developing collective esteem and behavioral differentiators.

There is no doubt that the Early Birds consider themselves special and unique. Several of the members as already described, mentioned during the interview how special they thought the group was and how happy they were to see this research study being done. Bill's comments are representative of both the appreciation the members have of their group as well as how they differentiate themselves by what they consider to be their unique behavior:

Oh, I think that the idea of your studying this particular group is absolutely fantastic. If it benefits you that's good. But the mere thought that the group of these people who have nothing in common except their affinity to play tennis and trade insults with each other year after year is worthwhile looking at for any sort of purpose is interesting.

It is perhaps interesting to reflect on the thought that the Early Birds have chosen to differentiate themselves from other groups by being a very psychosocially healthy group. They take pride in participating in a group experience that many of them implied in their interviews were different from less successful experiences in the past. Consider the following comment from Richard:

Very often a group like this tends to be sort of close knit and is a bit suspicious of outsiders. But in this particular case, almost anyone who comes along is ...is totally welcome. You know you feel like, 'oh ... come on, come on and play you know ...' It's one of the nice things about it.

I would suggest that Richard, whose pre-retirement career was that of a sales executive and who is now embarked on a second successful career as a landscape painter, shares with many other members past experiences of less than satisfactory group experiences. The differentiation



that the Early Birds make between themselves and others is not the cause of their cohesion but rather one of the natural and spontaneous byproducts of their successful group experience.

**Finding:** The social identity of the Early Birds is built out of both top-down and bottom-up processes which are processes which congruent with the theories of Postmes, et al. (2005).

**Table 30: Findings indicating that the Early Bird social structure has built up out of both top-down and bottom-up processes in a manner congruent with the theories of Postmes, et al. (2005)**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds social structure is built out of both top-down and bottom-up processes	After-Tennis conversations
	Competition
	Early Bird World Championships
	Appreciation for Diversity

Postmes, et al. (2005), whose research was first introduced in the Literature Review, theorized that two interactive processes are occurring in groups which contribute to the formation of social identity. In addition to the top-down influence of the collective identity as formulated in social identity theory, they also proposed a bottom-up influence contributing to social identity built out of the interactive dialogue of the members. This process is clearly in effect within the Early Birds. Members repeatedly responded that the after-tennis dialogue was one of the most pleasant parts of the group experience. The sharing of gossip, stories, and humorous incidents have contributed to an identity that was described during the interviews as an accumulation of individual incidents coalescing into a collective identity. Mort summed up during his interview this sense of that the Early Bird social identity is built up out of a history of intrapersonal incidents when he said:

Hum... [long pause] ... I, you know, I don't ... there isn't any one, you know, one thing that really stands out in my mind. Um, I think that the ... the general feeling of it is really what I would ...you know, if somebody asked me what the Early Birds were I wouldn't

be thinking of instances as much as the general feeling of it, of ... of, ah... combining the ability to, you know, to exercise and do something really different in a, in a fairly relaxed way and then also combined with the give and take of the discussions that come after the tennis. Which are to me an important part of the success of the Early Birds. The diversity of points of view and so forth...

At the same time that these day-to-day interactions have been contributing to reinforcing the social identity of the Early Birds, top-down events such as the annual Early Bird World Championships and the institutionalization of Saturday donuts and bagels have been equally important. Findings from the Early Birds are affirmations of Postmes et al.'s hypothesis that bottom up influences are equally important as more formal top-down processes.

**Finding:** There are processes in operation among the Early Birds that are congruent with Wegner's (1987) theories of transactive memory.

**Table 31: Findings indicating that transactive memory processes are present within the Early Birds**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
There is evidence that transactive memory processes are occurring within the Early Birds	Support in Time of Sickness
	Evidence of Early Birds Embedded in Self
	Competition
	Good Will and Laughter

One of the questions circulating through the theorizing and research about group processes is with regard to where cognition and indeed consciousness resides within the group. Does the group have a consciousness of its own? Does it have entitivity? Is there such a thing as a group mind? Wegner (1987) as described earlier in the Literature Review, defines a transactive memory system as “a set of individual memory systems in combination with the communication that takes place between individuals” (p. 186). According to Tindale and Kameda (2000) these shared mental models can be shared without group awareness. And Goethals (1987) additionally

adds that the position that transactive memory is most visible and viable in groups with high levels of trust and mutual appreciation.

The process of conducting individual interviews with the Early Birds created an interesting opportunity to search for evidence of transactive memory processes. It also has functioned as the kind of integrative process that Wegner identifies with creating new configurations of group knowledge. That is, the very process of conducting this study has brought together separately held memories into a common integrative group memory system codified within this study.

There is indeed evidence within the data to support Wegner's theories of transactive memory as well as to support Goethals' belief that transactive memories most often occur in groups with high levels of trust and mutual appreciation. Two particular instances from the interviews serve as illustration. These two instances center on stories that have become part of the common group mythology. These group stories were referred to by several individuals during the interview and were also known to me prior to this study as a result of the day-to-day conversations among group members. The first story has already been referred to several times in this study. It is the story of how Joann played tennis in the later days of her last pregnancy and beat Marty. Joann begins the story in her interview as follows:

So... I then... other people had probably talked about the fact that I played tennis when I was pregnant with my last child. And ... and I would beat them. And I think the reason I beat them because when they saw this ... pomp, pomp, pomp... coming across the court they would just burst out laughing and they lost their concentration. So I played til the day she was born. And so now when I go to parties with Marty and my daughter Michelle is there. She says 'I beat you before I was born!' [laughter]

Marty in his interview completes the story and then adds a new "chapter":

Um...well you know the famous story is of course being beaten by Joann S. when she was nine months two weeks pregnant. That is sorta is the base line for everything that

goes on here. Um ... We used to play singles with Joann. And we were not very good and she was always very good. And um ... she just always beat us. And it so was always the challenge could you ever win against Joann?

And she showed up ... she was nine months two weeks pregnant. And we walked onto the court and she said 'If I go into labor will you take me to the hospital?' and I said 'Only if I'm ahead.' And she said 'no seriously', I said 'Only if you concede.' And she said 'never'; and she beat me that day.

I'll give you the sequel ... a couple of weeks ago Joann and I ... and this is thirty years later ... Its maybe um... Yes it's just about 30 years later. We drew for, we drew the pills and Joann and I were nine and ten. And so we were over on the singles court so before it started I called her over and I said 'If you go into labor this morning I will take you to the hospital.' [laughter] and she said 'I'm not going to be pregnant but never!' and she beat me again.

The second example is a composite of stories about the injuries that Hart has sustained over the years while playing tennis. This set of stories is particularly interesting because of the differences in memories of the events as well as the differences in levels of information supplied by each interviewee. No one interviewee has the entire story but collectively they make up an integrative whole.

Cleve's observation from his interview indicates that he has partial knowledge of the degree of Hart's medical condition:

And I said some people have had some major things. Like one ... Hart almost has had a stroke.

Mort's interview reveals a greater awareness of the degree of Hart's medical condition:

Like Hart, I don't know if you know this but Hart had a ... had a blood vessel burst in his head ... An aneurysm in his brain. And got to the hospital in time. And they drilled a hole in his head and stopped the bleeding. He has a ... I don't know if you can see the hole up

there. And I remember going to the hospital, you know, and seeing him as he recovered. I didn't know him as I ... I know him better now than I did then. But I ... and I think a number of people did do that. And I don't know why that pops in my head. That's something that ... doesn't really have much to do with the Early Birds. But it's what popped into my head.

This observation from my own interview reveals a memory of a second medical condition of Hart's that was remembered differently by Hart and myself:

Um ... I can remember Hart and I playing together doubles, we were on the side toward the glass partitions where you can see down from the top of the club. And apparently he had a heart attack in the middle of playing. But in the typical kind of guy way he kept on playing until we finished the game. And then it just seemed like he left really, really quickly. And it wasn't until afterwards that we found out that he had had a heart attack while we were playing. But he kept on playing until we won and then he left.

And then finally from Hart's own recollections, a slightly different picture takes shape: I remember an incident with you. And ah ...you and I were playing. I think you were opposite me. And I thinking I was trying to beat you. And that's when I had my little heart attack. [laughter] So ...anyway, at that point they put a stint in. So I ...bear a stint now. I can't remember the dates.

And prior to that I had my little incident with my, my, ...when a blood vessel breaks ... anyway ... aneurism. I had an aneurism up here. [points to left part of head] And that was prior to that. And luckily it wasn't too serious though I went to the hospital about 10 in the morning after having played tennis. and ah, that was ... I was playing and I hit the ball and it went 'wonk'. I said 'That's not right.' But it went back to the opposite side and it came back. And I hit it again. And it went 'wonk'. And I said that's not right. And it came back again and I hit it once more ...'wonk'. And I said what the heck is

going on? So I went over and sat down... for awhile. Went home and took a shower.

Went to the hospital.

These two stories are significant for several reasons. First, they were considered important enough to be referred to by several people in order to be certain that they were included in this study. Second, each person brought a different perspective to the story based on different perspectives or different memory capabilities. In some cases this was almost as if they were finishing each other's thoughts. Marty and Joann's remembrances of their tennis match are particularly representative of this phenomenon. And finally, both stories were told by all interviewees with a great deal of affection and warmth that reflected a deep appreciation of each other.

This final observation points to more than a shared memory system. In addition to the way that these stories were recounted, there were also instances where the interviewees described their experience of the group in such a way that indicated that the group was working within its own shared psychosocial "ecosystem". Fred for example made the following observation that reflects the operation of a unique psychosocial ecosystem within the group:

Do we get together socially a lot? No. See, we did at one time, I think try to do that. And I don't think it was terribly successful. Because in a social environment with spouses present it is very different from the relationship that we all have sitting around the table where we're just good friends.

In a similar type of remembrance, Hendrik also noted that the group is founded on what he describes as a shared intellectual background:

It's just, you know ...it's a very well educated group. And one of the ... I remember ... its very interesting about that too. Um .... when I was in the Navy I dated ... I dated this really wonderful British girl. And she had been married and divorced. And we were at a friend of mine's house. And he had Tom Lear. A Tom Lear record. And we put it on and he and I were just cracking up cause Tom Lear's I mean even ... just ... that was 10 years

after Tom Leer made the records. And she didn't get it. She didn't get the humor in any of his music. But you could put Tom Lear on for this gang and they would all get all of the jokes. [soft laughter] So I think to some extent part of what keeps it going.... Part of what keeps it going is we all have enough of the same intellectual background. That we ... that we understand the humor.

While Hendrik attributes the longevity of the group to a shared intellectual background, it is the shared emotional processes among group members that are the dominant binding factor as well as the basis for its psychosocial identity as a unique ecosystem. I will return to a further examination of this phenomenon later in this chapter when I present my own theoretical positions.

### ***Findings Supportive/Non-Supportive of Theories of Adult Development***

As described earlier in the Literature Review pertaining to adult development theories and their implications for group relationships, there are many overlapping and/or contradicting theories regarding how adult behavior in groups is impacted by the psychosocial development levels of individual members. In this section I compare my findings to those previously described theories.

It is interesting and perhaps significant to note that many of the Early Birds began their relationships with each other in their late 30s to early 40s and have continued those relationships for several decades. According to the views of many adult developmental theorists these relationships have continued across the boundaries of more than one stage of development. From the perspective of the stage-oriented developmental models, the ages of the group members also span the boundaries of multiple developmental stages. The youngest age of an Early Bird included in the study at the time that the interviews were done was myself at 60; the oldest was Hart at 78; and the mean age in 2006 was 67.5. As Table 9 demonstrates the age differential between the youngest and oldest member has been hovering around 15years and this too points to cross-generational social cohesion. As mentioned earlier, the trend, as the average age of the

group moves steadily upward, is for individuals to join the group at an older age and to remain in the group until an older age. This means that the successful sustainment of the Early Bird group process cannot be attributed solely to the tasks or achievements of any one adult developmental stage or adult developmental model. Nevertheless, there are several findings from this study that can be related to the developmental levels of the individual members.

**Finding:** The Early Birds collectively appear to be operating at either level five or six of Kohlberg's (1969) model of moral development.

**Table 32: Findings showing evidence that the Early Birds are operating at Kohlberg's (1969) levels five and six**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds exhibit in attitude and behavior self-regulating interpersonal processes	Ease of Coming and Going
	Competition
	Good Will and Laughter
	Ethical Behavior
	Prototypical Member
	Conflict
	Growth
	Support in Time of Sickness
The Early Birds take pride in the diversity of the group	Appreciation for Diversity
	Openness
	Sense of Equality
	Good Will and Laughter
	Ease of Coming and Going
	New Member Selection Process



As described earlier, individuals operating at level five are characterized by an appreciation of the relativity of social values and rules while at the same time holding their own values and rules in high regard. Individuals operating at level six are characterized by recognition of universally operating ethical principles. I found a great deal of evidence that the Early Birds as a group are predominantly operating at these two levels. What is particularly interesting is the way that group norms “hold” individual members at these levels. That is, there is a recursive process occurring that reinforces the attitudes and behaviors of levels five and six. Individual members bring their own high ethical functioning to the group which informs the norms of the group. But at the same time group processes encourage, teach, and coach, members with regard to how to function at levels five and six. Two factors are particularly illuminating of how this recursive process plays out in the group: the observed behavior and interview notes that reflect high levels of tolerance and openness and the manner in which the group treats rules and rule making.

Several of the Early Birds mentioned with pride in their interviews what they considered to be the high levels of diversity and tolerance for diversity within the group. In point of fact there is actually relatively little demographic diversity among members. All of the members live within ten miles or so of the club in an area of Northern Virginia that has one of the highest per capita incomes in the United States. Hendrik’s comment is indicative of this diverse/not-diverse demographic:

Everybody is from a very, very different professional background. Though educational level is high across.

One area of diversity is worth mentioning however and that is with regard to gender. Many of the newer members have been women. As mentioned earlier, four of the last seven new members have been women. As one of those newer members my own entrance into the group has been refreshingly free of gender bias. The following entry from Wednesday, Jan 31<sup>st</sup> from my

observation log is indicative of the gender equality evidences in the behavior and attitudes of the Early Birds:

I had to laugh today. We landed up with three women playing with Mort. Mort was playing with Liz against Irene and myself. It was actually a good game. What is interesting is how no one thought anything about it – there were no boy-girl jokes or ribbing of Mort. When I think about it its fascinating how little gender comes up when we play or afterward having coffee and donuts.

There is also a strong sense of fairness among the members that is representative of level six of Kohlberg's model. Among other things, this plays out in the ways that rules are adopted and adapted during the morning tennis games. Mort is the "keeper of rules" for the group. He plays the role of reminding everyone when we should be playing no-ad (when we have people waiting to play) or how we should be playing if nine people show up. Mort's role is tempered by the resistance of the group in general to "rules for the sake of rules". It is important to note that this resistance does not manifest as conflict of one set of values pitched against another set of values. Rather it is played out in playful banter that while lighthearted is still clearly directive of how the group chooses to organize itself. My observations from one particular Saturday morning, March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2007, describe the process by which the group plays out this scenario:

Rules came up again. It's interesting, the group always let's Mort play the role of rules maker. It's as if the group knows that no one else has to take that responsibility since we know that Mort will always play that role for us. The first group of 4 people played about 45 minutes for one set. That meant that the other five of us who were cycling people in and out of a doubles match never had a chance to cycle in to a regular set of tennis. Mort of course felt bad for everyone. He has a deep sense of justice and fairness. He recommended that we put a time limit on the first group of people so that more people can play a regular set. Everyone laughed of course and shouted him down with 'no rules'. We didn't even discuss it --- it just never got turned into a rule.

The group's operation at Kohlberg's levels five and six has direct implications for group dynamics and the sustainment of the group processes. First, the increased tolerance for diversity and ingroup/outgroup differentials associated with level five provides the necessary conditions for maintaining group size through openness to new members and resilience to the loss of existing members. This tolerance results in a minimum of rules which could limit the introduction of new members and the participation of existing members. Members can come and go as they please. New members can enter the group with a minimum of indoctrination. Second, the adoption of universal values such as a sense of fairness, caring in time of need, and equality associated with level six provides the necessary conditions for high levels of harmony and cooperation among members. This sense of fairness and harmony is not based on a sense of obligation associated with lower levels of Kohlberg's model but rather on a sense of the universals characteristic of level six. Fred sums up this attitude as follows:

And in their own way, when someone is sick or has had an operation. We don't go out and do a grandiose thing with flowers or cards. But you do, you do a phone call or you drop by or something like that, or you know, you know the guy likes a certain subject. You go buy a book. No big fuss about it. You just do it.

**Finding:** The group members predominately demonstrate attitudes and behaviors that are consistent with theories of psychosocially mature adults.

**Table 33 Findings indicating that the Early Birds exhibit psychologically mature postformal processes**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds demonstrate many of the attitudes and behaviors associated with adult postformal operations	After-Tennis Conversations
	Good Will and Laughter
	Competition
	Support in Time of Sickness
	Prototypical Member
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Conflict
	Ethical Behavior
	Growth
	Aging – Maturing Process
	Ease of Coming and Going
	Friendship
	Group Stability
	New Member Selection Process
	Use of Humor to Deflect

In the Literature Review I presented the adult developmental theories of several stage-oriented and non-stage-oriented theorists who associate adult development with continually expanding capabilities to hold multiple, sometimes conflicting, paradigms in mind. There is evidence among the Early Birds of this capability and of the value of this capability as a means of minimizing group conflict and discord and consequently sustaining harmonious group processes.

Commons and Richards (2002) described four postformal developmental stages. They characterize the third of these levels, paradigmatic operations, as associated with synthesizing

new paradigms out of existing systems. The Early Birds perceive themselves as operating within such a new paradigm. Members in their interviews often commented about how special and unique the Early Birds are. Whether this is in fact true or not, the members collectively hold the perception that they have developed and are successfully sustaining a new paradigm of social organization. This new group paradigm is characterized by its capacity to hold multiple paradigms within it. The ability to come and go easily, the value the group places on its diversity, and the inclusionary attitudes and behaviors of the members are characteristics of the new paradigmatic operations of the group.

In addition to the ability to hold multiple concurrent paradigms, the Early Birds also demonstrate a consistent ability to maintain healthy psychosocial boundaries between their intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. The balance that has been achieved between taking care of each other and maintaining self-reliance is reflected in this observation made by Marty during his interview:

Nobody deals with the personalities. Ah...you know ... They are there but you shrug your shoulders and it's just part of the whole thing. And ... nobody has ever brought baggage to the table. Which is probably as significant as anything. You know if somebody has a health problem people will be concerned. But nobody brings personal family problems... Nobody says woe is me and ...

This observation from my own interview reflects the same views about the maturity of the group with regard to how they behave towards each other:

And this group doesn't get nosey about each other. I mean, I have never met a group of people where people don't gossip.

Allport (1961), as previously discussed in the Literature Review, associated a capacity to see oneself in a humorous light and to not take oneself seriously as a characteristic of psychologically mature individuals. As observed by 66.67% of the interviewees, a capacity for laughter and humor is a distinguishing characteristic of Early Bird interpersonal dynamics. Many

of the Early Birds commented in the interview on the good hearted teasing that occurs. Chuck, for instance remarked:

And I think also, everybody's gotten to a point in their lives where who's in charge here and 'I'm gonna' has sorta yielded... or taken ... gone a little further to the back ground and ... and the humor has become a more important component of our lives.

While the Early Birds take enormous pride in the quality of their relationships, this does not equate to being “stuck in their ways” or in any sense frozen in time developmentally. The opportunity for personal growth as a result of their participation in the Early Birds was commented on by 33.33% of the interviewees. During my own interview for example, I observed as follows about how the behaviors of the other Early Bird is reinforcing positive behavior on my part:

This group doesn't gossip. And it has been a wonderful education for me on how to keep a group together and how not to cause damage in the group. You just don't talk about each other.

In general then findings from this study clearly indicate that the Early Birds are operating at a high level of psychosocial functioning. Additionally, participation in the Early Birds affords opportunities for personal psychosocial development.

**Finding:** The attitudes and behaviors of the Early Birds are consistent with several theories that posit age-specific tasks and behaviors associated with later adulthood.

**Table 34: Findings indicating that the Early Birds demonstrate age-specific attitudes and behaviors consistent with theories of adult aging**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds demonstrate some age-specific psychosocial processes consistent with theories of adult development	Competition
	Historical membership data
	Aging – Maturing Process
	Early Birds Embedded in the Self

Several of the stage-oriented and non-stage-oriented theorists described in the Literature Review, identified age-specific behaviors and attitudes associated with later adulthood. As mentioned earlier, the average age of the Early Birds at the time this study was done was 67.5. There is also evidence that the average age of the group has been steadily moving upward. Both the interviews and my observation log provide extensive evidence that age-specific behaviors are occurring that are consistent with several of these theories.

Several theorists in the area of aging (Bellah et al., 1985; Levinson, 1988; Stevens-Long, 1988) provide evidence that later life is associated with the desire to sum up and to leave a legacy. Levinson, for instance, talks about later life being associated with finding a new balance between personal interests and those of society. Cohen describes a summing-up stage occurring generally in the seventies that is associated with consolidating life experiences into a unified story line. This is a process that is now occurring at a group level within the Early Birds. The Early Bird members without exception have been especially happy to participate in this study and feel that they have a great deal to offer to society as a whole by sharing their story. The enormous encouragement that I have received for the study as well as the positive value that members place on their membership in the Early Birds can be attributed in part to the age-specific tasks engaged upon by the majority of the members. They perceive this study to be a legacy of the group. These

remarks made by Bill towards the end of his interview, who just recently celebrated his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, are consistent with the way the group as a whole has responded to this study:

Oh, I think that the idea of your studying this particular group is absolutely fantastic. If it benefits you that's good. But the mere thought that the group of these people who have nothing in common except their affinity to play tennis and trade insults with each other year after year is worthwhile looking at for any sort of purpose is interesting.

