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ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood is a life stage of great change, and often instability in relationships and attachment (Demir et al., 2015; Lane et al., 2017; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Intimate friendships can be a moderating factor and assistance in gaining stability and increasing life satisfaction (Demir, 2021; Demir et al., 2015; Sanchez et al., 2020). This study used grounded theory methodology (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to develop a model of the process which Twentysomethings undergo while forming and maintaining intimate, or best, friendships. Through interviews with best friend pairs, this study found three main phases of the best friend process: forming friendship, deepening friendships, and maintaining friendships. Each of these phases also include sub-processes which push the overall process forward. The goal of this research is to assist clinicians working with Twentysomethings have a clear framework for establishing deep social connections, as well as to increase overall knowledge of friendship formation and maintenance after adolescence.

Forming and Maintaining Intimate Friendships as a Twentysomething

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of The Department of Marriage and Family Studies

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Marriage and Family Therapy

By

Molly S. Burke

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This thesis, directed and approved by the committee for the thesis candidate, Molly Burke, has been accepted by the Office of Graduate Programs of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Marriage and Family Therapy



Assistant Provost for Residential Graduate Programs

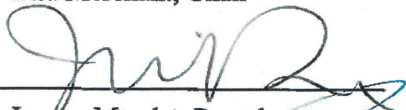
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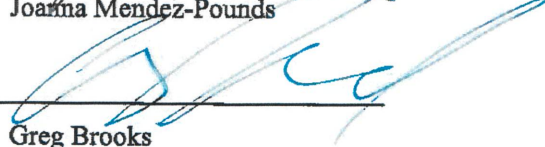
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Thank you to my church family across the country for your prayers and emotional support. Our community constantly reminds how valuable adult friendships are, and how they draw us closer to Christ.

Finally, thank you to my own best friends. You are my daily inspiration and the reason I care so much about best friendships. Your dedication, love, countless phone calls, and endless laughter in my life does not go unnoticed. You bring light to my life and remind me to continuously seek God before any of the other accolades or achievements I chase. My hope is that through this research at least one person may be able to make the kind of best friends you all are to me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For 30 minutes on a Thursday in 2004, 52.5 million individuals turned on their television at one time and watched the end of one of the most popular television shows in history (Carter, 2004). Sixteen years later the same show was the number one show streamed on a brand-new internet streaming service (Thorne, 2020). *Friends* (Crane et al., 1994–2004) influenced a movement of Twentysomethings to choose their own family made up of their own friends. The sitcom was not the first or last television program to romanticize the post-college single life of living with and hanging out with fictive kin. However, despite the popularity with this, now cliché, entertainment device, real life culture has only done a good job of adopting the desire for this type of relationship, and not a great job of putting it into practice. The romanticism of community and having a best friendship has won over the reality of fostering and maintaining a life that is a bit less individualistic.

Studies have shown that friendship is one of the most important relationships that a person can have, as well as a top coping mechanism (Cohen & Willis, 1985; Konstam et al., 2015; Widan & Greeff, 2019). Friendship lowers stress (Cohen & Willis, 1985), improves overall happiness (Demir, 2021; Demir et al., 2015; Sanchez et al., 2020), and often fills in attachment gaps that parents and spouses have neglected (Heinze et al., 2018; Miljkovitch et al., 2021) On the other side of the coin are studies that show that adults—specifically for the purposes of this study, adults in their twenties (which I will

refer to as “Twentysomethings”)—have high stress, low levels of happiness, and a bundle of attachment needs that are not being filled due to moving away from family and getting married later in life (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). If there is a seemingly obvious and simple answer to the issue of low life satisfaction of Twentysomethings, why does the issue exist?

This gap may be caused by Twentysomethings not having a space to meet new people, or if they are, not engaging in a depth of friendship that helps aid the areas of concern. Whatever the hurdles might be, it is imperative that the overbooked therapists (American Psychological Association, 2020) helping these struggling individuals are able to fully assist their clients in fostering beneficial relationships as a means to improve their life functioning. There is little literature on how adult friendships are formed and maintained, which leaves a gap in knowing how to assist Twentysomethings in forming, and perhaps more importantly, keeping these beneficial friendships. The purpose of this grounded theory study is to identify the process through which Twentysomethings form and maintain beneficial best friendships.

Friendship and Twentysomethings

In the following section I will examine the current literature’s information on friendship as well as the current experience of Twentysomethings. First, before reviewing the literature, I will state the definitions of the topic points of this research study and identify the theoretical lens through which the author is researching.

Twentysomethings

Twentysomethings experience a significant amount of instability due to developmental changes and transition during a short amount of time (Demir et al., 2015;

Lane et al., 2017; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). The season of life is typically filled with the majority of career choices and love choices that an individual will make, as well as mental changes at the same speed of a toddler (Jay, 2021). It is during this time that many Twentysomethings are met with facing patterns from families of origin and will decide who they call family for themselves, whether that means through a spouse, a church or other social community, or a group of friends (The Bowen Center, n.d.).

