



## Collaborative Circles: Friendship Dynamics & Creative Work

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The stage models of relationship and group development have pervaded communication research for decades. Sociologist and author, Michael Farrell, presents his own stage model of relationship and group development in his book, *Collaborative Circles: Friendship Dynamics & Creative Work*. Relying on historical details and letters written by members of collaborative friendship circles, Farrell provides a comprehensive overview of the formation and eventual cessation of several friendship circles. Using familiar examples of “famous” circles including, but not limited to, the Impressionists, Sigmund Freud and the Psychoanalytic Circle, Susan B. Anthony and the Ultras, Farrell is able to precisely describe and explicate his own developmental model. Farrell presents balanced, easily followed analyses of the development of friendship circles through the vivid and detailed examples he provides. The ease in which theory is blended with historical accounts is both informational and fascinating, making this book an interesting possibility for upper-level small group and interpersonal classes. The examples are easily understood and provoke thoughts of additional, more recent collaborative friendship circles.

Inherent in Farrell’s overall argument is that creativity is spurred by group cohesion and friendship. One comes away from this book realizing that even though historical accounts often highlight only some members of collaborative circles (e.g., Monet, Freud, Susan B. Anthony), the group cohesion of all members had something, if not everything, to do with the recognition of a few. Farrell highlights the importance of group work for advocating change, spurring ideas, initiating writing, and even moving members toward a new life, absent of the group. Farrell leaves no stage of the process unanalyzed, including the separation stage where he argues that the more time spent with the group actually leads to more “autonomous functioning” (p. 25).

Although Farrell provides his own stage model for collaborative circles, a brief mention of some of the already documented stage models might have been helpful. In particular, Farrell’s model is reminiscent of Mark Knapp’s (1996) relationship model, but Knapp’s work is never mentioned within Farrell’s text. For a comprehensive overview of Knapp’s model, please see [http://www.prenticehall.ca/beebe/intp\\_comm/relationaldev.html](http://www.prenticehall.ca/beebe/intp_comm/relationaldev.html).

Additionally, Farrell occasionally makes sweeping generalizations about the examples he provides. He is quick to assert interpretations about letters written by members of the circles, without ever recognizing that his assertions are just that—his assertions. While these generalizations might be viewed as a downfall of the book, they could provide the impetus for interesting class discussions.

Particular to the audience of this journal, Farrell makes several references to computers and technology, presenting a computer metaphor to describe the intimate connections often found within collaborative circles. While at times this metaphor seems awkwardly placed within the historical accounts, the metaphor provides a modern reaction to what could be viewed as outdated examples of group interactions. At times, it seems as though the computer metaphor could have either been more completely weaved throughout the book or abandoned entirely. At the very least, readers should be able to appreciate the connection Farrell attempts to make toward the technological world in which we all find ourselves. Towards the end of the final chapter Farrell makes an even grander gesture toward technology when he asserts that the Internet might be the newest place for “like-minded . . . marginalized people . . . to discover one another” (p. 293). Although he is reluctant to eliminate face-to-face meetings completely, he does see the value in the Internet for initial formations of future collaborators.

Michael Farrell offers a strong, historical account of the importance of group cohesion for stirring creativity. His chapter by chapter evaluation of collaborative friendship circles, together with his clear explanations and examples of his own stage theory, provide an interesting and informative approach to explicating small group and interpersonal relationships. His work opens the door to future projects dealing with more recent collaborative circles that might include, more specifically, issues of gender, culture, and technology. Farrell has set a foundation upon which his discussion of collaborative circles should only be the beginning.

### **Works Cited**

Knapp, M.L. & Vangelisti, A. (1996). *Interpersonal communication and human relationships* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Relationship Development. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2002, from [http://www.prenticehall.ca/beebe/intp\\_comm/relationaldev.html](http://www.prenticehall.ca/beebe/intp_comm/relationaldev.html).

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