Stevens-Longs (1988) describes the tasks of later adulthood with acceptance of one's life, an increased ability to tolerate conflict and the appreciation of other points of view, and the ability to meet one's own needs without (ab)using others. These attitudes and behaviors are in abundant evidence among the Early Birds. As described throughout earlier sections, there is virtually no conflict among the group. There is instead camaraderie based on mutual respect and appreciation. In a reflective moment over coffee on Jan 11<sup>th</sup>, Chuck shared the following sentiments that are indicative of the group's level of development:

Chuck and I finished early and we were up in the lounge having a cup of coffee and he made an interesting comment. He said that when we are young we think only about ourselves and personal achievement. It's only when we get older, he said, that we think about groups and society and our membership in it. It's only then that we see ourselves more as a member of a group rather than as an individual.

Reflecting further on Chuck's comments, it is interesting that many of the psychosocial attitudes and behaviors that theorists associate with the age-specific tasks of later adulthood are also the kinds of attitudes and behaviors that are conducive to positive group dynamics. Individuals with the ability and willingness to tolerate other points of view and the need to make a contribution to society are highly likely to make positive contributions to any group that they belong to. Seen from this perspective, clearly there is much that the Early Birds have to teach us about cooperative behavior.



**Finding:** There is compelling evidence that the Early Birds are highly adept in their use of the four mature psychosocial coping skills – sublimation, humor, altruism and suppression – that Vaillant associates with Healthy-Well aging.

**Table 35: Findings providing evidence of the use of mature coping mechanisms among the Early Birds**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
There is evidence that that the Early Birds use mature coping mechanisms as described by Vaillant	Good Will and Laughter
	Competition
	Prototypical Member
	Friendship
	Openness
	Use of Humor to Deflect
	Sense of Equality

Vaillant (2002) characterizes mature adults as having four coping skills: sublimation, humor, altruism, and suppression. These coping skills are abundantly evident within the Early Birds psychosocial processes.

Suppression is particularly in evidence during the after-tennis conversations. The group often engages in political dialogues with decidedly Republican and Democratic biases. I have observed on several occasions how these conversations progress with points of view being voiced and several rounds of opinions going back and forth. At a certain point however there is an implicit understanding that it is time to “agree to disagree” and the topic turns to something less sensitive. This observation from my notes dated Dec 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006 is descriptive of the manner in which the group exercises self-censure in the cause of harmony:

Our conversations are more like dialogue – there is space for all views. There is gentle teasing about politics positions but everyone knows s/he can speak their mind and never

really get attacked. There always seems to be a limit to how far the argument can go. This really is more like dialogue in the Socratic tradition.

Humor is one of the most powerful and fully developed of the group's defenses mechanisms. Several of the members during their interviews commented on the continual repartee between members. Indeed several members noted that our continual teasing of each other required a particularly strong personality. Joann for instance made the following comment during her interview that was common to the views of several other individuals:

Well nothings sacred... nobody ... you know you're ... you're just ... you can't have a thin skin around here. The guys will make fun of anything. You know. And that's all. It's a very supportive group. But no bones about it they will let you know, you know ...  
[laughter]

What is particularly distinctive about the group's use of humor is the fondness with which all of the members talk about the experience. It could be said that tennis is not the only competitive sport going on in the morning. The Early Birds pride themselves as much on their intellectual acumen as their cleverly disguised lobs. Indeed, the group in general is far more appreciative of a cleverly won point that has an element of surprise to it as they are of more power hitting.

Members of the group describe the group as being particularly caring of each other. Cleve for instance made the following observation during his interview:

It's a place that people who know you and care about you.... And that's probably important in anybody's life, you know...

Altruism is evident on many levels within the group. The way the group responded to two fairly recent events is indicative of how this manifests. Over the winter Fred pulled a muscle in his leg while going for a drop shot (that I hit). Immediately the group stopped playing on both courts, got ice and tended to Fred. As it developed, Fred actually tore a muscle in his leg that even as this document is being written has kept him from playing. The group maintains contact with

Fred through emails and telephone calls and he continues to be engaged albeit remotely. Recently as well, the wife of one of the male members of the group developed cancer. Cards were sent and members continue to stop and talk to the member about his wife. What is especially important about the group behavior however in these cases and in others is that there is very little conversation about these events in side conversations. That is, the group members do not gossip about each other. These behaviors are indicative of a highly refined sense of altruism that prevents members from using the misfortunes of others for their own entertainment.

Sublimation is an interesting coping skill to examine in relation to the attitudes and behaviors of the Early Birds. While Vaillant separates out humor, altruism, and suppression from sublimation, my experiences with the Early Birds suggest that it is more useful to describe humor, suppression and altruism as sublimation mechanisms. It is the overall manner in which the group competes, both in their tennis games and the verbal sparring, that forms a mechanism for translating the competitiveness that members express in their professional careers into playfulness.

The skills that the Early Birds demonstrate in their use of these four mature psychosocial coping skills have a direct bearing on the long-term maintenance of the group. Humor balances the competitiveness associated with athletic competition; sublimation tempers responses to points of view that differ between members; altruism fosters fairness and a sense of caring among members; and suppression keeps the most harmful of opinions from interfering with relationships. Collectively, the successful use of these skills is a major contributor to the sustainment of a psychosocial climate that is both free from conflict and yet highly personal. In a very real sense the longevity of the Early Bird group is both a confirmation and a celebration of the developmental achievements of its individual members. I believe that Vaillant would have no hesitation categorizing the Early Birds as healthy-well.

It is interesting that Vaillant's views on emotional defense mechanisms and their relationship to sustained relationship maintenance are dramatically different from those of Kaplan (1975/1976). While Kaplan claims a negative relationship between emotional defense mechanism

and length and quality of relationship, Valiant proposes a positive relationship between the development of these mechanisms and being categorized as healthy-well. These findings from the Early Birds, at least when pertaining to social group longevity, favor Vaillant's position. Too much honesty may not be conducive to long-term, harmonious social relationships.

**Finding:** The attitudes and behaviors of the Early Birds are consistent with contemporary attitudes towards the aging process.

**Table 36: Findings indicating that Early Bird attitudes and behavior are consistent with contemporary attitudes towards the aging process**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
There is congruence between the most recent attitudes towards aging and the attitudes and behaviors of the Early Birds	Aging – Maturing Process
	Good Will and Laughter
	Support in Time of Sickness
	Career after Retirement
	Competition

My Literature Review briefly touched upon research related specifically to our social attitudes towards aging in America. There is evidence from this study that the attitudes and behaviors of the Early Birds are indicative of new attitudes towards aging that are very different from views held as little as 50 years ago.

First, the group strongly resists being categorized as “old” while at the same time maintaining a negative stereotype of aging in America. Many of the interviewees distinguished themselves and the group as a whole as different from their stereotypical views of other aging Americans. As mentioned earlier in the Literature Review, the group specifically objected to being researched as old and indeed insisted on a change in the title to my research to eliminate the phase *older adults*.

My observations of the Early Bird are consistent with the findings of Celejewski and Dion (1998) with regard to the comparisons that the Early Birds make between themselves and other aging Americans. As noted by Celejewski and Dion “... elderly adults themselves have been shown to hold negative beliefs about the life circumstances of the aged, particularly when evaluating the “elderly in general” or a prototypical member of this age category” (p. 206). Indeed it is important to the Early Birds to distinguish themselves from what they implicitly hold as a negative stereotype of aging and the aged. They often describe themselves as not acting their ages which is consistent with the findings of other researchers. (Baum & Boxley, 1983)

Kaufman’s (1986) qualitative research into how older Americans find meaning in their lives is also highly consistent with my findings. Her following observation about her subjects is very much how I would characterize my research findings on the Early Birds. “The old Americans I studied do not perceive meaning in aging itself; rather they perceive meaning in being themselves in old age” (p. 6).

Several of the studies from the 1970s and 1980s (Bellah et al., 1985; Levinson, 1988) describe later adulthood as a time of reminiscence and consolidation. I found extremely little reminiscence among the Early Birds. The group members are extremely forward looking, firmly rooted in the present, and hopeful of the future. Indeed, the resistance of the group to reminiscence almost became an obstacle to my data collection process. As described earlier the group provided surprising, at least to me, few actual stories from their past. The members were far more interested in talking about the value of the group to their lives right now rather than reflecting on past events.

Living in the present has had a positive influence on the long-term sustainment of the group. First, the group does not dwell on the loss of members that is the inevitable result of death, moving away to retirement communities, or being too infirm to play. When members are gone, they are gone. Occasionally names will come up in conversation but in the three years that I have been a member of the group I do not recall ever a time when someone has equated the loss of a

particular member with a diminishment of the group as a whole. Neither people leaving the group nor people joining the group are a threat to the group self-image of those present. Living in the present allows the group to change over time and yet still survive as a group that can be called the Early Birds. As Cleve said in his interview, “I see this group going on and on”.

**Finding:** There is evidence that the Early Birds provide loss management support for some members that is consistent with the theories of Baltes and Smith (1999).

**Table 37: Findings indicating that Early Bird membership provides loss management support**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
Membership in the Early Birds provides loss management support for some members	Good Will and Laughter
	Friendship
	After-Tennis Conversations

Several researchers (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990; J. Smith & Baltes, 1999) have noted that the role of relationships changes throughout the lifespan. Later in life individuals are drawn to relationships that provide compensation for the inevitable losses that we all eventually experience. Several of the Early Birds commented about the value of their early morning tennis games as a way to create and maintain connections that can be interpreted as compensating for personal and/or professional losses.

Liz, who lost her husband several years ago said:

Well I guess it's just that it's a great feeling to get up at 5 o'clock every morning and friends that I tell that I play tennis at 5 o'clock can't believe that. But I mean it's just a wonderful event to have every morning to look forward to. To get up and say, oh I'm going to play tennis ... And knowing that you will have a good time. I mean, it's not competition and it's not you know gee I hope I play my best or whatever, just showing up and playing and enjoying everyone.

Chuck, a now-retired eminent physicist observed:

So it has really been an important aspect of my retirement I guess is what I would really. I probably need much more than I did before I retired. .... It's been great. It's been a very important part for 27 years for me now. 27 years, that's not a half, but a good fraction of my .... It's always just something ... something we get up in the morning to do...that's what it comes down to ...

And, Rivers, a now-retired physician also observed:

I enjoy the coffee hour after the tennis. And so it's a good ... And that's an important part for me because I live alone and so I get a chance to socialize and relate to other people. That's good for me.

This is not to say that Early Bird relationships are dependent. Far from it. But there is a sense of preciousness that permeates the interviews. Indeed, the manner in which the group members repeatedly describe themselves as “special” can also be interpreted as a stop-loss strategy. As mentioned above, the Early Birds as a group carry a decidedly negative view of being categorized as elderly, old, senior citizens, or any of the other terms that are used to distinguish, and perhaps marginalize, older adults. In seeing themselves as special the Early Birds behave in a manner consistent with the findings of Celejewski and Dion who when researching perceptions of aging in America found that “ .... both younger and older adults regarded themselves as an exception to the generalized view of elderly adults” (1998, p. 214).

Holding an image of themselves as special in a sense allows the Early Birds to avoid a label of *old people* which they associate with loss and diminished capacity. We all recognize how very fortunate we are to have found each other. All of us face the real possibility like Rivers, of living alone in the not too terribly distant future. The role of the group as loss manager, whether explicitly or implicitly recognized by individual members, is a powerful positive motivation for group continuance. There is something immortal about the Early Birds. Members come and go, life goes on. I agree with Cleve who I quoted earlier. I can easily imagine the Early Birds as a group 50 years from now. That's a nice thought.

**Finding:** The Early Birds describe in their life stories examples of later life creativity that are highly consistent with the theories of both Cohen(2000) and Tahir and Gruber (2002).

**Table 38: Findings indicating that the Early Birds are highly creative both on and off the court**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds demonstrate high levels of creativity in their lives and in their relationship to each other	Good Will and Laughter
	After-Tennis Conversations
	Career after Retirement
	Competition

As described in the literature review, several theorists positively link creativity to the tasks of later life. In that section I tentatively placed the Early Birds in the high mobility/high energy quadrants of Cohen's (2000) social portfolio matrix. Cohen equates these quadrants with high levels of involvement in groups and individual activities and with it a balance that facilitates creative processes. My continued observations of the Early Birds as well as the interviews corroborate this initial assessment. Tahir and Gruber's (2002) emphasis on the role of interrelational networks providing an affective environment for creativity in later life is highly relevant when describing the attitudes and behaviors of the Early Birds. I have observed on an on-going basis how the Early Bird group experience foster creativity among its members.

First, virtually everyone commented during their interviews regarding the repartee that occurs on court. They expressed their enjoyment with the sparring and playfulness of the exchanges. Even when they are not the leaders of the jesting they still expressed enjoyment with the process and in many ways played the foils for other member playfulness. Mort for example made this comment that reflects both his role and that of the jokesters in the group:

Um ... I think, you know, one of the things that, another thing that pops in my head are, are the jokesters that we have. You know, we lost one in Bud's moving and Cleve comes with his jokes and so forth. And I'm not a ... I don't remember ... I've never been a joke



person. I don't ... rarely remember them and ... I don't really concentrate on doing jokes.

But I've enjoyed ... You know it's interesting because ... I don't think I was with people who joked around very much for many, you know, for most of my working career. The ornithologists don't joke around very much. [laughter]

Many of the Early Birds also engage in individual creative activities away from the group and then bring back to the group their creative products. Cleve, whose day job is that of a cardiologist, is reviving his career as a country western singer. Twice a year many of the Early Birds attend his concerts at the local music hall. He shares his experiences with the group and in many ways we become a backdrop for his efforts. Marty is a Capitol Hill photographer who often brings his pictures to the group coffee sessions to share with us. Marty, who is in his 70s, has noted that he has been busier publishing photo books over the last two years than at any other time in his life. Chuck too, has recently become involved in photography and has thrown himself into creating professional level photo journals with pictures from his many trips abroad. Mort continues to volunteer at the Smithsonian and has developed a significant reputation there as an ornithologist. I have to count also in our creative efforts my own return to school in my 50s and 60s as another expression of our creative efforts. Indeed, I suspect that my selection of the Early Birds as the topic for my research may in part be due to an unconscious desire to be supported by the positive affective environment surrounding the Early Birds. In a sense this study is the shared creative collaboration of the entire group.

**Finding:** The psychosocial environment surrounding the Early Birds is conducive to adult development as well as sustainment of healthy psychosocial processes.

**Table 39: Findings indicating that Early Bird membership fosters positive intrapersonal and interpersonal development**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
Early Bird membership provides a supportive environment for psychosocial growth	Good Will and Laughter
	Competition
	Support in Time of Sickness
	Prototypical Member
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Conflict
	Ethical Behavior
	Evidence of Early Birds Embedded in the Self
	Growth
	Friendship
	Health
	Group Stability
	Sense of Equality
	Use of Humor to Deflect
	After-Tennis Conversation

Finally, I would like to conclude this section by responding to the challenge posed by developmental theorist Kegan (1982) that I first brought to attention in the Literature Review. Kegan posed the question, “what”, he asks, “...will a workplace or organization” look or feel like “when it can culture interindividuality as well as institutionality” (p. 247)? I can respond to Kegan quite simply. It would look and feel a lot like the Early Birds.

As documented throughout this section, the Early Birds as a social organization sustain the developmental needs and goals of its members. Collectively its members model the behaviors and attitudes associated with several models of postformal adult development. This modeling

recursively engages members into adopting these behaviors. This environment also is supportive of the growth of members. We bring ideas to the coffee sessions. We bring the results of our individual creative efforts to the group for approval and support. We test our wit as we parley quips across the net along with our best forehands.

Members recognize that they have used their group experiences as a learning mechanism. Cleve made the following comment in his interview which is a sentiment shared by several members, myself included:

And we've seen you know each other grow you know playing tennis and learn from each other and everything like that ... so ... but one thing I've said about these guys that if something is wrong with anybody they are like one big family you know ... if somebody is ill, you know you get an email, if somebody is in the hospital or everybody is calling ...

Members are also aware that the Early Birds are an important asset to the local community. This observation by Richard is indicative of the attitudes of the members towards the value of the group within the local context:

I think actually we are a benefit to the club from that point of view. Which means any new person joining the club can get a game of tennis. You know ... which is kind of nice to be able to say that. Because if you are a stranger from outside and you want to play. You are going to have to screw up your courage and call somebody on the list as opposed to the Early Birds where you can simply show up and be instantly welcomed in.

This easy balance between interindividuality and institutionality is one of the keys to the long-term success of the Early Birds. I will have more to say about the attributes of this kind of organization when I present my own theories in chapter 5.

### ***Findings Supportive of Theories of Adult Attachment***

As described earlier in the Literature Review, there is a limited amount of research in support of the application of adult attachment theory to group dynamics. This research extends the influence of attachment-related behavior beyond the mother-child dyad and adult romantic dyads into broader social settings. Even so, the research remained couched in an individualistic paradigm. The application of attachment theory to group processes will become the foundation of my own theorizing. For this reason I will cover findings related to adult attachment theory in an in depth analysis in chapter 5.

### ***Gender-Specific and Race-Specific Findings***

Although only a small portion of the Literature Review was devoted specifically to gender differences and none of the literature review was devoted to an examination of racial differences that may have relevance to a study of long-term group relationships, the interviews did bring up gender-specific views and race-specific views of the group that require examination and which may have bearing on the longevity of the group.

**Finding:** There is a difference in how the group is perceived by the women who are members compared to the how it is perceived by the men who are members.

**Table 40: Findings indicating that female Early Birds view the group differently than male members of the group**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
Women member view the Early Birds differently than males	Women vs. Men

Five of the 15 people interviewed for this study were women. Table 9 compares the number of years of membership for the men compared to the women. That table shows that on average the male members of the group have been with the group almost twice as longer than the

women. Indeed it is interesting to note that the over the last 10 years half of the new members have been women.

During the interviews all the women either directly or indirectly identified the group as a men's group. This was not the case with the men. None of the men identified the group as a gender-specific group. Instead, the men were more likely to describe the group as having a high level of diversity.

Arleen was the most explicit in her comments about the differences in male and female membership and made the following comment during her interview:

But women are definitely secondary to this group. And ...the guys show a lot more ...when they ... when they're in groups of like 8 or 10 they're very ...the topics are much broader ... at one point ... the group ... the discussion has varied depending of course who's in it.... but a couple of years ago it was a lot of war stories ...I don't know if you remember that?

Even Joann, who is among those with the longest tenure in the group and the woman with the longest tenure in the group, referred to the group occasionally during her interview as a "bunch of guys":

Several of the women described in their interviews their hesitancy about joining the group because they perceived it as a men's group that they would not be welcomed into. Irene made this comment about her initial entrance into the group that is at once reflective of her preconceptions and the way that gender-specific dynamics have continued to play out in the group:

Umm, I was a little hesitant at first. I had been playing a lot of tennis with Liz and some other, other women uh ... in the evenings but .... And one of the reasons I was hesitant, it looked like mostly like a guy group, Although Joan, I don't know, I can't remember her last name, but Joan seemed to be the one woman in the group. She had sort of, kind of broken the gender line ... laugh ...but they, I, I ... you know... they said okay, they

seemed to be fairly welcoming and this was at a time when, there was a ...there was a little furor, Oh Liz and I sometimes play in the mornings ...but the Early Birds would crowd us out ... and, uh ... We ... so I ... there was a ... some kind of meeting with the Early Birds... and, and ... I asked if I could attend the meeting even though I wasn't an Early Bird to find out what was going on with the Early Birds. And I think it was at that time they, you know, they, well sure you can come and play. And the first time I came on the court Marty just put his arm around me and said, you know, kinda ...welcome. [Laughter] ... and so I felt very comfortable right away with the group. I didn't feel like I was kind of intruding.

Even though the female members of the group are inclined to describe the group as a men's group it should be noted that in practice the group operates with an enormous amount of equality between genders and between races. First, there is complete equality in both the formal and informal rules that govern tennis play. As described earlier, we draw numbers in the morning to determine who plays together. It is not uncommon to have three women and one man playing together. Nor is it uncommon to have three men and one woman on the court together. In my recollections I cannot remember a time when any of the men have been resentful of the presence of a woman on the court. This entry from my observation log from Jan 31<sup>st</sup> is indicative of this group dynamic:

I had to laugh today. We landed up with three women playing with Mort. Mort was playing with Liz against Irene and myself. It was actually a good game. What is interesting is how no one thought anything about it – there were no boy-girl jokes or ribbing of Mort. When I think about it its fascinating how little gender comes up when we play or afterward having coffee and donuts.

Age of course is a great equalizer when it comes to tennis and the differential between the capabilities of the women and the men are relatively small for most of us. Indeed, several of the women possess tennis skills – Joann's backhand slice shot, my spin serve, and Liz's capabilities

to get every ball back, for example – that bring comments of respect and appreciation from both the men and the women on the court.

**Finding:** The Early Bird social structure supports the theories of Baumeister and Sommer (1997) that men form social groups that are broad and varied but only partially supports their descriptions of the characteristics of such groups.

**Table 41: Findings indicating that the Early Birds have some, but not all characteristics of male social groups**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
The Early Birds have some but not all characteristics of typical male social groups	Competition
	Ease of Coming and Going
	Isolated from Rest of Life
	Evidence of Early Birds Embedded in the Self
	Early Bird World Championships

When I reviewed the literature with regard to the differences between male-dominant and female-dominant social groups I noted at that time that Baumeister and Sommer (1997) posit that while both men and women strive for belongingness, they pursue relationships in different ways. Men, they propose seek out more broadly and diversely defined relationships while women tend to prefer fewer but more deeply related relationships. Similar research by Gabriel and Gardner (1999) also concluded that men and women equally seek interrelatedness however men find this through collective identities and women through individual friendships.

The relationships between the Early Birds seem to follow this pattern. That is, there is an extremely strong identification among members with being an Early Bird. This observation by Chuck reflects the degree to which the members identify with their membership:

No it has really been an important aspect of my retirement I guess is what I would really.

I probably need much more than I did before I retired. I mean Fred, he'll probably tell you

this but he says, 'We would move to Maine but this is just such an important part of my life that I hate to give it up.' And a lot of people say that they don't want ... the only reason they stay around here anymore is the tennis.

At the same time that the members value being Early Birds their relationships nevertheless also remain somewhat broad and general. The Early Birds highly value their time together playing tennis and sharing conversations afterwards yet for the most part, they do not extend these relationships beyond this early morning time together. Their relationships as Early Birds remain segmented from the rest of their lives.