Most of the literature related to adult friendships focus on studying college students, which makes sense until one looks closer at the ease of meeting new people and interacting with new people that the collegiate environment breeds. From sorority houses and group projects to communal dorm living, to student life sponsored activities and clubs, it is far too easy to form and maintain friendships. It is outside of the university environment that Twentysomethings are struggling. They move away from their college towns to big cities where they live alone or with a roommate which they may have found through an internet ad. They sit in offices where they chat with their coworkers over lunch, but then head home to sit on Instagram and see their former friends' lives. The built-in buffers from isolation, loneliness, and stress that the average person grows up with is removed, and now effort to find social support must be employed (The Bowen Center, n.d.).

This study will be looking specifically at adults who are between the ages of 20 to 30 and are not in a traditional university environment (meaning they either have left college, never attended, or are exclusively online students). This alleviates the chance of friendship coming from university sponsored social gatherings. Further, the friendship pairs interviewed will have met during their twenties which will eliminate any childhood

friends, and other pre-adulthood relationships. Twentysomethings may be married or unmarried and live alone or with a roommate.

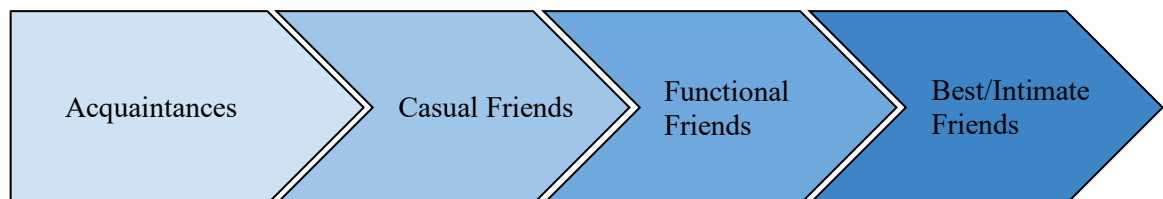
Intimate Friendship

“Friendship” is a deceptively simple concept. After parents, friends are typically one of the first relationships in which a person engages and are always the first relationship of choice. The simplicity behind the idea of friendship should make it an uncomplicated part of the human experience; however, that is not the case. Friendship is hard and more multifaceted than it might seem. Camirand and Poulin (2019) define *friendship* as “a voluntary, committed and normally egalitarian relationship, characterized by reciprocity” (p. 232).

The concept of friendship has layers. The term covers a multitude of relationships, but not all are equal. Various authors have broken down the layers of friendship into several categories (Allen, 2022; Hall, 2019), which have been synthesized and visualized in the spectrum in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Spectrum of Friendship



Note. Spectrum of Friendship developed from Allen (2022) and Hall (2019).

At stage one, *Acquaintances*, the friends would know each other’s basic information, such as occupation, and may smile and wave at each other if they saw each other out of the context in which they met. However, for the most part, acquaintances

stay within the bounds of a certain context (e.g., work or through a mutual friend), and do not hold any responsibility or attachment to the other.

In stage two, *Casual Friends*, the friends may see each other in multiple contexts; they may even meet for coffee or lunch alone at some point. Casual friends are likely to communicate about more than resumé items of each other's lives; however, they are void of responsibility when it comes to early airline flights, helping move, or hospital visits. Casual friendships are fluid and enter in and out of people's lives without much impact or loss.

Stage three, *Functional Friends*, is where most "friends" will probably find themselves. These are the folks in wedding parties, the gang invited to birthday dinners, the people who sit together at social events and who know all of the social media-worthy events of one's life. What differentiates these relationships from being Intimate Friends is the level of attachment. Functional friends are easier to leave or be left by. One may not even notice if they have drifted apart. Functional friends do not have long-term, or even mutual, commitment attached to them. As the name suggests, support from and for these people is more functional than emotional in nature.

Finally, stage four brings *Best, or Intimate, Friends*. This specific friend relationship will be the focus of this study. ("Best Friends" and "Intimate Friends" will be used synonymously in this report.) Best Friends are closer to the family system than the former three friendship types. They are not only aware of important events in one's lives, but they are present and involved in the events. These are the non-kin relationships that outsiders can see from a million miles away and which hurt when they end in the same way as a breakup from a significant other, sometimes even as much as a divorce. Losing

an Intimate Friend has the potential to cause an emotional scar that impacts not only other friendships, but all other types of relationships. However, these are also the friendships that decrease one's overall stress (Cohen & Willis, 1985) and increase happiness (Demir, 2021; Demir et al., 2015; Sanchez et al., 2020), which is why this study will be looking into the process of fostering and maintaining Intimate Friendships

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following review of literature will examine and present the main themes and findings in the literature as relevant to this study. First looking at what the literature says about why best friendships are important. Second, what is known to form an intimate friendship. Third, what studies say help in maintaining intimate friendships, and then finally, what the literature says about the relational challenges facing best friends.

