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Women Psychotherapists' Reflections on Female Friendships: Sisters of the Heart

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Psychologists, as well as the general public, have recognized the importance of female friendships. Scientists call this bond the tending instinct- a kind of female relaxation response that has salutary effects. Such special attachment shields women from isolation and provides an enhanced sense of wellbeing. Intimate friends can therefore act as sisters of the heart to promote connection, solace, wholeness, and longevity. Moreover, women friends frequently provide emotional, social, physical, and spiritual benefits. Indeed, sisters of the heart constitute an unparalleled bond that encourages women to connect with themselves, with others, and with the world at large. In this book, twelve women therapists, who are diverse in age-- young, middle, and older women; as well as in ethnicity--White, African American, Latina, Asian American, Native American, and multiracial women---examine the psychological and physical aspects of this unique female bonding. Through their narratives we hear their distinctive voices as women and as healers. In this fashion, they reflect on both the functional and dysfunctional dynamics occurring between intimate female friends. Finally, these women therapists examine how their experience with a sister of the heart informed their development as healers, and discuss how they use this special bond in psychotherapy with women.

This book was originally published as a special issue of *Women & Therapy*.

'This enlightening, iconic book is for anyone who wants to understand more about the powerful roles of friendships?including challenges--among women that facilitate their ability to survive and thrive. It is special in that the chapter authors are psychotherapists who describe the impact of female bonding, from scientific as well as personal bases. The descriptions are rooted in theory, research, extensive clinical experience and personal lives. Refreshing and much needed, this book will prove useful to professionals as well as any women or men who want to understand the value and salience of female relationships.'

Melba Vasquez, PhD, ABPP

Past President, American Psychological Association

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