Forty percent of the Early Birds commented during their interviews about how they appreciated the diversity of the group. This is consistent with the research of Cross and Madson (1997), cited earlier, that noted that men value social relationships characterized by uniqueness.

There are however discrepancies between my findings and those of Baumeister and Sommer (1997) who describe male social connections as dominated by hierarchies, status seeking, and power seeking. This is not congruent with the Early Bird social structures. The Early Birds do not operate under the hierarchical power structures that Baumeister and Sommer equate with predominantly male social groups. The Early Birds are a truly leaderless group. Even the responsibility for the distribution of numbers in the morning to determine who plays with whom is randomly rotated among the members based on who is most likely to show up each morning. The ease of coming and going that 26.67% of the interviewees favorably commented about is reflective of the lack of hierarchical, power based structures. The men themselves note the difference between the Early Birds and other male social groups that they have belonged to. Chuck for example, made this comment during his interview that is reflective of the appreciation that the members have for the relaxed atmosphere of the group dynamics:

Anyway, it is a very interesting group I ... and I enjoy the discussions about as much as the tennis. And ups and downs don't put you, you know, it's not so hierarchical as if we were playing singles, you know. There would be a king of the hill and everybody's trying



to bump him off or move up the ladder. And it isn't the moving up the ladder that's so important. It's the, I can come and play and do some exercise and have some motivation to do some exercise.

In defense of Baumeister and Sommer (1997) however I refer back to their own writings where they say, "Concern over power may simply be an unavoidable byproduct of the broader social sphere orientation of men because equality and mutuality are relatively rare in large groups" (p. 42). There is a power dynamic in the Early Birds. I find that its locus rests not at the individual level but at the group level. Members identify with the uniqueness of the members and draw from the power of being associated with such a group. In this sense the Early Birds are an unusual group.

**Finding:** There is a subtle ingroup/outgroup difference in the way that members perceive the group that can be interpreted along gender and race lines.

**Table 42: Findings indicating that there is a subtle ingroup/outgroup awareness among members who consider themselves to be a part of the out-group**

Finding	Primary Nodes / Categorical Analysis
There is a subtle ingroup/outgroup awareness among members who consider themselves to be are part of the out-group	Women vs. Men
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Sense of Equality

One of the more interesting things that I noticed as I transcribed the interview notes were the differences in tense that was used by the interviewees to describe the group and the group members. All of the men with the exception of Cleve, whose interview I will comment on in the next few paragraphs, consistently used the first person when describing the group. "We" and "us" were commonly used. In contrast several of the women and the one African-American member of the group, Cleve, described the group members occasionally using "they" and "them" as they described events occurring in the group. Even Joann, who has been a member for over 20 years

and who, through most of her interview, referred to the group in the first person changed tense when she made the following comment about the group:

Well nothings sacred... nobody ... you know you're ... you're just ... you can't have a thin skin around here. The guys will make fun of anything. You know. And that's all. It's a very supportive group. But no bones about it they will let you know, you know ...  
[laughter]

Although in my own self-interview I described the group in the first person using “we” and “us” I too have at times unconsciously described the group in the third person. This occurred for example at a Union Institute and University School of Professional Psychology workshop when I was presenting the outline for this study to my peers and to the doctoral program staff. It was at this time that one of the faculty members, Dr. Donald Klein, interrupted my presentation to make the observation that I was speaking about the group in the third person even though I was describing myself as a member. What surprised me about Dr. Klein's observation was how totally unaware I was that I was making this distinction.

I consider this finding a reminder that we are all concurrently members of many interrelated groups and social constructs. It reflects that demographic groups who feel marginalized within society itself are likely to also bring these senses of being “on the outside” to whatever other groups that they become members of. I suspect that this finding would be the same in any group that consists predominantly of middle class white men in contemporary American society. It is a significant quality of the Early Birds that it's non-white, non-male members, despite at some level feeling themselves to be not wholly central to the group, have continued to participate in the group on a long-term basis and have indeed been integral contributors to the group's success.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

### ***Organizational Relationship Theory***

The previous chapter compared the findings from this study to a wide variety of previous theoretical positions, providing support for many of those theoretical positions and questions regarding others. Each of those perspectives provided evidence supporting one or more factors that could potentially contribute to harmonious group longevity. But is the whole perhaps more than the sum of the parts? Is there a broader, more generalizable perspective, one that has not been identified before, that can provide a better explanation as to why a group of individuals should choose to sustain a harmonious relationship over an extended period of time? There is such a broader, more generalizable, and more encompassing explanation. In this section I present my theoretical hypotheses related to emotional processes in groups which I have termed *organizational relationship theory* as well as the evidence from this study which is supportive of portions of the theory while remainders of the theory remain to be further researched.

Organizational behavioral researcher Cunliffe states that the radical reflexive researcher should acknowledge “the constitutive nature of our research conversations”, “constructing ‘emerging practical theories’ rather than objective truths”, and focus “on life and research as a process of becoming rather than already established truth” (2003, p. 991). Biologists Maturana and Varela also say this about the theory-building process:

An explanation is always a proposition that reformulates or recreates the observations of a phenomenon in a system of concepts acceptable to a group of people who share a criterion of validation. Magic, for instance is as explanatory for those who accept it as science is for those who accept it. (Maturana & Varela, 1998, p. 28)

It is from within this relational constructionist framework that I propose to present an extrapolation of my research findings as support for a broader interpretation of group relational

processes. As already noted at several points earlier in this study, much of the research and theorizing regarding the psychosociology of groups couches the arguments in the language of the individual. In this section I will strive to move away from the language of the individual to the language of relationship.

To summarize the research presented earlier in this study regarding attachment theory, the most fundamental and earliest to develop of our relational assumptions are those that pertain to how we define ourselves and how we anticipate the world will respond to our needs. Is the world a safe place, am I worthy of protection, care, and love, and are those who care for me reliable and trustworthy? Developmental psychologists (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1973, 1982; Main & Solomon, 1986) describe these assumptions under the theoretical framework of attachment theory. Four attachment styles, or working models, have been defined by these theorists: *Secure attachment* which describes a healthy, optimal balance between separation and togetherness between the child and the primary care giver who is seen as dependable, trustworthy and loving; *avoidant attachment* which is characterized by distancing and emotional rejection of a caregiver who is seen as not dependable, loving or trustworthy; *anxious-ambivalent attachment* which is characterized by a neediness and overly emotionally enmeshed response to a caregiver who is seen as emotionally distant and neglectful; and finally, *disorganized attachment* which represents the most profoundly disturbed of responses with the child unable to form a coherent response style to a caregiver who is bewildering to the child.

Increasingly, psychologists are realizing that these early relationship patterns, commonly referred to as working models, continue to affect how we form relationships throughout the lifespan with other individuals and even with groups. They “shape an individual’s beliefs about whether the self is worthy of love and whether others can be trusted to provide love and support”, and they “influence the kinds of interactions individuals have with others and their interpretations of these interactions” (Mickelson et al., 1997, p. 1092). Working models encompass both a self-conception and an other-conception. They are important because they become the basis for

predicting the behavior of others in social relationships and for planning one's own behavior. These working models differ from other social-cognitive structures in that first, they are more driven by motivational needs and goals; second, they are formed out of needs for emotional fulfillment and are consequently more affect-laden than other social-cognitive structures; and third, that they are explicitly interpersonal and relational. (Collins & Allard, 2001) As such, given that they are so much a part of basic reaction patterns they tend to be far less accessible to conscious reflection.

As the breadth and depth of investigation into adult attachment styles has expanded it has remained however constant and limited in one fundamental sense. It has continued to view attachment and how it influences relationships from the perspective of the individual. That is, it has continued to study attachment as a relationship process between a subject and an object, as a relationship between an individual and either another individual or an individual and a group of individuals.

However, what happens when we open ourselves to the possibility of talking about attachment styles using the language of social constructionism? First, and most importantly, we open ourselves to the possibility of examining attachment styles not as individual processes but rather as social and relational styles existing at the group and organizational level. That is, we open ourselves to the possibility of viewing attachment-related behavior as a cultural phenomenon rather than an individual phenomenon. Indeed, I propose that a great deal of what we describe as group and organizational culture can be explained in terms of organizational relationship patterns.

I propose to reframe attachment theory within the relational, social constructionist, paradigm. It is my belief that there are patterns of attachment – cognitive, affective, and behavioral – in operation within groups, organizations, and societies. These patterns manifest as working models held not at the individual level as proposed by earlier attachment theorists but rather at the group or societal level. Indeed I propose that we are embedded in networks of these

working models that have a profound influence, primarily unconscious, on how we think, feel, and behave. I further propose, and will demonstrate in a later section, that the Early Birds are representative of an identifiable pattern of relational attachment.

I propose that we look at relationship patterns as being similar in their characteristics to those of an indirect field effect in a manner analogous to the way that gravity operates on the physical body. Doing so allows us to talk about organizational relationship patterns in the same ways that we talk about cultures or ecosystems. Indeed, I propose that an organization's relationship pattern is one aspect, and perhaps the dominant aspect, of its psychosocial cultural ecosystem.

As described earlier, there is precedent within the social constructionist and postmodern literature for this perspective. Shotter (2003) and others, for example, have posited an ethos within groups. Anderson, Keltner, and John (2003) concluded from their research that there was evidence for a phenomenon they label as *emotional convergence* which is the result of the “...satisfaction of mutual goals, and in the long run, relationship satisfaction and longevity” (2003, p. 1055). In recent research, Yorks, Neuman, J. Kowalski, and D. Kowalski (2007) describe collaborative social space as follows:

Collaborative social space embodies a social and emotional atmosphere in which group members experience a sense of engagement, safety, energy, flow, and synergy resulting in generative learning and cooperative action that they perceive as resulting from a unique collective experience. This is a collectively experienced phenomenon. (p. 355)

This perspective places organizational relationship theory within the bounds of Gergen's more extreme relational constructionist position which Gergen describes as follows:

With postmodern consciousness begins the erasure of the category of self. No longer can one securely determine what it is to be a specific kind of person – male or female – or even a person at all. As the category of individual person fades from view, consciousness of construction becomes focal. We realize increasingly that who and what we are is not

so much a result of our ‘personal essence’ (real feelings, deep beliefs, and the like) but of how we are constructed in various social groups. (1991, p. 170)

This perspective also places this study of organizational relationship theory within the bounds of what Thompson (1998) categorizes as the Type III socially shared cognition research paradigm of social cognition research. This type of research assumes that “social interaction constitutes cognition” (p. 3). It is characterized by “(a) a focus on dyads and groups as entities, (b) interaction among persons, (c) coordination and synchrony among interacting persons, and (d) development and change” (p. 3).

Although I place organizational relationship theory within the social constructionist paradigm, examining attachment theory through the relational lens is of necessity a curious and somewhat contradictory operation. Attachment theory in many ways is the penultimate modernist theory. With its focus on dyadic subject-object relationships, it can almost be seen as being obsessed with the development of the individual. (Indeed, there is a correlation between the importance given to attachment theory in the United States and the equally exalted role that American culture ascribes to individual achievement.) Yet at the same time attachment theory is about relationships. And if we turn our focus to the relational aspect, the “lines between the boxes” so to speak, then there is a case for moving the locus of attachment patterns from the individual to the psychosocial ecosystem within which individuals relate to each other. Nevertheless, this change in focus requires using much of the modernist language of attachment theory to describe relational phenomenon. The temptation to reify the conceptual model presented here into a modernist subject-object paradigm should be resisted.

The conceptual model for organizational relationship theory is predicated on the two-dimension, four-category model of adult relationship attachment style developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). I view the self-concept as comprised of both continuous and discontinuous working models connected by a network of relationships that sometimes contradict each other. Although I take a dimensional perspective, I do so with the caveat that clustering of dimensions

in trait-like fashion tends to occur due to recursive feedback loops in the working models.

Clustering of dimensions is the basis for the generalized structure of the model and should not be considered reification into trait-like characteristics.

As described in detail in the Literature Review, Bartholomew and Horowitz elaborated on the original model of adult attachment and transformed it into a two-dimensional, four-category model. Their model focused on differences in self and other internal working models as the framework for describing attachment patterns. The two dimensions of the Bartholomew and Horowitz model are the views that the individual holds of the self and the view the individual holds of the other. Table 43 compares the individual-oriented dimensions of the Bartholomew and Horowitz model to the relational-oriented dimensions that I hypothesize are characteristic of organizational relationship theory.



**Table 43: Comparison of the dimensions of the Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) model of adult attachment to the dimensions of the organizational relationship theory**

	Bartholomew and Horowitz model of Adult Attachment	Organizational Relationship Theory
Working model of self	<p>The positive or negative sense that one has of one's own importance and value, especially as being worthy of the love and respect of another.</p> <p>Triggered by the dynamics of the romantic relationship.</p> <p>Acted out in the individual-to-individual relationship</p>	<p>The positive or negative sense that one has of the importance and value of oneself as an individual member of the group, and/or the positive or negative sense that one has of the importance and value of one's own group, especially with regard to meeting the needs of the group while having individual needs met by the group.</p> <p>Triggered by the dynamics of the relationship between an individual or a group with the group or with an individual who is considered to be a representative of the group.</p> <p>Acted out in individual-to-individual, individual-to-group, group-to-individual, and group-to-group relationships.</p>

	Bartholomew and Horowitz model of Adult Attachment	Organizational Relationship Theory
Working model of other	<p>The positive or negative sense that one has of the importance and value of another individual, especially as being the object of the love and respect.</p> <p>Triggered by the dynamics of the romantic relationship.</p> <p>Acted out in the individual-to-individual relationship.</p>	<p>The positive or negative sense that the group or a representative of a group has of the importance and value of another group or a representative of another group, especially with regard to meeting the needs of the group while having individual needs met by the group.</p> <p>Triggered by the dynamics of the relationship between an individual or a group with the group or with an individual who is considered to be a representative of the group.</p> <p>Acted out in individual-to-individual, individual-to-group, group-to-individual, and group-to-group relationships.</p>

The difference between the self-other dimensions of the two models centers on the locus of attachment-related cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors. The social constructionist perspective of organizational relationship theory places that locus at the social/relational level. Even though individuals perceive that they are operating at an individual-to-individual level, they are actually embedded in social ecosystems that contextualize their cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors. Individual action is always contextualized by a multitude of social constructs. Thus, organizational relationship theory is not particularly concerned with individual-to-individual interaction except as it functions as an instantiation of the various social constructs that it is embedded in.

The difference between the two models also shifts the locus for the evaluation of psychosocial well-being. Organizational relationship theory allows for, and indeed requires, conceptualizing psychological health at the group or organizational level. I will return to the implications of this aspect of organizational relationship theory later in this chapter when I expand on the theoretical and practical implications of organizational relationship theory. It is important to note however that organizational relationship theory adds a psychosocial component to social constructionist theory that has been predominantly lacking from the predominantly cognitively oriented theorizing.

I have retained Bartholomew and Horowitz's four-category model along with its labeling to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy patterns of organizational attachment. As with the model of Bartholomew and Horowitz, only the secure attachment style in organizational relationship theory is considered to be psychosocially optimal. The other three styles, avoidant, dismissing, and fearful are collectively described as insecure attachment styles and are expressions of psychosocially distorted relationship styles. Figure 4 is a graphic representation of the model for organizational relationship theory.

<p><u>AVOIDANT</u></p> <p>positive view of self</p> <p>Negative view of others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Organizational and social isolation</li> <li>● Avoidance of conflict</li> <li>● Lack of awareness of the needs of others</li> </ul>	<p><u>SECURE</u></p> <p>positive view of self</p> <p>positive view of others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● High performing teams</li> <li>● Open systems, adaptive</li> <li>● Responsive to the needs of others needs</li> </ul>
<p><u>FEARFUL</u></p> <p>Negative view of self</p> <p>Negative view of others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Emotionally abusive</li> <li>● Avoidant of responsibility</li> <li>● Low productivity</li> </ul>	<p><u>PREOCCUPIED</u></p> <p>Negative view of self</p> <p>Positive view of others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● High levels of conflict, internecine warfare</li> <li>● Destructive competition</li> <li>● Inwardly focused</li> </ul>

**Figure 4: The two-dimensional, four-category model of organizational relationship theory**

The following paragraphs are brief theoretical descriptions of the four organizational relationship patterns. These opening theoretical descriptions are extrapolations and reframing of current research on attachment from the social constructionist perspective. In the next section I will present the research findings from this study that validate the model for secure relationship patterns and expand on the descriptions. Validation of the remainder of the model lies outside the scope of this study.

**Secure organizational relational patterns:** Secure working models are based on equally strong valuing of oneself and of others. Self and other from the perspective of organizational relationship theory are defined both as the individual member in relation to other

members, and as the group in relationship to other groups. Organizational relational patterns are instantiated in the attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors of individual members of the group or organization. At the same time the reoccurring patterns of group attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors that we tend to cluster under the appellation of *culture* tell a story predictive both of individual and group behavior. In securely related groups and organizations there is a harmonious, synergistic relationship between the satisfaction of both individual and group needs. The individual feels enhanced by membership in the group and the group feels itself enhanced by the attributes of its members. Tensions between individual and group needs do not occur. Play and creativity occur at the dynamically defined and redefined boundaries between self and other. Groups with secure relationship patterns thrive on only the minimum of organizational structure. That structure is related to getting the work of the group done and does not need to invest in processes to manage the anxiety of the group members. Consequently, securely related groups and organizations maximize the use of their energy in pursuit of individual and group goals

**Avoidant organizational relational patterns:** Groups with insecure relationship patterns require additional organizational structure to contain the anxiety associated with participation in group processes. In groups and organizations that are characterized as avoidantly related the attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors of the individual members as well as the patterns of the group reflect an enormous amount of energy expenditure tied up in defensive organizational mechanisms such as bureaucratic red tape. Avoidantly related groups and organizations are characterized by their siloed structures with individuals and groups avoiding each other because they consider their own self-worth to far exceed that of other group members and or other groups. Contact is considered bothersome and is experienced as a drain on energy rather than as energizing as it is in securely related groups. Anxiety reactions such as observational blindness, triangling, and cutoff are triggered when individuals and groups are required to cooperate with each other as a result of external pressures placed on the group to perform at a higher level of effectiveness.

I hypothesize that of all the possible insecure relationship patterns that avoidant patterns are most common in America society. I base this hypothesis on the evidence that American society has historically placed an exceedingly high value on rugged individualism. Bellah, et al. (1985) observed that our traditional American cultural obsession with rugged individualism and self-sufficiency is now working against our long-term success as related persons and as a society. This emphasis on individualism, coupled with the increased forces associated the postmodern milieu – the increasingly multiphrenic self, the intermingling of cultures and values, and the saturation of information as well as social structures – create a fundamental tension in society that manifests as a subliminal social anxiety. Erikson foresaw this fundamental dilemma when he wrote:

Where large numbers of people have been prepared from childhood to expect from life a high degree of personal autonomy, pride, and opportunity, and then in later life find themselves ruled by superhuman organizations, and machinery too intricate to understand, the result may be deep chronic disappointment not conducive to healthy personalities willing to grant each other a measure of autonomy. (1980, p. 77)

**Enmeshed organizational relational patterns:** As with Bartholomew and Horowitz's model of adult attachment behaviors, organizational relationship theory hypothesizes that there will be two different behavioral styles associated with the enmeshed pattern. Enmeshed relational patterns are premised on a devaluing of one's own self working model and a hyper-valuing of the model of other. Differences in behavioral patterns are determined by the strategy adopted in the relationship. Dependent strategies are characterized by helplessness and attention-seeking behavior aimed at acquiring what the other has by begging for it. Alternately, acquisitional strategies are characterized by competitiveness and over involved behavior aimed at acquiring what the other has by taking it.

In the business and work environment enmeshed organizations are characterized by continual emotional crisis and most especially process churn. Churn is the result of decisions

being made over and over again, each time with a different set of decision makers, each with competing senses of ownership. Duplicative efforts and excessive overtime accompanied by missed deadlines are hallmarks of enmeshed organizations. These organizations are often characterized by leadership that at first appears to be charismatic but upon closer examination is seen to be bullying and abusive as it seeks to control all aspects of the organization without delegation.

**Fearful organizational relational patterns:** This pattern consists of the conjoining of a negative valuation of the self working model and an equal devaluing of the model of the other. I hypothesize that the fearful relational pattern is highly unlikely to occur in voluntary social groups such as the Early Birds. Groups and organizations with fearful relationship patterns are likely to demonstrate defensive strategies that are both dependent and abusive. Bullying and other intimidation techniques are likely to be combined with passivity and subjugation.

I hypothesize a fearful relationship pattern is in high likelihood to occur when organizations are forced into conjoined situations where exit from the relationship is not an option. These situations include outsourcing, acquisitions, and military occupations of countries. In these cases the reorganized components devalue themselves for being forced into the relationship and devalue the “occupier” for its ineffectiveness in improving their newly formed relationships. Of all of the organizational relationship patterns, the fearful one will be the most difficult to sustain.

I have found significant evidence of secure organizational relationship patterns operating within the Early Birds. I also believe that taken as a whole, the Early Bird working model of secure relationship patterns can be the encompassing framework describing both cause and effect of the longevity of the group. Organizational relationship theory represents the most effective and efficient explanation, and indeed an elegant explanation, for why groups remain together for long periods of time in harmonious relationship.

A social constructionist perspective facilitates responses to two questions central to understanding the correlation between organizational relationship theory and the longevity of

groups and organizations and hence, why the Early Birds have been able to sustain a harmonious group relationship for decades. First, how do groups and organizations develop organizational relationship patterns? All groups start somewhere. They may start spontaneously, like the Early Birds, as a response to a common need or interest. The Early Birds evolved as best as anyone understands from a group of tennis players at the Mount Vernon Health and Racquet Club who happened to like to play tennis early in the morning and didn't want to be bothered with the need to call around for partners each time they played. They spontaneously organized themselves enough to agree to show up at a scheduled time and play for a specified length of time – if and when they could make it. And this level of organization has continued with little change for decades.

Groups and organizations also form as the result of directed actions such as the initiation of a group task such as designing an automobile. They also begin as the result of social actions such as mergers of companies, outsourcing, or invasions of countries. It is in these large-scale conjoinings that the social constructionist perspective is most easily illustrated. Securely related groups, unless there is an overwhelming difference in “ologies”, will conjoin to form new securely related groups. Conversely, groups with insecure relationship patterns, especially with regard to how other groups are construed, will conjoin into insecure relationship patterns.

The organizational relationship pattern of a group or organization evolves out of the working models brought to it by its founding mothers/fathers. That is, when a group spontaneously comes together, perhaps to form a new business venture or to form a social group, the patterns that first arise in the relationship are predominantly determined by the relational history of the individual members. When the group is a few people, then it is the prior history of relationship patterns, the residual imprints on working models from prior experience, both personal and organizational, that each member brings to the relationship that will predict the patterns of the new relationship. Social constructionism posits our embeddedness and indeed inseparability from our social context. Not even “nothing” is context free. Past relationship



patterns will influence how we form new relationships. This implies that the founding members of the Early Birds were most likely to have been individuals with secure relationship patterns. Indeed, the earlier members of the Early Birds are remembered by current members as having the same characteristics as the current group. This history conditioned how the group formed and interacted with each other within the group context.

When the new group or organization is founded out of the conjunction of groups rather than individuals, then the same evolutionary pattern holds with the exception that it is the past organizational relationship patterns that are brought forth and predictive of the new relationship patterns. For example, if a work group is created for the purpose of completing a project that is composed of consultants from a management company and a group of business users from the sponsoring company, then a new organizational relationship patterns, predicated on past patterns, will form around the conjoined project group. If the consultants, even if arriving together in a large group, have never worked together and there is no group history, then it is likely that the new group will adopt the relationship pattern of the business community.

This leads to the response to the second question. “How and why do these patterns maintain themselves over time?” If groups evolve over time like the Early Birds with changes in membership happening one or two people at a time over a year or two time span, then the group will maintain the same relationship pattern provided that a powerful external force (such as the closure of the tennis club, for example) does not occur. Organizational relationship patterns have field-like properties that cannot be isolated in the attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors of any one individual in the group or organization. The departure of any individual, even if the group construes that person to be a prototypical member, will not alter the pattern of the group.

Additionally, these field effects are powerful precisely due to their predominant invisibility to group members and that when new members join they will adopt in their group processes the preexisting patterns of the group they are joining. It is only when group membership is altered by large influxes of new members or equally large egresses of members,

that the group is vulnerable to changes in its organizational relationship pattern. With regard to the Early Birds, for example, the longevity of the group might have been threatened if an influx of a large number of new members with predominantly insecure relationship patterns had occurred over a short period of time. These new members, for example, might have wanted to let people choose their own tennis partners or perhaps have insisted that a club president and secretary be elected for the group. However members have joined and left the Early Birds in very small increments and the group's relationship pattern based on what the Early Birds revealed during their interviews, have remained the same over time.

This study provides evidence that groups with a secure relationship pattern are likely to voluntarily stay together for extended periods of time with very little volatility in group membership. In contrast, I hypothesize that groups and organizations with insecure relationship patterns will require internal and external constraints in the form of policies, social strictures, and "ologies" to hold themselves together. The following section provides a detailed picture, based on the evidence provided by the Early Birds, of what a securely related group looks like.

### ***Evidence of Secure Organizational Relationship Patterns among the Early Birds***

In this and the following section I reframe my findings based on what the Early Birds have disclosed about themselves in individual interviews, the group interview, as well as from my own observations to provide a profile of securely related groups and organizations. As described in the previous sections I define secure working models as based on the balancing of equally strong valuing of oneself and of others. Self and other from the perspective of organizational relationship theory are defined both as the individual member in relation to other members, and as the group in relationship to its individual members as well as to other groups.

Expression of the Early Birds' positive appreciation for self and others permeates virtually all of the primary nodes. It is expressed in the way that the Early Birds talk about themselves and how they talk about others. Indeed, it is the consistency with which these perspectives are maintained across all topics that so strongly characterizes the group as securely related.

Evidence that the Early Birds have a positive sense of self-regard is demonstrated by the great personal pride Early Birds freely express about their membership. The fact that Bill, Joann, Chuck, and Marty have been members for over 25 years speaks itself to the value that each must experience in their voluntary membership of the group. Fred's observations that he has altered his retirement plans in order to maintain his membership is also indicative of the value that he places on membership.

Relatively newer members such as Liz also expressed the personal satisfaction they experience with the group experience:

And then gee, I guess I started playing with Early Birds six or seven years ago and have enjoyed every minute of it. Um ... I have three children, John, Amy and Brian. And ... Jack died in 19, 2000. And it's been a great source of making friends with new people and I have really enjoyed it, meeting everyone and playing.

Members consistently spoke in their interviews in positive terms about the group itself. Fred was one of the most emotive in his praise of the group and indeed started his description of his group experiences by saying:

I'm very happy to do these interviews because I think you know, we've talked about this before, how much the Early Birds means to me. In fact, how much it weighs in the decision process that we make about when we are here and when we are not here. It's a very important part of it.

A vital characteristic of a securely related group is the respect and value that the group as a group places on the individuality of its members. That is, members are not valued simply for

their “groupness” but rather for the individual characteristics that they bring to the group. The group feels secure enough in its own identity to accommodate differentiations in its individual members. As described earlier, 40% of the Early Birds commented in their interviews about the diversity of the group. Richard’s comments are reflective of this value among the Early Birds:

No... I mean it is ... it’s a very interesting group which is probably why you are doing this little study because it’s sort of organic.... It um ... it’s very welcoming. Very often a group like this tends to be sort of close knit and is a bit suspicious of outsiders. But in this particular case, almost anyone who comes along is ... is totally welcome. You know you feel like, ‘oh ... come on, come on and play you know ...’ It’s one of the nice things about it.

Equally important to what the Early Birds said in their interviews was what they did not say. There were few and only minor complaints about individual needs not being met by the group. Mort mildly mused, for example, that he wished that the group might socialize more outside of tennis. Cleve commented that he would enjoy playing tennis for more than an hour in the morning. But neither of these comments was couched as a complaint. Nor were any of the other comments of the participants. There was a notable absence of any negativity in any of the interviews. There is also a notable absence of negativity in the behavior of the members that could be construed as reflective of some unsatisfied needs. Marty explicitly observed about this quality of the group when he made the following comment:

But you don’t see anybody trying to really exceed and say ‘ah... you know ... and this is the way I’m going to score points’ because nobody scores points with this group outside of playing tennis. But ... ah ... and nobody is trying to one-up. And I think that’s very significant. I think you have a level of ... and it’s an unspoken relationship.

This opening profile provides a generalized view of the Early Birds as a securely related group. The following section more fully articulates the psychosocial characteristics of the group and their relevance to the group’s longevity.

## ***The Psychosocial Factors Associated with Secure Organizational Relationship Patterns and with Sustained, Harmonious Group Processes***

Positive valuations of self and other are reflected in the cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors of the individual members of the group as well as of the group in general. In this section I delve deeper into the data to provide a picture of what securely related groups “look like”. The psychosocial factors described here are not only associated with securely related groups but also are directly associated with long-term harmonious group processes such as those exhibited by the Early Birds.

Although each of these factors is analyzed separately, it is essential to view the psychosocial factors associated with any organizational relationship pattern as synergistically related. In keeping with a social constructionist perspective, the psychosocial factors associated with organizational relationship patterns should be seen more as patterns in the flow of a river rather than as separate, discrete entities. Additionally, much of the analysis in this section remains couched in subject-object terms associated with modernist perspectives.

Each of the descriptions of the psychosocial factors in this section is accompanied by a list of the primary nodes where the supporting evidence is found. A consolidated model illustrating the relationships between all of the psychosocial factors and the primary nodes is included in the Appendix. The following table documents the instances where supporting evidence was found for each of the psychosocial factors.

**Table 44 Primary nodes with supporting evidence for each of the psychosocial factors associated with secure relationship patterns**

	PRIMARY NODES IN ORDER OF FREQUENCY CITED	PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS												TIs
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1	After-Tennis Conversation	X		X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	9
2	Good Will and Laughter	X		X	X	X				X	X	X		7
3	Competition	X	X	X	X	X			X	X				7
4	Extensive Travel in Life						X	X					X	3
5	Support in Time of	X	X			X		X			X	X		6
6	First Experiences as an	X	X			X		X			X			5
7	Prototypical Member	X			X	X				X	X	X		6
8	Appreciation for Diversity	X		X	X		X		X			X	X	7
9	Conflict	X		X	X	X								4
10	Ethical Behavior	X	X	X		X			X					5
11	Evidence of EB embedded	X	X								X			3
12	Isolated from Rest of Life	X									X		X	3
13	Early Bird World		X							X	X			3
14	Growth	X		X					X					3
15	Aging - Maturing Process	X							X	X				3
16	Ease of Coming and going	X	X			X	X						X	5
17	Friendship	X		X								X		3
18	Health	X						X	X					3
19	Women vs. Men	X		X	X	X	X						X	5
20	Career after Retirement	X								X				2
21	Group Stability	X												1
22	Leaving the Group							X			X		X	3
23	New Member Selection		X			X	X	X					X	5
24	Openness	X				X		X	X	X		X		6
25	Sense of Equality	X	X	X			X			X			X	6
26	Use of Humor to Deflect			X		X				X				3
27	Primary and secondary			X				X						2
28	Rejection					X	X							2
	Totals	21	9	1	7	1	7	8	8	1	9	7	9	

**Psychological Factor 1:** Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns are characterized by an absence of tension between the satisfactions of individual versus group needs. Indeed, not only are these groups characterized by an absence of tension between individual and group needs, there is synergistic enhancement of both needs as relational processes are engaged.

**Table 45 Supporting evidence for Psychosocial Factor 1**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 1</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns are characterized by an absence of tension between the satisfactions of individual versus group needs. Indeed, not only are these groups characterized by an absence of tension between individual and group needs, there is synergistic enhancement of both needs as relational processes are engaged	After-Tennis Conversation
	Good Will and Laughter
	Competition
	Support in Time of Sickness
	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Prototypical Member
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Conflict
	Ethical Behavior
	Evidence of EBs Embedded in Self
	Isolated from Rest of Life
	Growth
	Aging-Maturing Process
	Ease of Coming and Going
	Friendship
	Health
	Women vs. Men
	Career after Retirement
	Group Stability
	Openness
	Sense of Equality

This psychosocial factor is exemplified in the Early Birds in the way that they take pride in each other's accomplishments. When Hendrik makes the following observation during his interview, he is sharing in the status of the other members and enhancing his own personal status:

We have ... Hart's a lawyer, Marty is a PhD, Rivers is an MD. I guess Mort must have a PhD at this point or the equivalent in terms of his research background. Um ... I'm Masters level, you're Masters level working on PhD.

The group feels good about its members and the members feel good about the group. Each becomes more by association. In turn, the group itself is enhanced by the positive attitudes of the members that become expressed in relaxed and playful social exchange. The more members feel good about themselves, the more relaxed and positive they are in relationship with others; the more relaxed the relationships are, the more there are opportunities for enjoyable relationship. The more the group is experienced as enjoyable, the more it provides opportunities for individuals for a positive experience as a group member.

In contrast, I hypothesize that tension between individual and group needs is an inevitable outcome of the three insecure organizational relationship patterns. For example, when the members of a group experience their relationships as avoidant, then the interpersonal relational activities that are the basis of the group being a group become interpreted as self-sacrifice on the part of the individual who simply does not want to give up his or her energy and time in service of the group's goals. In contrast, in a group with predominantly enmeshed relationship patterns, members are likely to feel that the group owes them something which may translates into aggressive and quarrelsome behavior as a finite size group "pie" is competed for among members.

**Psychosocial Factor 2:** Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns have a minimum of rules, regulations, and social norms governing their relationships.



**Table 46 Supporting evidence for Psychosocial Factor 2**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 2</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns have a minimum of rules, regulations, and social norms governing their relationships.	Competition
	Support in Time of Sickness
	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Ethical Behavior
	Evidence of EBs Embedded in Self
	Early Bird World Championships
	Ease of Coming and Going
	New Member Selection Process
	Sense of Equality

The rules, regulations, and social norms that do exist in these groups consist only of those needed to coordinate the activities of the group. There is an absence of the types of rules, regulations, and social norms associated with controlling behavior of members such as rules and regulations that dictate when and how the members are to engage each other and how group decisions are to be made. The absence of such rules and regulations is a result of the lack of tension between individual and group needs satisfaction. It is also related to the low levels of anxiety that the group experiences. The low levels of anxiety are associated with an absence of any sense of threat to either the working model of self or the working model of the group.

Groups with secure attachment patterns will resist the implementation of affect regulating rules and regulations. Groups with secure attachment relationships will also have social norms that encourage ad hoc adjustment to social events. Ad hoc rules will be easily established in such groups for a specific circumstance and then abandoned just as easily once the circumstance is no longer active.

Among the Early Birds, for example, the rules and regulations governing tennis play have been set up with the maximum amount of flexibility. Members are not required or expected to commit to be present on any specific morning. Partners are chosen randomly through simple selection process in the morning. In the occasional cases when the numbers used for drawing partners are missing, then the group will find some other ad hoc way to sort themselves into doubles teams. On days when 5, 9, or 13 members show up, then ad hoc means are established to rotate in the 5<sup>th</sup> person into the game on one of the courts.

Nor do the Early Birds have formal organizational structures regulating their behavior. There are no membership requirements. As Cleve observed, “But that’s how you join. You figure well this person’s been here about four times they must be one of us.” The group has no officers, no dues, no newsletter, and indeed no official membership list. Even so, the group has for several years been able to organize an annual tournament, along with prizes. And in all the years that I have been a member I have never shown up for morning tennis when there was no one else there to play. Many of the members have been showing up for tennis in the morning for over 25 years without any “requirements” for them to do so.

In contrast, I hypothesize that groups with insecure relationship patterns will require rules, regulations, and social norms to contain and constrain the anxiety associated with their group interactions. In fearful groups and organizations, for example, where trust is absent between the individual members and/or factions in the organization, rules and regulations are required as a mechanism to “protect” the members of the group from each other. Rules, regulations, and regulating social norms are required in groups with insecure relationship patterns to contain the anxiety associated with social interactions. These types of groups cannot endure ambiguity and must have rules and regulations to cover every possible situation that might occur.

**Psychosocial Factor 3:** Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns have self-healing relationships between the individual members, between the members and the group, and between the group and other groups.

**Table 47 supporting evidence for Psychosocial Factor 3**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 3</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns have self-healing relationships between the individual members, between the members and the group, and between the group and other groups	After-Tennis Conversation
	Good Will and Laughter
	Competition
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Conflict
	Ethical Behavior
	Growth
	Friendship
	Women vs. Men
	Sense of Equality
	Use of Humor to Deflect
	Primary and Secondary Group

Self-healing occurs because of the mutual valuations placed on the members and the group. When there is a positive attitude towards the other group members and/or the group in general, there is far less likelihood that individuals or groups will be attacked in ways that will make disagreements difficult to resolve. Where there is a positive sense of both of the individual and the group self, there is less likelihood that disagreements will be perceived as personal affronts and a threat to the work model of self.

In the Early Birds the self-healing nature of relationships is reflected in the extremely low level of conflict among members. Potentially conflictual interpersonal relationships are tempered by the use of humor and repartee. In the after-tennis conversations members may express widely divergent opinions but differences in opinion do not translate into personal attacks. Members self-regulate their own behavior, knowing how far to take their arguments before changing the topic

and/or drawing back from win-lose exchanges. Mutual respect prevents carrying disagreements into the realm of personal attacks. Richard's comments about the after-tennis discussions are reflective of both the willingness of the group to engage each other in topics where there are differences of opinion but also how the group deals with the ensuing arguments:

And then sometimes we'll shift to you know world affairs and you know politics and there are some pretty red-faced arguments go on with that which is kind of fun [laughter] cause people get quite a worked up.

Richard's humorous interpretation of differences of opinion is consistent with the responses of other group members. Resentments do not build up over time. Nor do members "walk on egg shells" afraid to present their own opinions for fear of rejection or recrimination.

In contrast, I hypothesize that in insecurely related groups and organizations, damages to relationships are more likely to result in psychosocial trauma rather than being repaired. As a response to the trauma, insecurely related groups and organizations are more likely to respond with additional rules and regulations to ensure that the traumatic experience does not reoccur rather than finding ways to integrate the experience into the group identity and heal the relationship. As a result traumatic group experiences become psychologically dissociated, separated off, and unacknowledgeable. Shadow is the product of insecure organizational relationship patterns.

**Psychosocial Factor 4:** Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns are able to successfully reframe what might otherwise be construed as divisive and conflictual circumstances in terms that support group cohesiveness and longevity.

**Table 48 Supporting evidence for Psychosocial Factor 4**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 4</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns are able to successfully reframe what might otherwise be construed as divisive and conflictual circumstances in terms that support group cohesiveness and longevity.	After-Tennis Conversation
	Good Will and Laughter
	Competition
	Prototypical Member
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Conflict
	Women vs. Men

This finding is closely related to the previous one but not identical. Murray and Holmes (1993) conducted research that determined that individuals in romantic relationships with the greatest longevity and stability were able to reframe negative characteristics of partners in such a way that faults are actually seen as virtues. These narratives become core constructs instrumental to the longevity of the relationship. Furthermore, the stories that individuals tell will reflect not only how much tension is unresolved in the relationship but also how they go about resolving tensions.

These types of processes are clearly in evidence among the Early Birds. The dominant challenge for the Early Birds has been how to reframe strong competitive instincts among individual members in such a way that it binds the group together rather than tearing it apart. Humor has been the primary mechanism for achieving this end. The Early Birds are more aggressive in their use of humor and repartee than in their use of their tennis racquets. The history of equally giving and taking the exchange of quips, puns, and pranks, is captured in the stories of the group. These stories provide a continuum of memories that reframes competition and competitiveness in a self-effacing, playful manner that is interpreted as mutual respect and affection rather than aggression. The group story that most exemplifies this characteristic of the

group is the one of Marty and Joann's tennis match when Joann was nine months pregnant. Over the last 20 years, the story has been told probably hundreds of times. Every new person who joins the group is told the story by someone within the first few months of joining the group. What does this particular story say about the group? First, it acknowledges and accepts the competitive nature of the group members; second, it pays respect to the female members of the group and indicates that they are welcome as equal group members; and finally, in its humor it places the priorities of the group on the repartee that occurs between members. This particular story then provides to members the model for on-going reframing of competitive activities, the relationships between men and women as well as between members with different backgrounds and ethnic differences, and finally how members are expected to use humor as a means to balance aggressive tendencies. The Early Birds have indeed, in a totally unconscious manner, institutionalized the mechanisms for reframing aggressiveness and any other factors that might create divisiveness in the group.

In contrast, I hypothesize that groups and organizations with insecure relationship patterns will reconstrue events in terms of the dominant organizational relationship pattern in the group. For example, avoidantly related groups will reconstrue events in such a way that they reinforce negative valuations of other group members, the group itself, or other groups. Enmeshed groups will reconstrue in ways that confirm their own dependency on others or their own sense of being unfairly deprived of what they consider to be due to them. In fearful groups and organizations, reframing will follow a downward cycle of abuse and neglect of self and other. In all cases continuation of the group will require increasing amounts of propping up with rules and regulations. Bureaucracy is the product of insecure organizational relationship patterns.

**Psychosocial Factor 5:** The internalized values of securely related groups and organizations can be construed as spontaneously arising ethical behavior.

**Table 49 Evidence supporting Psychosocial Factor 5**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 5</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
The internalized values of securely related groups and organizations can be construed as spontaneously arising ethical behavior.	After-Tennis Conversation
	Good Will and Laughter
	Competition
	Support in Time of Sickness
	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Prototypical Member
	Conflict
	Ethical Behavior
	Ease of Coming and Going
	Women vs. Men
	New Member Selection Process
	Openness
	Use of Humor to Deflect
	Rejection

Social constructionist theorists, Maturana and Varela (1998) described ethical behavior as arising out of our interpersonal construal of the human world. Ethical behavior as they describe it is the outcome of our movement of our locus of awareness and choices into our social environ. How we choose to be with each other defines our ethical perspective. Organizational relationship patterns therefore define par excellence how groups and other social organizations construe ethical behavior.

The Early Birds have made several implicit choices regarding how they are to be with each other that are indicative of the ethical norms that inform securely related interpersonal processes. From Marty, for example, we learn that Early Birds balance their own need for competitive excellence with an understanding that we do not do this at the expense of others:

But you don't see anybody trying to really exceed and say 'ah ... you know ... and this is the way I'm going to score points' because nobody scores points with this group outside of playing tennis. But ... ah ... and nobody is trying to one-up. And I think that's very significant. I think you have a level of ... and it's an unspoken relationship. Nobody says 'oh he's this, he's that ...

Cleve reminds us out that while humor and playfulness are part and parcel of how Early Birds relate to each other, Early Birds are also expected to be mindful of how their behavior affects fellow members:

I know there was ... we had a guy who used to come to the Early Birds. Really, really loud guy. We don't even know his name. But anyway. He came. He from ... he moved out of town so very periodically he will come back into town and come in the morning and everybody's irritated 'cause he's just talking and running his mouth. And although we are in there, there is some understanding. That you don't bring all of this noise. [laughter]

For the Early Birds ethical behavior arises not out of compliance with formal rules and regulations but rather spontaneously out of the positive regard that is held for self and other. From a pragmatic perspective, ethical behavior is much easier to achieve when there is respect for the individuals and groups one is engaged with and when one does not feel threatened in the process. Fred described in his interview how this type of behavior manifests among the Early Birds:

And in their own way, when someone is sick or has had an operation. We don't go out and do a grandiose thing with flowers or cards. But you do, you do a phone call or you drop by or something like that, or you know, you know the guy likes a certain subject. You go buy a book. No big fuss about it. You just do it.

In contrast, I hypothesize that while ethical behavior can be a characteristic of insecurely related groups and organizations, these types of groups are much more likely to experience ethical choices as personal sacrifice. Consequently these types of groups are also more likely to need rules and regulations to dictate the “shoulds” of ethical behavior. Because of either the devaluation of the self or the other, empathy and altruism are not available as motivations for



ethical behavior. In these circumstances ethical behavior must be learned and monitored through the enforcement of rules and regulations. Avoidantly related groups, for example, will be less likely to recognize their social obligations to the wider social community and reach out with support. Alternately, enmeshed groups will be consumed with a need to acquire and will tend to consume their surroundings.

**Psychosocial Factor 6:** Securely related groups can sustain a wider diversity of membership. The breadth of diversity that can be tolerated is proportional to the security of relationship patterns of the group.

**Table 50 Evidence supporting Psychosocial Factor 6**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 6</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Securely attached groups can sustain a wider diversity of membership. The breadth of diversity that can be tolerated is proportional to the security of relationship patterns of the group.	Extensive Travel in the Life History
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Ease of Coming and Going
	Women vs. Men
	New Member Selection Process
	Sense of Equality
	Rejection

Personal construct psychotherapy, as described in the Literature Review, focuses its attention on the individual as the construer of reality. According to the range corollary of its founding theorist George Kelly (1966) individuals have *ranges of convenience* which determine what is meaningful to them and what is not. The range of convenience determines what the individual can incorporate into his/her working model. Any experience outside that range is discarded as being irrelevant. Because of their positive valuation of self and other members of securely related groups and organizations will have wider ranges of convenience. That is, their working models, and the working models of the groups they belong to, will be able to

accommodate more diversity. Further, repeated success integrating diverse experiences will result in expansion of the range of convenience which is also the objective of personal construct psychotherapy.

The Early Birds, as already described several times earlier in this study, take great pride in what they perceive to be the diversity of their group. Even though the group is relatively homogeneous demographically, the group nevertheless experiences itself as diverse and indeed it is most likely that this group of doctors, lawyers, politicians, academics, and government professionals would not otherwise form such lasting friendships. There is some truth to observations such as Hendrik's:

So... but it's an interesting group of people. It's a group of people ... it's a cross section of people that in your normal workaday life, most of them you would never run into.

Diversity is also expressed among the Early Birds in the attitude of the group towards new members. At the same time that there were numerous observations made by the interviewees about how welcomed they were into the group, there were no mentions in the interviews of turning someone away from the group. Nor have I witnessed during my observations of the group any time when someone was turned away. Even the one instance that Cleve mentioned during his interview about the man with the particularly difficult personality did not result in the group actually telling the individual to leave.

In contrast, I hypothesize that groups and organizations with insecure relationship patterns will have limited ranges of convenience, and, as experiences occur, will be more likely to shrink their range of convenience in order to preserve a threatened sense of self. Avoidantly related groups for example, will reject individuals who are "not like them". This will consequently limit the availability of suitable new members to a narrow demographic.

**Psychosocial Factor 7:** Groups and organizations with secure organizational relationship patterns will be more resilient to changes in the internal and/or external psychosocial environment and more likely to remain a group.

**Table 51 Evidence supporting Psychosocial Factor 7**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 7</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Groups and organizations with secure organizational relationship patterns will be more resilient to changes in the internal and/or external psychosocial environment and more likely to remain a group.	Extensive Travel in the Life History
	Support in Time of Sickness
	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Health
	Leaving the Group
	New Member Selection Process
	Openness
	Primary and Secondary Group

Groups and organizations with positive valuations of all individuals who are already members of the group have histories of established norms for accommodating the differences in attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors of its various members. Members of these groups also have histories of having experienced others as enhancing and affirming of their senses of self rather than as threatening. These histories form the basis of working models that predict that the group and its members will experience new “others” as positive enhancements to the group. As a result the group is more likely to successfully refresh its membership not only with new members who are similar in their attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors to existing members, but also with new members who have differences from existing members. This allows the group to adapt to the availability of new members and to changes in the existing group such as departure of members or changes in group characteristics such as changes in the health or financial situations of its members.

The flexibility and openness of its working models has been one of the most important reasons for the long-term endurance of the Early Birds. The analysis of the categorical data,

individual interviews, the group interview, and my observation notes reveal a group that has adapted over time to changes in its own internal members as well as changes in the world around them. The group has transitioned over the decades from being a group comprised predominantly of middle-aged males, playing singles as well as doubles, to a group that is now one-third female with an average age of 67.5 and who now exclusively play doubles. Most importantly, as members have departed from the group either due to illness and the inevitabilities of old age or as a result of moving away from the area, a steady stream of new members have refreshed the group membership. These new members have often had different backgrounds than those of the earlier group members. Several of the interviewees, for example, noted that many of the individuals who were past members had a military background. Now the group is primarily comprised of individuals with government or professional backgrounds. Arleen, for example, noted the difference in the group dynamic as a result of the change in individual member backgrounds:

There were a lot of war stories because Cliff was .... You know ... because those were the major memories of some of the older members. And now of course it's changed. And now it is more on what they are doing on a day-to-day basis or the current events. And I've hardly heard any war stories. And it could be because we don't really have any ... of course they are younger and there aren't any world war two veterans. But I'm sure some of them ... I'm sure they've been in the armed services. I mean I ...

Nevertheless, the group has continued to exist, and, based on the analysis I have already described, comparing the attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors of past members to those of present members, the group has continued to maintain the same values and beliefs that this study is showing to be associated with secure organizational relationship patterns. The group has also continued to exist without the adoption of additional rules and regulations to adapt to changes in membership. Because the Early Birds have not needed to use rules and regulations to hold the group together, it has not needed additional rules and regulations to accommodate the diversity of new members.

In contrast, I hypothesize that the working models of groups and organizations with insecure organizational relationship patterns will predispose these groups to inflexibility and premature demise. Groups with insecure relationship patterns will use rules and regulations to “hold themselves together”. These rules and regulations however will be tailored to the management of the anxieties of the current group membership. Changes in the needs of the membership or in the external environment will require the adoption of new rules and regulations. As this process is repeated over time, the group becomes increasingly encumbered with layer upon layer of bureaucracy that consumes increasing amounts of the group’s energy. Eventually the groups will collapse under the weight of its own processes, having lost its vitality and reason for being.

**Psychosocial Factor 8:** Securely related groups provide a psychosocial environment that is conducive to the psychosocial development of its individual member.

**Table 52 Evidence supporting Psychosocial Factor 8**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 8</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Securely related groups provide a psychosocial environment that is conducive to the psychosocial development of its individual member.	After-Tennis Conversation
	Competition
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Ethical Behavior
	Growth
	Aging-Maturing Process
	Health
	Openness
	Career after Retirement
	Group Stability
	Leaving the Group
	New Member Selection Process

Adult developmental theorists for all their differences in opinion do seem to agree that development involves some type of expansion of postformal operations. The ability to hold many points of view, many of them contradictory is a characteristic of postformal operations.

In the Early Birds this is manifested in the appreciation that the group expresses for its diversity. It is also held in other expressions of tolerance such as expressed in this observation by Hendrik:

And so... but yeah ... and it's a very mixed group. You have a group of people who are still serious about improving at tennis. And you have another group who come and do it and really don't care about improving. They just enjoy the process. And they don't ... they don't care about improving. But that's okay.

The group is able to tolerate multiple points of view by predominantly taking the stance of “agreeing to disagree”. That is, cooperation and reconciliation occurs among the Early Birds not by having members accede to the values and beliefs of other members and engaging in “group think” but rather by providing sufficient psychosocial space for multiple points of view. Only the most elemental requirements for maintaining the group’s structure such as agreeing to draw numbers for partners or swapping in a fifth player when the numbers don’t divide by four are structured.

As stated earlier, the constructivist perspective on developmental processes focus on the role of relationships in the developmental process. In later life relationships are more often sought out to enhance emotionally meaningful experiences while at the same time social contacts associated with less meaningful or rewarding experiences are curtailed (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996; Fredrickson & Carstensen, 1990). From this perspective, the Early Birds provide a forum for the type of type of developmental processes most important to older adults. The Early Birds are similar enough in demographics to be wrestling with the same personal and social issues. Concerns such as postretirement career, maintaining health, keeping a sharp and curious mind, and in general staying connected with society are no doubt somewhere in the thoughts of most of the members. Yet, even so they are from different enough occupational backgrounds to bring different political points of view, religious perspectives, and knowledge bases to the banter that occurs during and after-tennis.

Participation in the Early Birds is stress free and both intellectually and emotionally stimulating. It is stress free because the psychological energy of its members is not locked up in defensive postures designed to protect the working model of self and other from violation by the group processes. It is intellectually and emotionally stimulating because members feel safe enough to playfully reach out and touch and be touched by the repartee that is a constant backdrop to group processes. To behave in this way requires both a confident sense of self as

well as a deep respect for others. Several of the comments made during the interview, such as Marty's, alluded to this group dynamic:

Well I guess that's sort of a reflection of the attitude of the Early Birds. And it's the camaraderie. And you come in and you get what you get. And if you don't have a thick skin you don't stay. But it's not personal abuse, it fun abuse. It's really a ... the light humor. But it's not personal.

Within this environment, development consists of increasing one's personal capability to touch and be touched in relationship. When psychological touch and touching is experienced as both safe and pleasurable then there is motivation to repeat the process. The psychosocial ecosystem of the securely related group grows out of these individual processes, enveloping its members in a recursive developmentally enhancing relationship. The group ecosystem sustains and is sustained by the relational processes of its members. Indeed, it may be that such types of groups are the only environment in which certain types of developmental processes may occur. Without the opportunities for relationship that the group affords, they may be no opportunities for the experiences that lead to enhanced development.

In contrast, I hypothesize that groups and organizations with insecure relationship patterns have ecosystems that discourage psychosocial relationship and hence development. They are more likely to put their members at risk of at minimum stunted development and at worst psychological trauma. If these types of groups are not able to regulate the behavior of their members through the enforcement of rules and regulations, then these groups are likely to manifest regressive societal processes as described by Bowen (2004). That is, to protect themselves from the painful experiences of being psychologically touched and touching they engage in defensive processes. Cutoff, triangling, and observational blindness will become commonplace organizational behaviors. Individuals will adopt psychosocially regressive behaviors as they defend their working models against anxiety-inducing experiences in the group environment that are directly a result of their organizational relationship patterns. For example,



avoidantly related groups will have tendencies to be intragroup and intergroup isolationists.

Forced interactions with others such as interactions associated with integrating business functions or improving relationships with the wider demographic community will be experienced as stressful. Typical tasks such as negotiation and consensus building that occur during integration efforts will be perceived as attacks on the working mode and will be experienced with anxiety.

**Psychosocial Factor 9** Securely related groups support creativity among their members because they provide the affective environment conducive to creative processes.

**Table 53 Evidence supporting Psychosocial Factor 9**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 9</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Securely related groups support creativity among their members because they provide the affective environment conducive to creative processes.	After-Tennis Conversation
	Good Will and Laughter
	Competition
	Prototypical Member
	Early Bird World Championships
	Aging-Maturing Process
	Career after Retirement
	Openness
	Use of Humor to Deflect

Tahir and Gruber (2002) posit that creativity among adults, and especially older adults, is dependent on the optimal interrelationship between knowledge, purpose, and affect. This last determinant, affect, is dependent on maintaining relationships conducive of generative engagement. As described with regard to the previous psychosocial factor, secure relationship patterns as manifested by the Early Birds provide such an optimal environment for creativity. With the psychological energy of the group freed from the needs to maintain anxiety protective

defenses, the group is free to engage in the playful banter that has been described throughout this study.

Additionally, the creative atmosphere of the Early Birds carries over into the individual activities of the members outside the group. The personal histories of the members, both in the past and in the present, paint a picture of a group with high levels of creativity. Many of the members such as Mort, who in retirement has become an ornithologist at the Smithsonian, and Rivers who has become a civil war historian, have adopted second careers that allow them opportunities for creativeness. Indeed, the group's support of this study and my efforts to achieve a doctorate has been an additional exemplar of the creativity supportive atmosphere of the group.

In contract, I hypothesize that insecurely related groups will drain their members of their creative tendencies. If creativity is about finding and expressing new and unusual relational touch points within the psychosocial environment, then an atmosphere discouraging of relationship will work against the creative process. Creativity will be least apparent in fearsome groups where lack of belief in one's own abilities as well as a lack of respect for others and indeed fear of others will discourage any of the risk-taking associated with the creative process. I hypothesize that if we examine groups that have come to a virtual standstill with regard to the generation of new ideas and products then we will see fearful groups and organizations.

**Psychosocial Factor 10:** Securely related groups have affective access to their histories that is affirming and contributes to binding the group together.

**Table 54 Evidence supporting Psychosocial Factor 10**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 10</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Securely related groups have affective access to their histories that is affirming and contributes to binding the group together.	After-Tennis Conversation
	Good Will and Laughter
	Support in Time of Sickness
	First Experiences as an Early Bird
	Prototypical Member
	Evidence of EBs Embedded in Self
	Early Bird World Championships
	Leaving the Group

Secure group members will tend to recount their history as field observations rather than from an observer perspective. That is, they will be in touch with the affective as well as the cognitive memories of the event. Affective access to past events held in collective memory may be one of the key factors that perpetuate the relationship style of the group into the future.

The Early Birds tell stories of their past with humor and warmth. Bill who is the oldest of the members who was interviewed told several stories about past members that were full of these qualities. This story from Bill is particularly vivid. It reflects how the story is texturized in memory with both humorous undertone and an acceptance of iconoclastic behavior. Bill clearly has access to his affective memories of Gertrude:

Uh ... Gertrude, the Spider, who was the optical physicist at Fort Belvoir, a German lady from the First World War as far as I was concerned, who was an adamant forehand shot and she had absolutely no patience with anyone, particularly her partner if they muffed a ball. And there were times when she would lie flat on her back and scream at the ceiling beating on the floor with her elbows and the backs of her knees in her anger at her partner's shot. And Gertrude was not built like a tall thin man ... woman, Gertrude was

sort of short and squat. So when she laid flat on her back it probably looked like a turtle or something or other, this huge shape. [laughter]

As described earlier, the Early Birds remember past members as having characteristics and values similar to those characterizing and valued by current members. Good will and laughter, a competitive spirit, humor and caring for each other are a part of the history of the group.

In contrast, I hypothesize that insecurely related groups and organizations will have organizational memories that are more highly abstracted and generalized and less available to affective access. These remembrances will mask the painful affective memories that may indeed have become dissociative and hence unavailable to direct affective recall.

**Psychosocial Factor 11:** Members of securely related groups are more likely to form multidimensional intragroup bonds that are resilient to single-points-of-failure and consequently contribute to the longevity of the group.

**Table 55 Evidence supporting Psychosocial Factor 11**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 11</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Members of securely attached groups are more likely to form multidimensional intragroup bonds that are resilient to single-points-of-failure and consequently contribute to the longevity of the group.	After-tennis Conversation
	Good Will and Laughter
	Support in Time of Sickness
	Prototypical Member
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Friendship
	Openness
	Sense of Equality

In securely related groups and organizations, breaks in one portion of the relational network, perhaps as a result of political or religious difference of opinion during a particular election year, will not result in threat to the cohesion of the social network. Nor will single-point

breaks necessarily form a threat to the bonds between individuals. In securely related groups individuals will tend to form bonds that are far denser and based on multidimensional points of interest. When individuals feel that they have something of value to offer to the group and when they recognize the value that other members bring to the group, they will be less likely to break their bonds over single points of difference.

In the Early Birds for example, the after-tennis conversations offer the opportunity to connect with each other in many ways that go beyond the common interest in playing tennis. Topics such as politics, movies, photography, and even technology offer ways for individuals to connect that add multiple layers to the relational network. Rivers commented during his interview for example about how the group keeps itself “connected” in a very practical sense:

I mean you ... so the ... everybody's senior. I mean they're in their 60s and 70s. They've all done. And conjointly together they've done just about everything. So you know you hear some amazing things. And like you know if I have a problem with a computer I bring that up at the table. Usually somebody knows, you know 'Hey, you gotta do this, or you gotta do that.'

It is possible in this environment then for differences of opinions on one topic such as political points of view to be only one point among many and in the overall relational scheme easy to tolerate because the rest of the relationship is so vital. Additionally, when social networks are richly connected there is less preponderance of factions and clichés. In the Early Birds for example, while there are a few friendships such as that between Cleve and Marty and between Rivers and Chuck that extend beyond the bounds of early morning tennis there is also an enormous uniformity of relationships between all members that minimizes the disruptive influence of clichés and factions.

In contrast, I hypothesize that the relational networks in insecurely related groups will be sparsely connected. Additionally, there will be clusters of nodes in the social network around enclaves as factions polarize the group or organization. Because the experience of relationship is

painful and frustrating, these groups will be permeated by toxic nodes consisting of one or more individuals or groups of individuals who are in irreconcilable conflict or avoidance.

**Psychosocial Factor 12:** Securely related groups that are able to sustain their existence over long periods of time will have organizational structures and values that are congruent with those of the wider social context.

**Table 56 Evidence supporting Psychosocial Factor 12**

<b>Psychosocial Factor 12</b>	<b>Primary Nodes with Supporting Evidence</b>
Securely related groups that are able to sustain their existence over long periods of time will have organizational structures and values that are congruent with those of the wider social context.	After-Tennis Conversation
	Extensive Travel in the Life History
	Appreciation for Diversity
	Isolated from Rest of Life
	Ease of Coming and Going
	Women vs. Men
	Leaving the Group
	New member Selection Process
	Sense of Equality

As securely related as a group may be, it is nevertheless still embedded in a larger social context that cannot be ignored. Groups and organizations that are ultimately able to sustain themselves over extended periods of time such as the Early Birds have done, must have organizational structures as well as values that are at least modestly congruent with those of the larger social context.

In the Literature Review I presented the thinking of postmodern theorists such as Gergen (1985, 1991; Gergen & Davis, 1985) and Lifton (1993) who describe a present and near-future view of Western culture that is dramatically different in its structures, technologies, and world views than those of the recent past. The structures that the Early Birds have put in place to govern

themselves are highly compatible with the world views of these postmodern theorists and consequently contribute to the longevity of the group.

The interviews reveal a group of individuals who are highly mobile which is in itself a characteristic of postmodern societies. Members such as Fred and Irene maintain multiple residencies; Marty and I travel frequently for work; other members take time to travel. The manner in which the group organizes itself for morning tennis by drawing numbers for partners among those individuals who show up makes it possible for individuals to remain members even though their attendance is sporadic or irregular. The Early Birds have adapted their organizational structures to the “realities” of the postmodern milieu and indeed have made these adaptations matters of group pride and distinctiveness.

Additionally, one other characteristic of the Early Birds is consistent with descriptions of the postmodern milieu. Many of the Early Birds commented during their interview regarding the isolation of their Early Bird social relationships from the rest of their personal lives. That is, many of the members only meet and engage with each other during tennis and do not otherwise maintain social contacts. To repeat a quotation presented earlier, Zurcher (1977) predicted that “...the individual will increasingly become challenged to organize his or her life around transience, to endure discontinuities and disjunctions, and to withstand ego-flooding from an environment explosive with sensory simulation” (p. 158). Clearly, the Early Birds have met this challenge exceedingly well. The ability, and willingness, of group members to have long-term meaningful relationships with a group of individuals who are otherwise not a part of their lives is an exemplary response to Zurcher’s challenge.

Bill commented during his interview about this particular characteristic of the group in a way that brings life and vitality to Zurcher’s predictions:

Oh, I think that the idea of your studying this particular group is absolutely fantastic. If it benefits you that’s good. But the mere thought that the group of these people who have

nothing in common except their affinity to play tennis and trade insults with each other year after year is worthwhile looking at for any sort of purpose is interesting.

In contrast, I hypothesize that groups with insecure relationship patterns, particularly those that have negative valuations of others, will have more difficulty bringing their organizational structures into congruence with the larger social context and hence will be less likely to be able to sustain their group processes. Groups that have negative working models of others will be less likely to appreciate the values of the larger social context and will be less willing to accommodate the requirements of coexistence. I hypothesize that groups and organizations with organizational structures that are radically different from those of the larger social context, groups such as cults for example, will be shown to have insecure relationship patterns.

### ***Psychosocial Factors that may be Associated with Secure Organizational Relationship Patterns and with Sustained, Harmonious Group Processes***

In addition to the psychosocial factors identified and described in the previous section that have significant supporting evidence from the study, there are also several psychosocial factors that the research points to but which will require further study to confirm or disconfirm. In general these psychosocial factors will require further study of groups other than the Early Birds and especially will require longitudinal studies of those groups. In this section I present these potential psychosocial factors as a guide to future researchers who may wish to continue the exploration of these factors.

**Potential psychosocial factor:** There may be a minimum number of group or organization members or percentage of group or organization members who are individually assessed as securely attached before a group level secure relationship pattern can form.



One of the questions that this line of reasoning opens up for examination can be stated as follows: “What percentage of group members and in what roles must be securely attached in order for a predominantly secure relationship field to develop and be sustained around the group?” This line of questioning has implications for the process of adding or removing members from a group. That is, what happens when a large influx of new members with collectively a different relationship pattern enter into an existing group. Alternately, what happens when a significant portion of the group leaves such as when key members die or move away?

In the Early Birds, members have historically entered and left the group in very small increments – typically this is a single individual. It is difficult to predict then what would happen if several members left or alternately a large group entered. I hypothesize that securely related groups such as the Early Birds should be resilient to the predominant attachment patterns of new and departing members but further study is required to understand how large changes in group membership will affect the group’s or organization’s relationship patterns. Indeed, I hypothesize that dramatic changes in group membership may be one of the best ways to alter the relationship patterns of a group. This has implications for the field of organizational psychology and organizational development where the task is often to improve the functioning of a group or organization.

**Potential psychosocial factor:** The average age of the members of a group or organization may be related to the ability of the group to develop secure organizational relationship patterns.

As described earlier, Mickelson, et al. (1997) drew the conclusion from their research findings which revealed lower levels of insecure attachment patterns in older adults and that older adults may resolve their insecure attachment patterns into secure patterns as they mature. The average age of the Early Birds is 67.5 which suggests that there may be a correlation between the ages of the group members and the ability to form and sustain a secure organizational relationship

pattern. Having said this however, it is important to remember that the group formed when many of the current members were in their 40s. A few of the members made comments during their interviews that suggested that they had had previous experiences in groups that were very different from what they were experiencing with the Early Birds. Indeed, the high regard that the members hold for the group may itself be a function of a comparison with a history of far less satisfactory group experiences. Further study, especially longitudinal ones, is required to explore this question. Lawson's (2006) work with bible study groups may actually be a source of information that could shed light on this question.

**Potential psychosocial factor:** The purpose of the group may have an influence on the ability of a group to form secure relationship patterns.

The Early Birds are a social group. Even though they describe their attitudes towards their tennis games as competitive, this is certainly not the same as the function of a work group or even a social action group. The added dimension of having a group task may place stresses on the group that have an impact on the group's relationship patterns. I hypothesize that securely related groups may be more likely to handle difficult group tasks than insecurely related groups. Indeed, I suspect that understanding how relationship patterns impact the productivity of groups will be the most important off-shoot of this study. I will explore this concept further when I consider the implications of this study later in this chapter.

**Potential psychosocial factor:** There may be an inverse proportional relationship between the ability of a group to form and maintain secure relationship patterns and the organizational relationship patterns of the larger social context.

The Early Birds are characterized by openness to new members and to the social context of the tennis club where the group plays. This study, however, did not extend its investigation to the larger social context of the group. It did not for instance conduct interviews or observations of the management of the Mount Vernon Racquet Club or of the other club members. Nor did this

study examine the other social contexts of the members such as their marital relationships, work relationships, or other social group relationships.

The openness to the larger social context and other related psychosocial characteristics of a group may be a function of the organizational relationship patterns of the larger social context. That is, securely related groups and organizations may take on other characteristics when they are enveloped in insecurely related social contexts. For example, the Early Birds might have other group characteristics that have not yet been discovered if there was an adversarial relationship with the health club or if, for example, there was some social stricture against older adult tennis players or even against men and women playing sports together. The relationship between the organizational relationship patterns of groups and other groups as well as the larger social context may be an area for further exploration.

**Potential psychosocial factor:** There may be an inverse proportion between the ability to form securely related groups and organizations and the size of the group.

The Early Birds are a medium sized social group with a membership that has for several decades appeared to hover between 10 and 20 individuals. Bowen (2004), whose theories of societal regression were described earlier suggests that social density can have an anxiety-inducing effect on organizations. He suggests that the biological imperative to establish territory becomes increasingly frustrated and anxious as social density increases. It may be that the additional organizational requirements of large groups that are required to manage the intersections between complex functions may make it more difficult for secure relationship patterns to form.

Together then, the psychosocial factors presented in this section provide an opportunity for future research into group functioning. I hypothesize, that should this research be conducted, that we, as mental health professionals, will have a far better understanding of how to structure groups within the psychosocial environment and then, going forward, how to sustain groups into the future.

In summary then, the picture presented here of a securely related group is one of rich, cognitively and emotionally stimulating relationships between individuals who feel comfortable with whom they are and comfortable with whom their fellow group members are. It is a picture of a group whose members look forward to their time together as a time to challenge themselves and their fellow Early Birds to play the best tennis they can without regard for fear of failure or disappointment to themselves or others. It is a time to make contact with fellow group members who genuinely care about your well-being yet at the same time will not hesitate to use your missed shot or off-hand phrase as fodder for puns, quips, and repartee. It is a picture of a group whose members are enhanced by their membership and the group enhanced by their membership. Is it any wonder that Cleve would say, “Well I see this group going on and on.”

### ***Reinterpretation of Other Theories and Research from the Perspective of Organizational Relationship Theory***

In this section I return to several of the research findings and theories described earlier in this study and offer the possibility of reinterpreting these from the perspective of organizational relationship theory. I hope to demonstrate that several descriptions of group attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors explained by previous research and theorizing can be better explained or further enriched by reframing from the perspective of organizational relationship theory.

**Maintenance-by-suppression versus maintenance-by-expression strategies as a means to maintain long-term relationships:** I have presented evidence describing how the Early Birds make use of maintenance-by-suppression techniques rather than maintenance-by-expression techniques to maintain harmonious relationships. I concluded at that time that Kaplan’s theories (1975/1976) did not adequately explain why some relationship partners prefer one mechanism over another and why some relationships require more or less of these techniques

to maintain the relationship. This question can now be reframed within the context of organizational relationship theory.

Groups with predominantly avoidant relationship patterns are more likely to exhibit maintenance-by-suppression behavior patterns. In contrast, groups with predominantly enmeshed relationship patterns are more likely to use excessive maintenance-by-expression techniques. This means that either of Kaplan's relationship maintenance styles can be dysfunctional. (Kaplan, as presented in the Literature Review, suggests that maintenance-by-expression is the preferred technique to maintain long-term relationships.) Groups with secure relationship patterns, I propose, are more likely to need less of either technique. Securely related groups are likely to resolve tensions as they arise by either deflecting or expressing depending on the circumstances. The important issue is that the tension is resolved. Insecurely related groups on the other hand, are more likely to revisit tensions over and over again without resolution – whichever technique is used.

**Why do some individuals become members of enclaves and others become members of communities of interest?** In the Literature Review, I presented the theories of Bellah, et al. (1985) with regard to their comparisons between lifestyle enclaves and communities of memory. The lifestyle enclave is represented by the country club, the gated community, and other socially engineered social structures that Bellah et al. distinguish from the community of memory where community is “an inclusive whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life” as contrasted to the lifestyle enclave which celebrates the “narcissism of similarity” (p.73). Bellah et al. describe the lifestyle enclave as representative of a social fragmentation based in a cancerous individualism that is at the heart of an American social malaise.

I would respond to Bellah et al. that when individuals are psychologically capable of forming secure adult relationships, group membership becomes a valuable and meaningful experience. The psychosocial factors associated with the ability to form secure attachments found in these types of group are those that lead to the formations of communities of memory. In

contrast, I hypothesize that what they call lifestyle enclaves are actually expressions of the dominant American social relationship pattern which I characterize as avoidant. The gated community is the quintessential expression of avoidant relationship patterns.

**Organizational relationship theory can be an overarching framework to distinguish between theories and research providing evidence of tension in groups and organizations between individual and group needs and those that do not.** Lack of tension between individual and group needs is a core characteristic of securely related groups. Indeed, I hypothesize that what has previously been identified by some researchers and theorists as a fundamental tension between individual and group needs is actually a manifestation of an insecure organizational relationship style. So, while the research conclusions might be correct on a case-by-case basis, the underlying cause may actually be quite different. Tension between individual and group needs is a defining characteristic of avoidantly or enmeshed organizational relationship patterns. The tension is experienced when defense mechanisms are put in play as a response to the lack of balance between the perceived satisfaction of individual and group needs. I hypothesize that the greater the maladaptive relationship pattern, the greater the tension between the satisfaction of individual and group needs will be perceived to be.

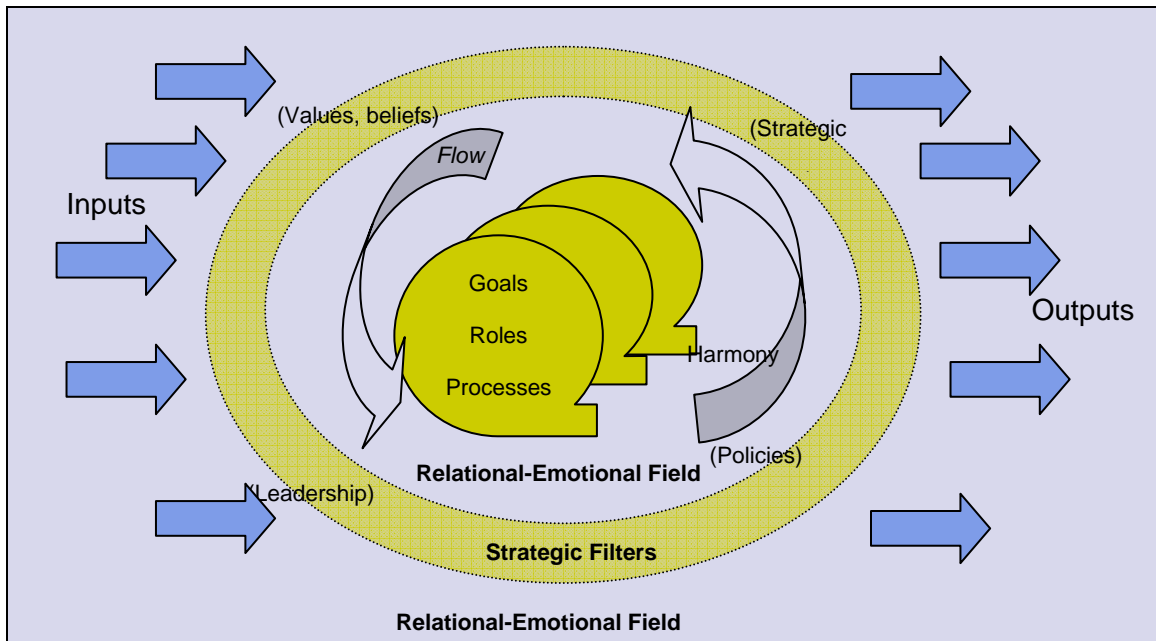
**Reframing of social identity theory:** That which distinguishes organizational attachment theory from social identity theory and its corollary, self-categorization theory, is our differences with regard to what we believe are the binding factors that hold groups together. As described earlier, Thoits and Virshup (1997) note that social identity theory and self-categorization theory do not take into account the intragroup and intergroup emotional processes that may be contributing to group cohesion. My research provides the “missing link” in social identity theory by filling the void with regard to how emotional processes play into group relationship patterns and how groups members are bound to each other.

There are two positions held by social identity theorists that can be challenged from the perspective of organizational relationship theory. First, social identity theorists posit

depersonalization as the primary psychological process that binds individuals in groups. (Turner et al., 1987) Turner posits that depersonalization is characterized by reductions in social role and social status differences in highly cohesive groups. (Thoits & Virshup, 1997) My findings run contrary to this conclusion and I must reject Turner's position. Indeed, the Early Birds as the findings of this study attest take great pride in their diversity of opinions, personal histories, and social positioning.

Rather, I propose that it is organizational attachment, with its physiological, emotional, and cognitive psychological constituents, that compels individuals to engage in social exchange. Organizational relationship patterns are core working models that govern attitude, cognition, and behavior at both the conscious and unconscious levels. Organizational relationship theory has an advantage over depersonalization as described in social identity theory in that it does a better job of explaining why individuals remain in social or organizational relationships that they experience as unpleasant and/or stressful.

Second, social identity theorists emphasize the maintenance of ingroup-outgroup tension as a means to enhance group cohesion. I would counter that the need for maintaining ingroup-outgroup tension is a characteristic of insecure relationship styles. This is where a field level interpretation of organizational relationship patterns becomes particularly meaningful. It is important to remember that social structures are social constructs nested and intertwined in an infinite variety of patterns. When we examine organizational relationship patterns then, it is important to analyze not only the pattern of the group or organization in question but also the pattern of the surrounding social structures. The following diagram illustrates the interplay between a group's relationship patterns and those of the surrounding social environment.



**Figure 5 the Organizational relationship pattern of a securely related organization**

I propose that ingroup-outgroup differentiation is necessary for the cohesion of a group in one of two contexts. First, if a group is insecurely related, then it will be necessary for it to create artificial boundaries to sustain it. As the illustration shows, the boundaries are maintained by emphasizing the values, beliefs, and governance processes as well the leadership of the group. Second, I propose that ingroup-outgroup differentiation is necessary when a securely related group strives to maintain its cohesion in the midst of an insecurely related social environ. In this case, the group maintains boundaries to protect itself from contamination from the external environment. When the group is also insecurely related but centering itself on different values, beliefs, and governance structures, the barriers are further exaggerated.

Taking this concept one step further, I contend that the postmodern social milieu that we find ourselves embedded in is a case of an insecurely related social environment. The return to tribalism, factionalism, and indeed cult behavior that we see in some areas of the world can be seen as a response to the perceived threat of the insecure relationship patterns of the surrounding environment. The level of boundary that is established is directly proportional to the perceived



threat to social identity. When social groups are insecurely related themselves that threat is magnified.

**Responding to Kegan's challenge to identify the types of organizations that can foster both interindividuality and institutionality:** As already cited, constructivist developmental theorist Kegan presents the following challenge: "What a workplace or organization actually looks like or feels like when it can culture interindividuality as well as institutionality I leave for others to elaborate" (1982, p. 247).

In response, only securely related organizational structures can provide the framework that Kegan envisions. Kegan requires that this social structure be such that it can accommodate growth of the individual by being willing to sacrifice the permanency of its own artifacts to the developmental process. The social unit must envision itself as in flux, as process rather than as product, constantly interacting with its multiple environs. At the same time the social unit must maintain enough cohesiveness to retain its distinction as a social structure. In this delicate balance can only be sustained in the securely related organization.

Insecurely related organizations, as I elaborated on in the previous section, all use governance models to mute anxiety levels. These governance structures, with their gates and boundaries, are emblematic of the types of organizations that Kegan calls institutional. Their rules and regulations serve to maintain the artifacts of the status quo which is in itself a means to manage social anxiety. They create artifacts that become more important than process. In contrast, as I have described earlier, one of the core characteristics of the securely related organization is that its governance structure, its policies, procedures, and role enactments exist only as they are needed to support the current goals of the organization. They are open to change as the needs of the organization change.

The implication of this view then is that social structures must be at a developmental level equal to or greater than that of the individual entering into the organization if they are to be able to foster the individual developmental process. This is a view that I am still considering but

have not yet been able to fully adopt. It will require both further considerations on my part as well as an opportunity for further investigation.

**Organizational relationship theory can contribute to a better understanding of the Kilburg et al. (1998) model of organizational regression** Kilburg, et al. have developed a model that describes the progression of organizations from health to dysfunction as a result of mal-adaptation to the internal and external driving, restraining and barrier forces operating on an organization. They used the terms *internal regressive forces* and *external regressive forces* to describe the forces working against organizational health and cohesion and the term *balancing forces* to refer to the forces contributing to resisting regressive tendencies. When I presented the theories of Kilburg et al. I posed the question: “Why do some organizations regress while others, experiencing the same internal and external regressive forces, self-heal and remain high functioning?”

Organizational relationship theory can provide a useful response to this question. I hypothesize that organizations with secure relationship patterns will be far more resistant to internal and external regressive forces. The self-healing social processes in evidence among the Early Birds will function to repair the damages of regressive forces without the psychosocial scarring that will be found to characterize insecurely related groups and organizations.

Additionally, the application of intervention methods specifically tailored to move organizations towards secure relationship patterns may be more effective than interventions tailored towards altering the internal and external regressive forces. That is, it may be more effective to improve the health of the organization rather than to eliminate the psychosocial viruses in its environment.

In addition to the responses to the sampling of theories presented above, organizational relationship theory will have application to a wide variety of research and theorizing about group processes. The strength of organizational relationship theory is in its generalizability to a multitude of social processes and structures. It applies equally to studies of small groups as to

social structures. It also applies equally to social groups, work structures, and to government institutions. There are significant opportunities for further study in these areas.

### ***Implications for Adult Mental Health Care***

While this study has confined itself to an examination of psychosocial factors associated with a single instance of a social group, there are significant implications from this study for the ways that we conduct psychotherapy. In this section I will make my contributions to what can be called a social constructionist psychotherapy.

A body of evidence is accumulating, to which my own research is contributing, that points to the correlation between the kinds of relationships that an individual has and the level of his/her psychological health. Yet even as this evidence accumulates we continue to do psychotherapy in one-to-one relationship in the isolated and artificial setting of the therapist's office. We do not see our clients in the contexts of their daily life, in their family environment, in their work setting, with their friends, and engaged in casual pursuits. We do not see if their behavior changes from setting to setting. How then can we really assess the psychological health of our clients who may be grounded and rational in the therapy office yet once triggered in the work environment, may exhibit completely different anxiety laden behavior?

If there are, as my research suggests, pathological organizational relationship patterns, than can we effectively do therapy in isolation from our clients social contexts? This study and its social constructionist perspective have powerful implications for how we view the relationship between group and organizational participation and optimal psychosocial functioning. First, when we are concerned for improving the psychosocial functioning of an individual therapy patient then we need to take a much closer look at the groups that the individual belongs to or doesn't belong to. What are the relationship patterns of the family, of the work environment, of the individual's social memberships? Can a person "get well" if they work in an office environment that is highly avoidant, enmeshed, or worse yet, fearful? Alternately, if we want to support

healthy psychosocial functioning in our patients then perhaps more of our attention should be placed on finding opportunities for them to join high functioning groups where they can experience the beneficial effects of secure relationship patterns.

If individuals will take on the cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors of the groups they belong to, then a different model begins to develop of psychosocial health. An individual from this perspective can be high functioning and “normal” in one group environment but severely hampered by anxiety-inducing relationship patterns in another. This study, for example, did not examine marital or work relationship patterns or relationships in other groups. One of the fertile areas for future investigation will be to compare the influence of relationship patterns across multiple social contexts to determine the influence that one social context will have on another.

### ***The Case for a Social Psychotherapy***

Sampson (1989) makes the following challenge to the discipline of psychology:

A psychology for tomorrow is a psychology that begins actively to chart out a theory of the person that is no longer rooted in the liberal individualist assumptions, but is reframed in terms more suitable to resolving the issues of a global era. (p. 920)

Shotter (2003) also contends that the discipline of psychology has made a “dangerous mistake” because it has failed “... to take account of the fact that in our everyday social life together, we do not find it easy to relate ourselves to each other in ways which are both intelligible (and legitimate), *and* which also are appropriate to ‘*our*’ (unique) circumstances; and the fact that on occasions at least, we nonetheless do succeed in doing so” (p. 23).

I would like to propose in this section the beginning of what I call a *social psychotherapy*. By this I mean, a collection of methods, tools, and techniques, based upon a social constructionist paradigm with the objective of collaboratively effecting change within groups, organizations, and societies, *as* groups, organizations, and societies. Organizational relationship theory can become a vital part of the theoretical underpinning for such a social psychotherapy.

Organizations are increasingly challenged to become learning organizations or high reliability organizations. (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001) These high performing organizations are dependent on secure organizational attachment styles. When cultural transformation efforts aimed at these kinds of high performance capabilities are instituted within organizations with avoidant or fearful attachment styles, then the transformation efforts are doomed to failure. Sustained high performance is dependent on a secure organizational attachment style. In the same way that the Early Birds have sustained a level of warmth, humor, and profound mutual respect over a 35 year period, commercial organizations must strive for the same mutuality of interests.

Organizational relationship theory offers the potential to bridge the gap not only between individual psychotherapy and organizational psychotherapy, but between constructivism and constructionism. I am not proposing that organizational attachment theory is an all-encompassing social constructionist psychotherapy. But I do see it positioned within a social constructionist informed social psychotherapy in the same way that developmental and adult attachment theory is positioned within individual psychotherapy.

A social psychotherapy would distinguish itself from individual, family, and group psychotherapy in that the locus of pathology would be envisioned to lie not within the individual(s) but rather in the relationships among and between individuals. The goal of social psychotherapy would be to heal and optimize relationships.

What would this psychotherapy look like? First, like virtually all psychotherapies and organizational intervention methods, it would follow a sequence of assessment, intervention, and maintenance processes. The assessment phase would be a process of identifying the organizational attachment styles of the organization and how those styles are affecting organizational behavior. Assessment would consist of examining first and foremost how individuals behave towards each other including the rules and regulations binding the organization together. Do the members of the organization tend to work in siloed enterprises? Is there continued churn and turmoil? Are there excessive regulations governing behavior? One of

the great benefits that this study has to offer to social psychotherapy is its model of what a healthy, securely related organization looks like. As the “gold standard” for healthy group functioning, it provides the beginnings of a model to assess group attitudes, cognitions, and behaviors against.

Depending on the particular insecure pattern operating within an organization, interventions consist of means to transform negative working models of self and/or other to positive ones. The complexity of this process cannot be underestimated. Indeed, in cases where fearful relationship patterns are deeply entrenched intervention may not be possible. Again, the findings from this study can provide a frame of reference for developing interventions.

Organizational interventions should be: first, targeted at those behavioral and institutional conditions that are acting against these psychosocial factors; and second, targeted at enforcing those behavioral and institutional conditions that will reinforce these factors. Maintenance processes would consist of monitoring group processes and making targeted interventions to ensure that healthy secure relationship patterns are maintained.

A social psychotherapy can also make a contribution to our decisions with regard to how groups are formulated. If we wish, for example, to form a small pilot group to develop a product prototype, then it would be wise to form the group initially from a small cadre of individuals with a history of secure relationship patterns. These individuals, unless there are compelling reasons otherwise such as dramatically opposed “ologies”, would form the core working models of a securely related group. This group should then be added to slowly over time so that new members can adopt the working models of the founding mothers/fathers and not overwhelm the secure relationship patterns of the group. Adding new members too quickly will put the group at risk of overwhelming the core working models. This phenomenon explains why the successful efforts of small informal work groups such as the Lockheed Martin Skunk Works® (2006) of the 1940s and 1950s fail to be duplicated when rolled out to larger and different populations. It is not the processes and governance of the original group that must be duplicated, but rather the secure

relationship pattern that was the root cause out of which the processes and governance spontaneously arose.

Organizational relationship theory can also make a contribution to our understanding of the too often disappointing and even tragic consequences that occur when cultures are involuntarily or reluctantly thrust together. When cultures collide in this way, as in the cases of business mergers, outsourcing, and military occupations, the by and large unconscious anxiety-inducing effects of forming new organizational relationship patterns can have profound effects putting the newly formed social structures at risk of devolving into fearful organizational relationship patterns.

If the dominant group approaches the relationship with negative attitudes towards the other group, then it is highly unlikely that the newly formed group will achieve the lofty goals of improved economic and/or social success that propelled the groups together in the first place. The group being absorbed into the merger, outsourced, or occupied as a result of invasion is at high risk of developing a sense of defeat and uncertainty about its own value and self-worth. Equally, members of this group are collectively unlikely to develop positive feelings about “intruders” who hold their group in such low esteem. As a result, both of the originating groups increasing doubt their own value and self-worth, especially as they fail to form into a new, “improved” group. A fearful organizational relationship pattern, with all its destructive consequences, ensues. As the relationship progresses and the newly formed group fail to achieve its goals of social and/or economic well-being these forces intensify in strength and further embed the group in a fearful organizational relationship pattern. This is what quagmire looks like. It is also what Bowen (2004) describes as social regression.

These examples and hypothetical situations provide a compelling case for social psychotherapy. The possibility to avoid the types of situations outlined above are reason enough to explore how organizations can be worked with to move from insecure to secure relationship patterns.

## ***Limitations***

Vaillant (2002), observing about the strengths and weakness of the Harvard Adult Development Studies noted that the prospective nature of these studies was one of their strongest features. Conversely, for exactly the same reasons that Vaillant claims for the strength of the Harvard study, the retrospective nature of my own study is one of its weaknesses. First, as Vaillant notes, retrospective studies can only draw information from the survivors. My study of the Early Birds did not have the advantage of interviewing early members (many now deceased) or especially those individuals who came to play a few times and then did not return. Thus, the voices of individuals who might have less favorable opinions of the group experience were not heard in this study.

Second, Vaillant (2002) notes that human memory can be unreliable. The Early Birds in recounting the stories of the group have in many cases had decades to reframe events in the most representative manner of their group mythology. This has both advantages and disadvantages. The reframing process does provide insight into how the group construes itself. But the process of how this comes about is still a matter of conjecture and hypothesis building. The steps by which the Early Birds have evolved into what it has become could only have been seen from a long-term perspective study. The stories that the Early Birds have told about themselves tell us what the Early Birds are but not too much perhaps about how they have evolved over time. This will need to become the material of future, and far more elaborate, studies which will have their own advantages and disadvantages.

The primary limitation of the study however is the relatively small sampling of data that was used to generate a theory of as broad a breadth and depth as organizational relationship theory. Further studies of groups and organizations using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods to study a range of organizational types and sizes will be required to confirm my initial



findings. Nevertheless, given that this study has provided a model of a high functioning group it will provide a vital framework for comparison.

### ***Future Research Issues***

While this research study has hypothesized about attachment styles in a single instance of a social group, there are further possibilities for the study of attachment styles in work groups. There might be particular value in researching self-managed work groups as models of secure organizational attachment styles. Kirkman and Bradley have researched differences in resistance to participation in self-managed work groups across cultures and noticed that there were cultural variations correlated with variations in power distance, collectivism, and organizational commitment. (Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001) Their research might, for example, be reframed as an examination of organizational relationship styles as predictors of the efficacy of self-managed work groups. Based on my research results I would hypothesize that organizations with predominantly secure relationship styles would be much more supportive of self-managed groups.

Additionally, this study, as well as others such as that of Rom and Mikulincer (2003) that have examined group attachment styles, has focused on assessing current behavior. There is an opportunity to go beyond assessment into the area of intervention. That is, there is an opportunity to use assessment as the basis for changing the relationship styles of groups. This can have interesting implications for working with task-oriented groups.

Another line of inquiry offers intriguing possibilities. As commented on briefly in the Literature Review, Bowlby (1982) and many other theorists and researchers (Caporael, 1997; Cozolino, 2006; Pederson & Moran, 1999; Stern, 1985) have posited an adaptive evolutionary process with regard to the development of attachment behavior. Recently Insel (2000) has provided research evidence that the neurochemical oxytocin is secreted by humans both at birth and during sexual behavior. He suggests that oxytocin secretion may be related to the formation of attachment bonds. If this line of research proves fruitful it might be intriguing to expand the

research to determine if similar neurobiological processes are occurring in group and organizational behavior. It seems as reasonable to assume that adaptive evolutionary processes have contributed to group attachment bonding as it is to assume that it has to parent-child and male-female attachment behaviors. Indeed, such a neurobiological antecedent might explain why we seek each other's companionship even when it sometimes is a less than satisfactory experience.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

In this study I have presented a picture of a social group that has stayed together for upwards of 30 years simply because they enjoy each other's company. Members feel good about themselves as a result of their membership and the stature of the group is enhanced by its members. The group has remained a group through the departure of members and the additions of new ones. Significantly, it has retained its love of competition, its good will, and its playful relationships through changes in membership and age-related changes in the ability to play tennis.

From this picture of a single social group I have laid some of the groundwork for the development of organizational relationship theory as an overarching framework for explaining why a social group, or any organization for that matter, is able to sustain a long-term spontaneous organizational relationship. Organizational relationship theory is premised on the application of current theories of childhood and adult attachment. It takes, however, a social constructionist perspective that places the locus of attention not on the intrapsychic processes of group members but rather on the relationship itself.

The Early Birds, through their interviews and through their willingness to be totally open to observation have provided a picture of the psychosocial characteristics of a group that is securely related and hence able to sustain harmonious group processes over an extended period of time. As revealed by the Early Birds, the psychosocial factors related to secure relationship patterns and group longevity are as follows:

- **Psychosocial Factor 1:** Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns are characterized by an absence of tension between the satisfactions of individual versus group needs. Indeed, not only are these groups characterized by an absence of tension between individual and group needs, there is synergistic enhancement of both needs as relational processes are engaged.
- **Psychosocial Factor 2:** Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns have a minimum of rules, regulations, and social norms governing their relationships and self-organize around the function of the group.
- **Psychosocial Factor 3:** Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns have self-healing relationships between the individual members, between the members and the group, and between the group and other groups.
- **Psychosocial Factor 4:** Groups and organizations with secure relationship patterns are able to successfully reframe what might otherwise be construed as divisive and conflictual circumstances in terms that support group cohesiveness and longevity.
- **Psychosocial Factor 5:** The internalized values of securely related groups and organizations can be construed as spontaneously arising ethical behavior.
- **Psychosocial Factor 6:** Securely related groups can sustain a wider diversity of membership. The breadth of diversity that can be tolerated is proportional to the security of relationship patterns of the group.
- **Psychosocial Factor 7:** Groups and organizations with secure organizational relationship patterns will be more resilient to changes in the internal and/or external psychosocial environment and more likely to remain a group.
- **Psychosocial Factor 8:** Securely related groups provide a psychosocial environment that is conducive to the psychosocial development of its individual member.

- **Psychosocial Factor 9:** Securely related groups support creativity among their members because they provide the affective environment conducive to creative processes.
- **Psychosocial Factor 10:** Securely related groups have affective access to their histories that is affirming and contributes to binding the group together.
- **Psychosocial Factor 11:** Members of securely related groups are more likely to form multidimensional intragroup bonds that are resilient to single-points-of-failure and consequently contribute to the longevity of the group.
- **Psychosocial Factor 12:** Securely related groups that are able to sustain their existence over long periods of time will have organizational structures and values that are congruent with those of the wider social context.

There is enormous benefit in adopting the social constructionist perspective of organizational relationship theory. It opens up the study of groups and organizations in ways that are congruent with the aspirations of Anderson et al. (2003) who suggest that:

...our understanding of emotional experience will be just as fruitfully advanced by looking outside the individual, especially to the individual's relationship context. Human experience may be even more social than we imagined or that the prose of our private experience suggests. (p. 1066)

Organizational relationship theory has much to offer in the way of not only revising and improving our understandings of why groups and organizations behave the ways that they do, but also towards improving our ability to intervene in group and organization psychosocial processes in order to move them towards secure relationship patterns. Many of the factors that previous researchers have identified as "causes" of maladaptive organizational behavior may, if examined more closely through the lens of organizational relationship theory, be seen as the symptomatic effects of the more fundamental insecure relationship patterns. Organizational relationship theory has a great deal to offer towards improving our understanding of why some groups and

organizations will continue to function at a high level of effectiveness for prolonged periods of time while other groups and organizations will collapse under the internal and external regressive forces within their psychosocial ecosystem.

The challenge associated with finding ways to sustain harmonious group processes is a daunting one. It is when the balance in an organization between structures supporting operations and structures designed to manage anxiety tip in the direction of the later role that organizations devolve into insecure relationship patterns that are entrenched in the organization. Once these structures are in place they become exceedingly difficult to eliminate due to their very function of anxiety maintenance. Organizations attempting to break out of insecure attachment styles must find alternative ways to manage their anxiety as transformation takes place. This is one of the greatest challenges of organizational development work. This is indeed what Bowen was saying in his writings on societal regression. Bowen, who is primarily known for his systems approach to family therapy, also applied his theories to an examination of modern Western society. He observed that there are two opposing forces in any family or society, a striving for individuality and a striving for togetherness, which must be kept in perfect balance for optimal functioning. His description of these two opposing forces within families and society bears a striking similarity to the descriptions of enmeshed and avoidant attachment patterns proposed by Bartholomew and Shaver (1998) as cited earlier:

These two forces are in such a sensitive balance that a small increase in either results in deep emotional rumblings as the two forces work toward the new balance .... On a societal level, the anxious vocal segment [enmeshed] begins a plea for peace, harmony, togetherness, caring for others, more rights, and for decisions that provide this. The individuality forces [avoidant] oppose and plead for principle, the autonomy of self, and staying on a predetermined course in spite of anxiety. (Bowen, 2004, p. 277)

Organizational relationship theory and the organizational assessments and interventions that can be developed as extrapolations from its core theoretical constructs can provide a very

powerful means to work with groups that recognize that there are dysfunctional psychosocial processes in place that are preventing the organization from achieving its highest potential. This study of the Early Birds has played a vital role in forwarding our understanding of what healthy organizational relationships look like.

The Early Bird psychosocial processes are a gold standard against which the functioning of other groups and organizations can be assessed. This is something very special in the realm of psychology. In a field dominated by the study of dysfunction, the Early Birds are a model of high functioning that can be aspired to. Additionally, because this study has contributed an understanding to why the Early Birds are so successful as a group, we now have the starting point for group interventions that can help other groups and organizations achieve the same long-term group processes as the Early Birds. I think the Early Birds will be very pleased with their legacy.

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## **APPENDIX: N'VIVO MODELS**

The following pages illustrate key models built using the N'Vivo modeling software. They have been transposed into MS Visio for improved readability. They document the grounded theory paths through the data and theory generation.

### Figure 5: Findings related to Post Modern theories

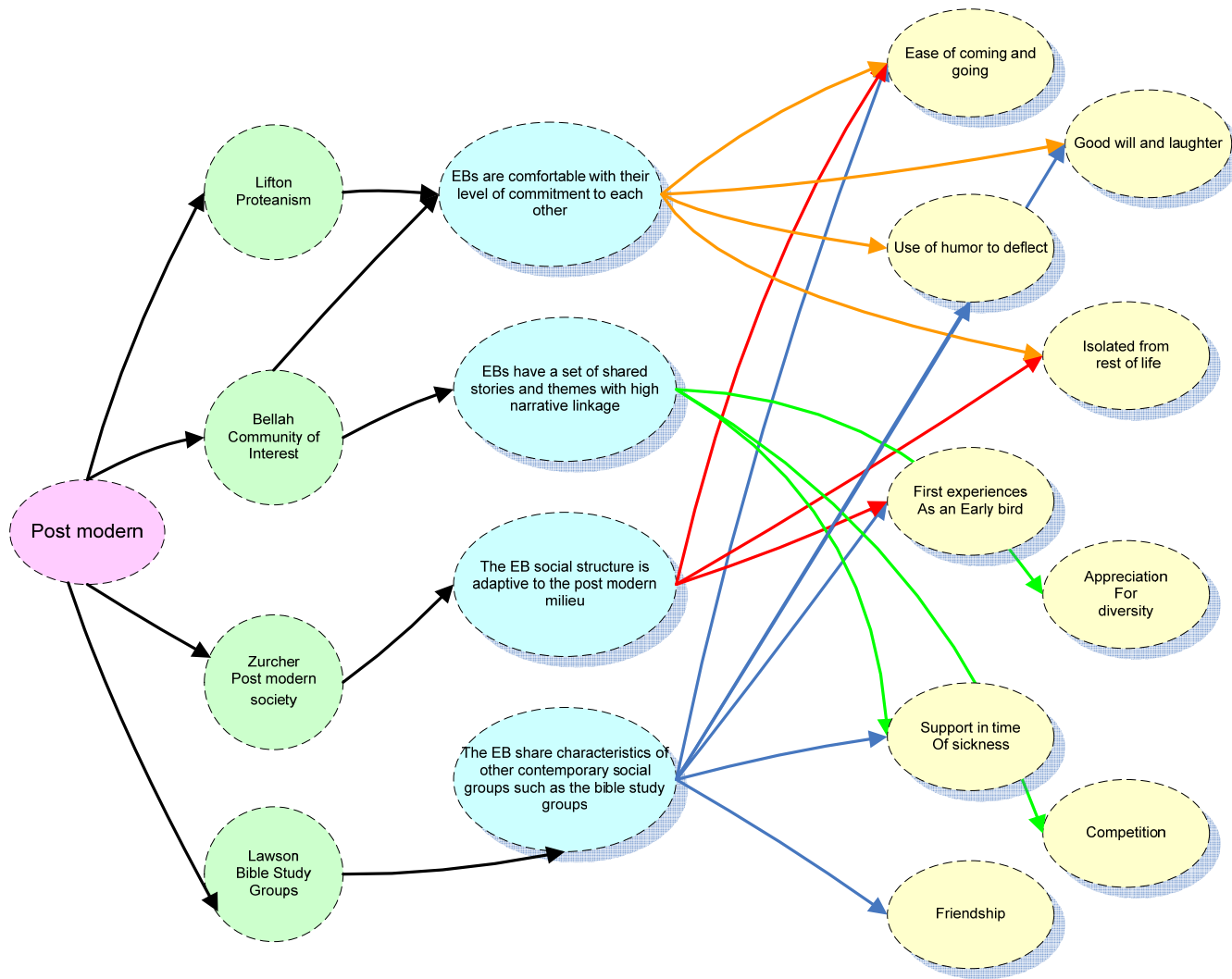


Figure 6: Findings related to theories of group behavior - part one

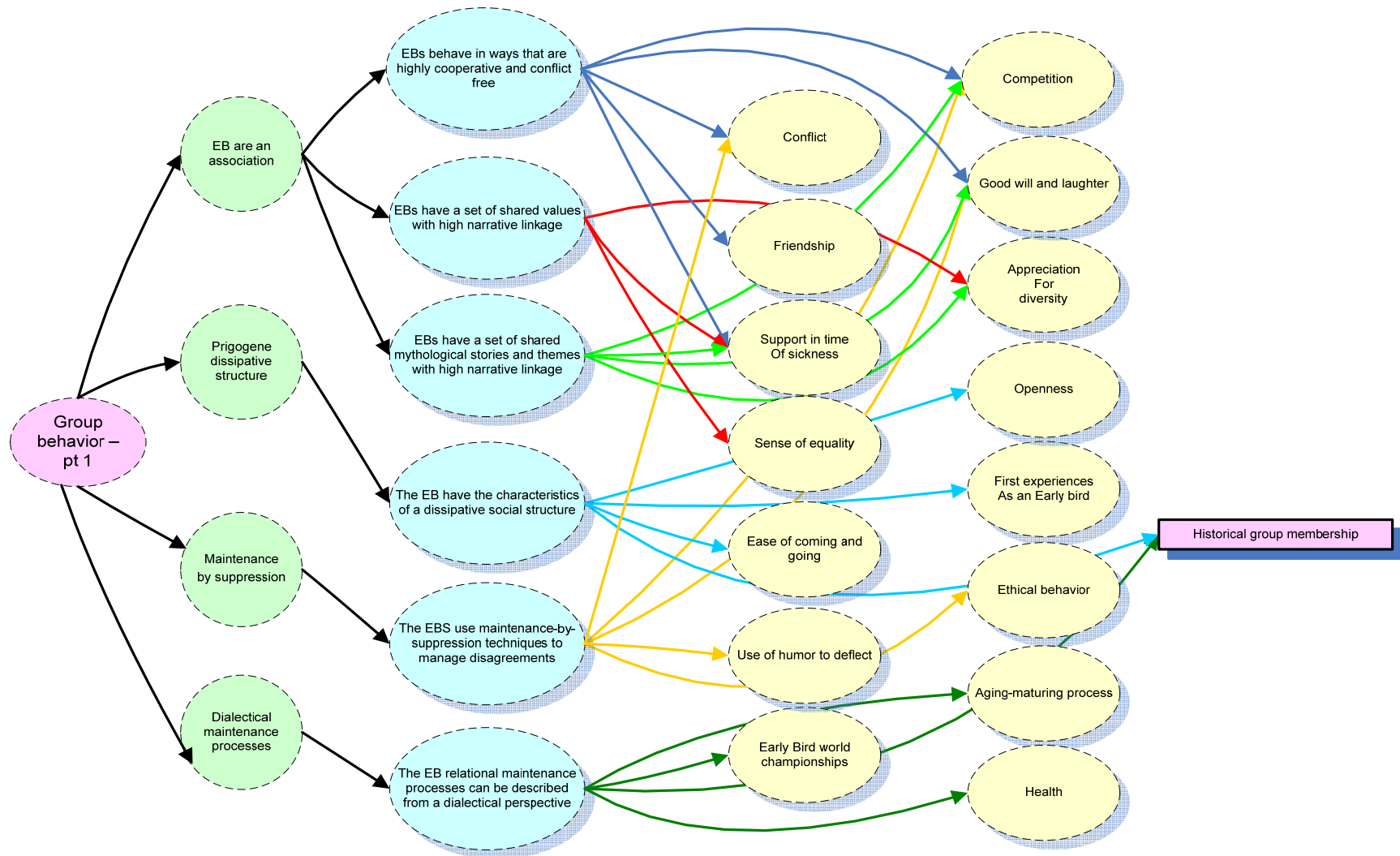


Figure 7: Findings related to theories of group behavior - part two

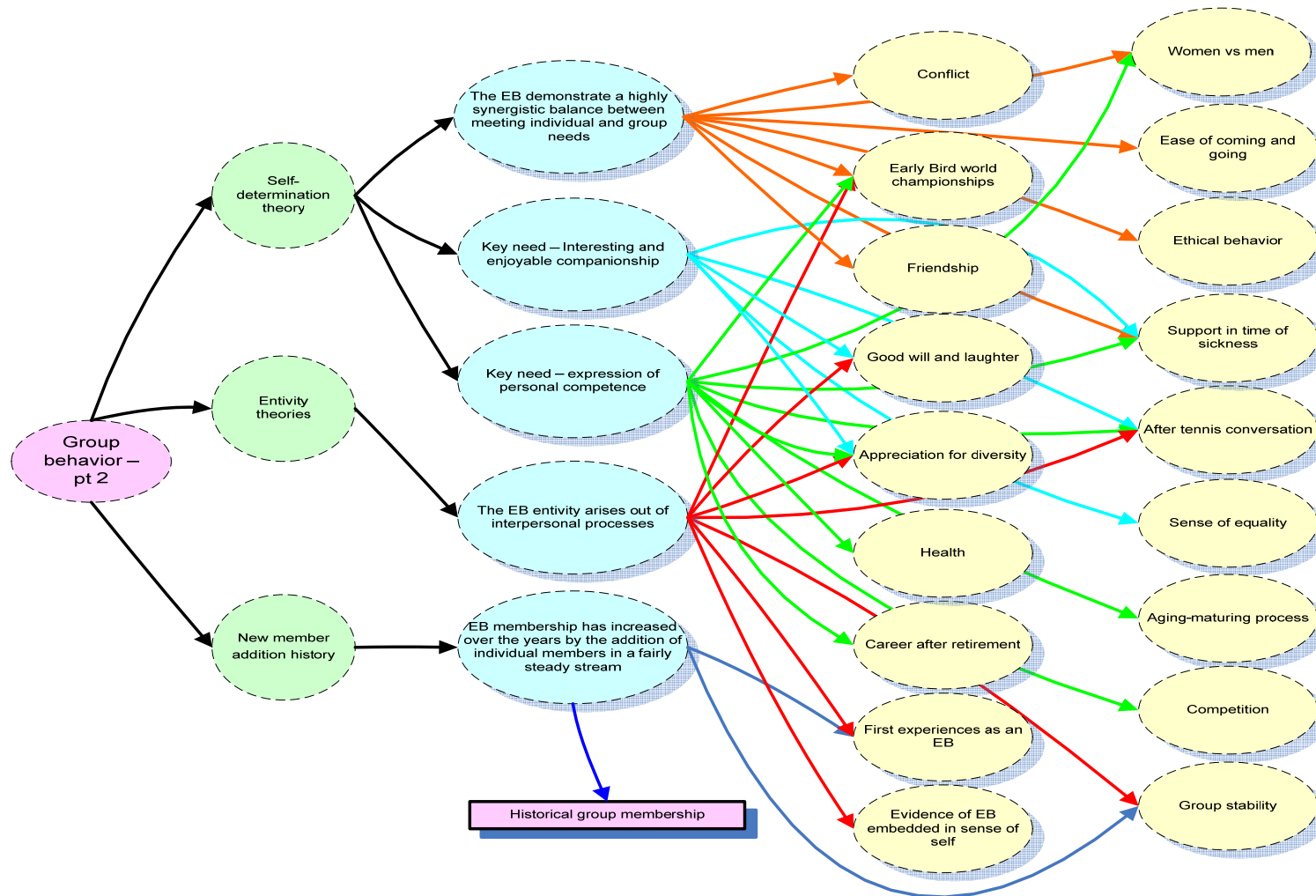


Figure 8: Findings related to theories of group behavior – part three

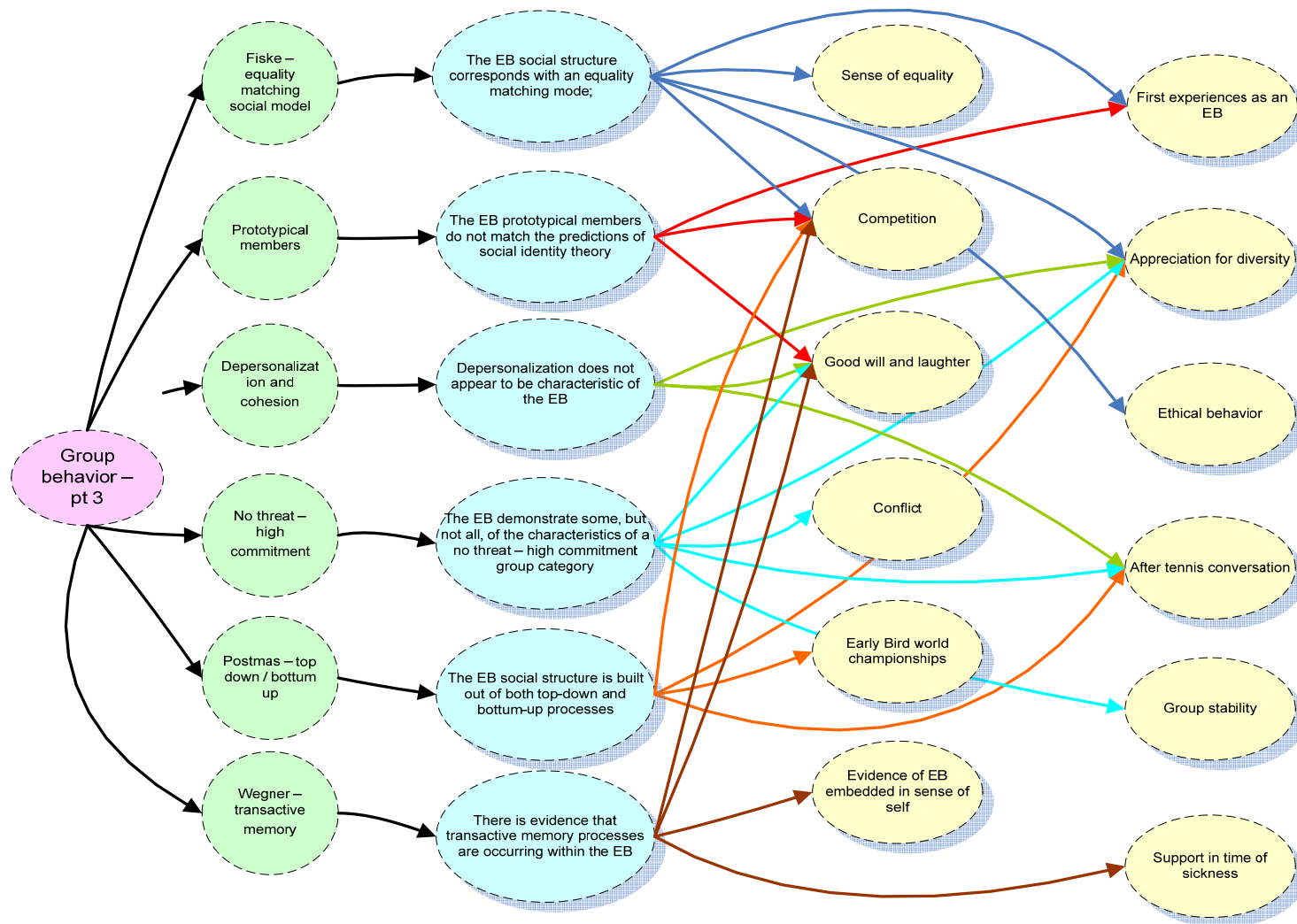


Figure 9: Findings related to adult developmental theory – part one

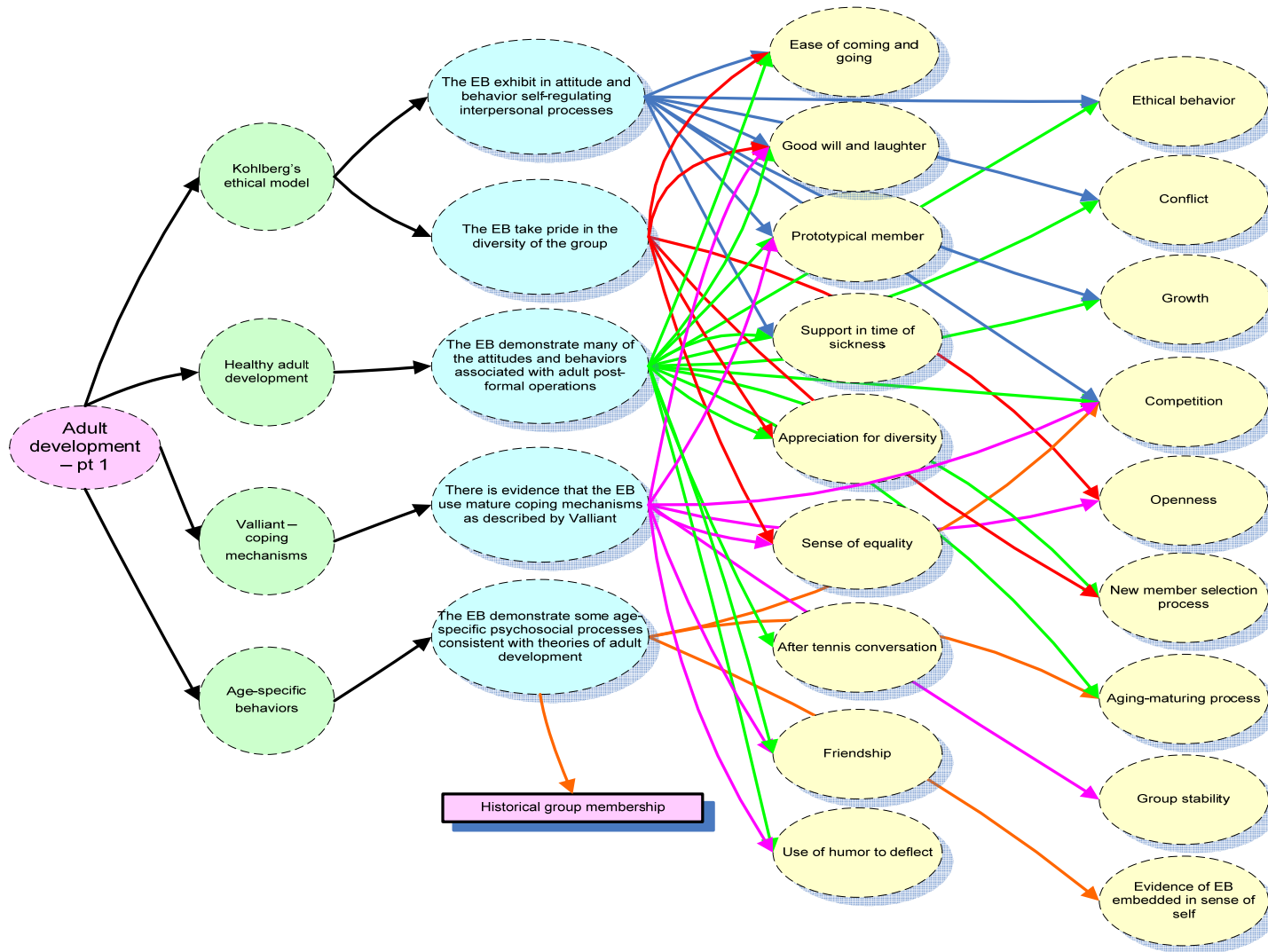




Figure 10: Findings related to adult developmental theory – part two

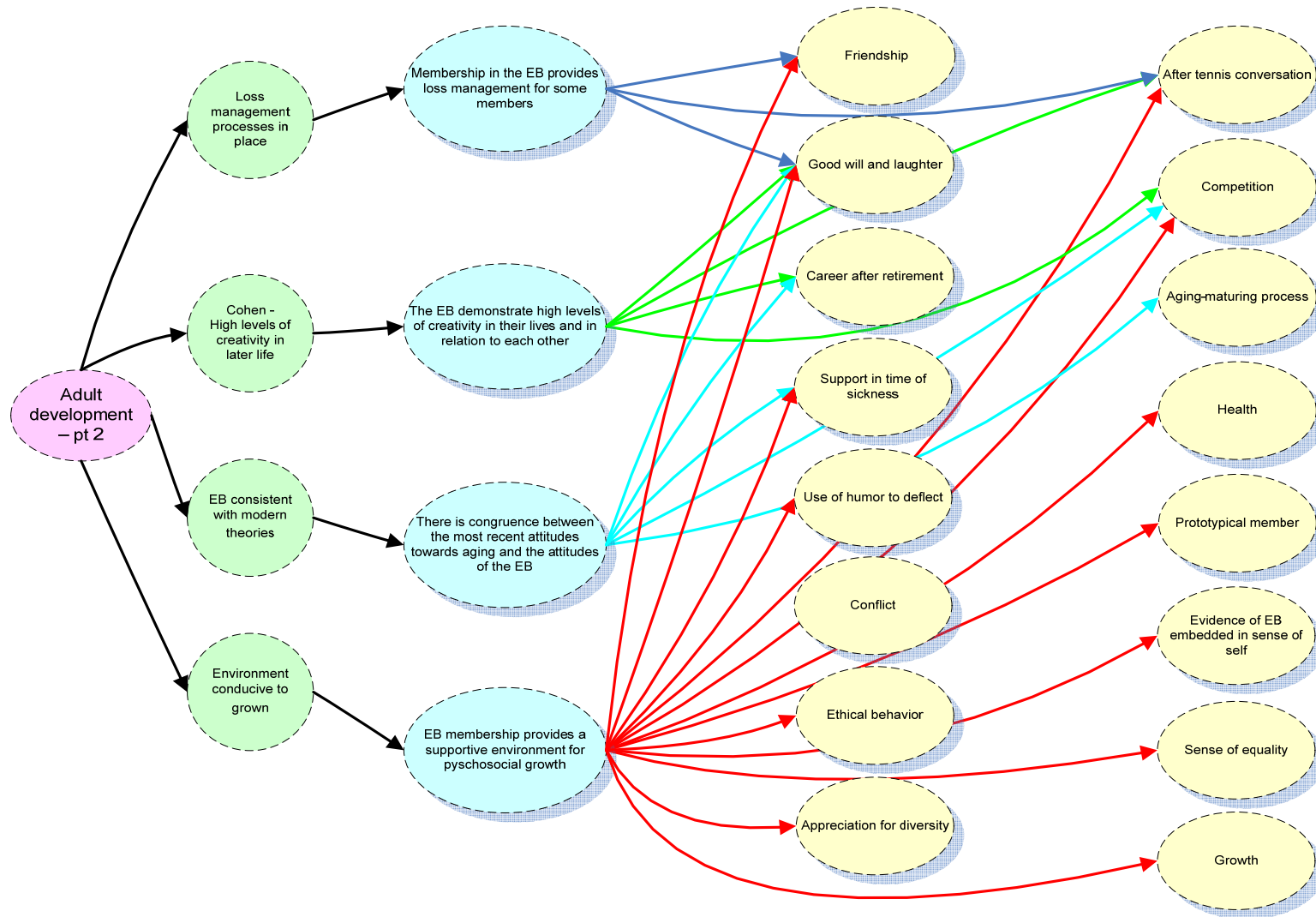


Figure 11: Findings related to adult developmental theory - part three

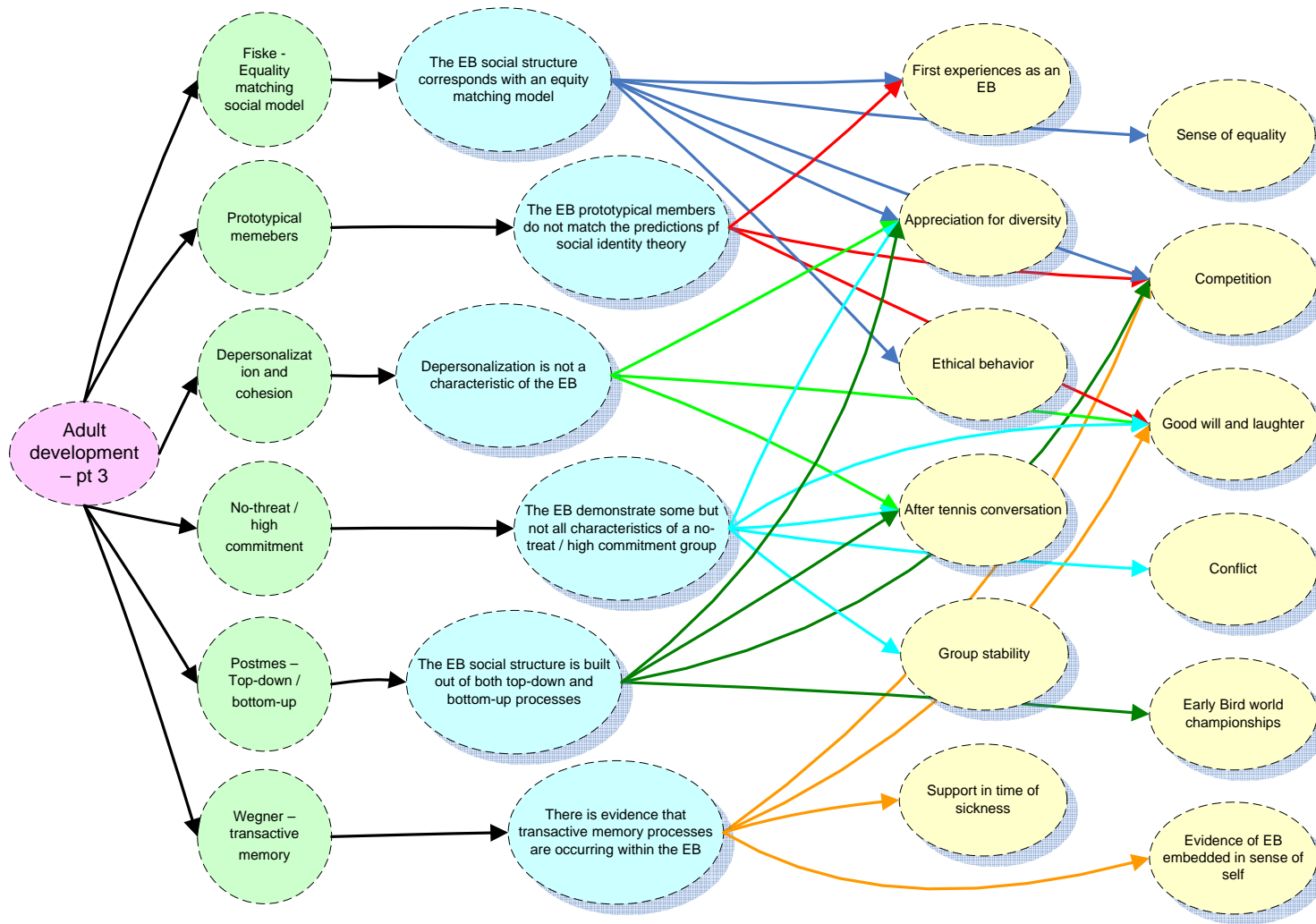
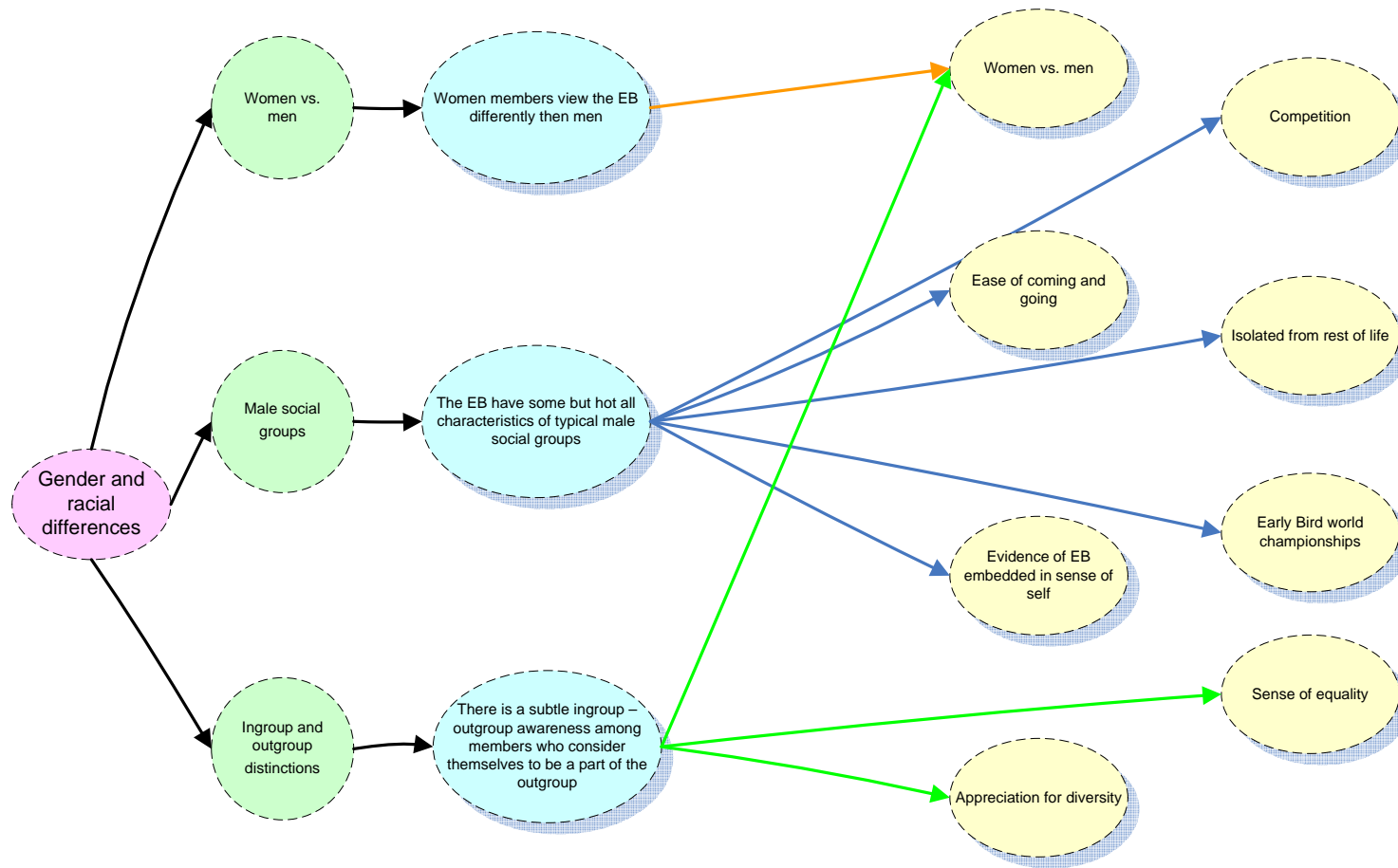
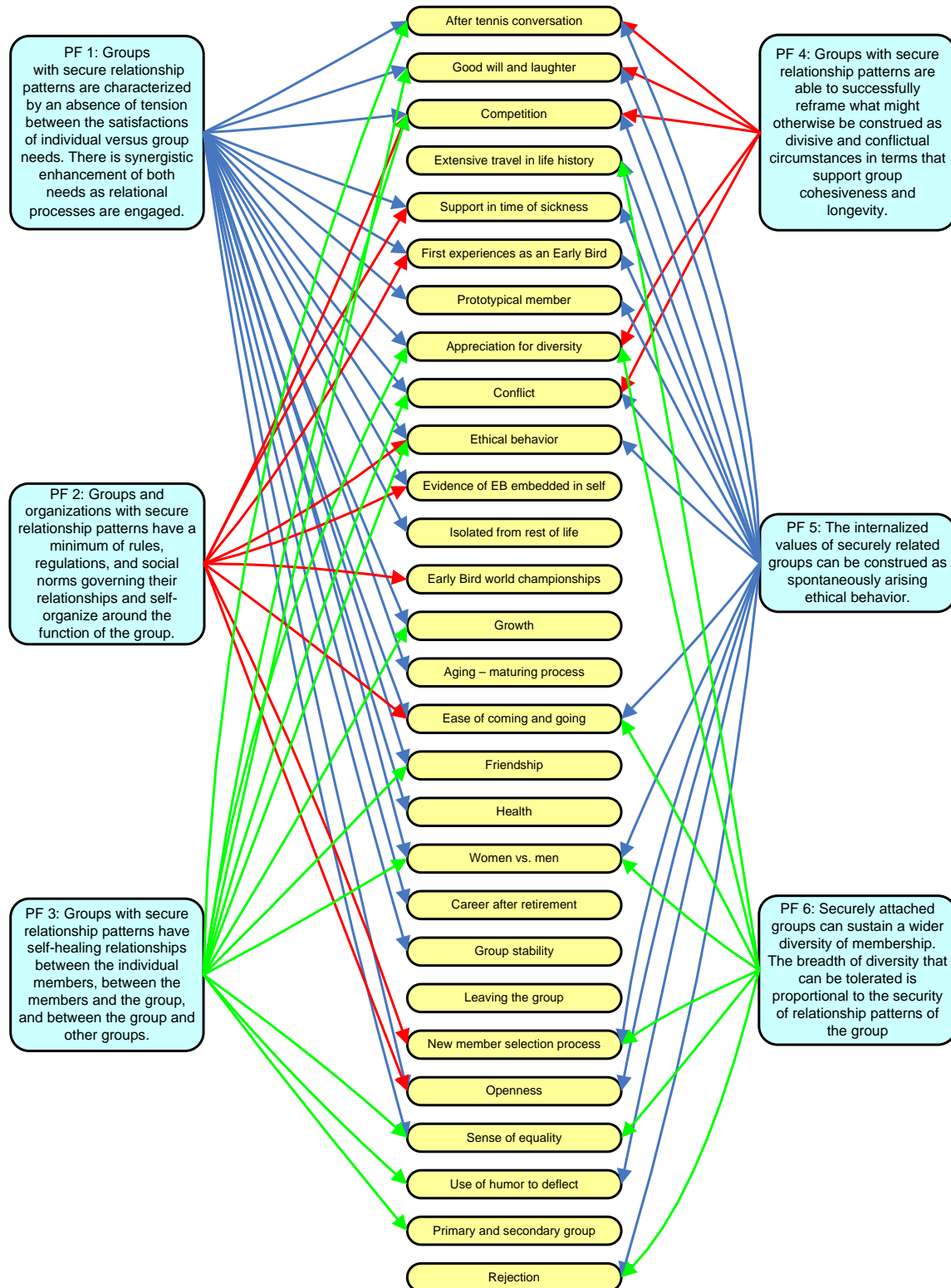


Figure 12: Findings related to gender and race differences



**Figure 13 Evidence within the primary nodes for the psychosocial factors (p1 – p6) associated with secure relationship patterns**



**Figure 45 Evidence within the primary nodes for the psychosocial factors (p7 – p12) associated with secure relationship patterns**