Benefits of Best Friendship

This section aims to explore the benefits of friendship and why establishing a process for how intimate friendships are forged in adulthood is important. The literature captures many benefits, but for the sake of this study we will focus on happiness, belonging and attachment, stress reduction, and social support.

Happiness

Companionship, individual uniqueness, and, as will be discussed below, playfulness contribute to individual happiness and boost life satisfaction (Demir, 2021; Demir et al., 2015; Sanchez et al., 2020;). Demir et al. (2015) add that while research continually demonstrates that friendship correlates to happiness, the correlation is weak. Demir (et al., 2015) attributes this to the designs of the studies and calls for researchers to dig deeper into “how, why and when friendship is related to happiness” (p. 125), especially as it relates to mediators and moderators of happiness in young adults.

Belonging and Attachment

Best friendship is a relationship that can fulfill individuals' core sense of desire for belonging, as well as fill attachment gaps that may have been left by caregivers or are not being satisfied by partners or other relationships. Hall and Davis (2017) explain that belonging, and how relationships, specifically friendships, are integral to fulfilling this need. Camirand and Poulin (2019) argue that friendship quality based on belonging and attachment regulates and is regulated by romantic partners in young adulthood. They found that individuals who consistently had long term romantic partners were less likely to be attached to friendships, however those that were more sporadic in their romantic relationships had better friendship quality and found their sense of belonging within the friendship relationships. Sanchez et al. (2020) furthered this point by explaining that compassion in friendships, which will be discussed further in the section on friendship maintenance, leads to a better sense of community.

Further, Miljkovitch et al. (2021) found that while peer attachment was valuable to maturation and social development, it was greatly regulated by parental attachment. This parental attachment moderator may be a variable of how easily Twentysomethings are able to make and keep best friends. Friendships are a suitable battle ground for Twentysomethings to begin working through potential problematic processes from their family of origin and to learn how to develop healthier relationships overall.

Stress Reduction

A common stated benefit of friendship in previous literature is that having a best friend reduces stress (Cohen & Willis, 1985). Cohen and Willis (1985) looked at whether

this phenomenon was being done through buffering from stressful events or if there was a main effect happening. Through their research, the authors found that often stress is reduced by being buffered by their relationships, but integration with the social community also has a main effect. When it comes to friendship's ability to reduce stress, the deciding factor is usually how the relationship operates plus the effect of the stressor. If an individual needs someone to take their children to school and a friend (no matter the level of friendship) can do so, that reduces stress through a function. However, if an individual is going through a divorce and has many different instrumental needs and emotional needs, one close friend can help buffer the impact of the stressor. Cohen and Willis (1985) also found that the number of friends a person has does not decrease stress any more than having only one or two intimate friendships.

Social Support

Numerous studies have found that friends tend to be a support to individuals during trying times. One study found that 100% of the single moms who were studied listed friends' support as markedly beneficial in adaptation and resilience. This was the only category of social support options that was unanimous within the study (Widan & Greeff, 2019). Other studies have found that friends were a leading support in healthy development after divorce during young adulthood (Konstam et al., 2015), and that when experiencing grief or coping with trauma, college students friends' support was craved and appreciated (Kennedy & Balderrama-Durbin, 2021; Tedrick Parikh & Servaty-Seib, 2013). Another study found that college students who have experienced sexual abuse were more likely to disclose abuse and seek support from friends than from parents, authorities, or other sources (Stepleton et al., 2019). These reports demonstrate not only

the benefit of having best friends, but the importance of cultivating healthy forms of these relationships.

Cohen and Willis (1985) listed four support resources that friendships offer: 1) esteem support, 2) informational support, 3) social companionship, and 4) instrumental support. Interestingly, Cohen and Willis (1985) found that while all of these resources are helpful to some extent, it is the integration of all of these working together that is the most beneficial in reducing stress and aiding support. This finding describes the concept of Best Friendship and proves the importance of said relationship.

Friendship Formation

Throughout the literature that studied emerging adulthood, time, communication, and the limits of friendship quantity are the most apparent factors that are found in how friends are made. The literature on friendship formation focuses heavily on adolescents and college students, which is again, a gap in the literature. The most relevant research is discussed below.

Time

Much like any relationship, friendships take time. Hall (2019) studied just how long it takes to make a best friend. Hall's research found that, among a group of college freshmen, it took 30 hours for acquaintances to emerge, 50 hours for casual friendships, and 140 hours for functional friendships, with best friendships not emerging until 300 hours of the individuals spending time together (Hall, 2019). This demonstrates a challenge that may be plaguing Twentysomethings. Getting two individuals who are both trying to establish adult lives to find 30 free hours in their schedule--let alone 300—is a big ask.

Three hundred hours is especially large once one considers the distinction between work hours and personal hours. Hall (2019) reports that class and work hours with a person do not count towards the total needed for friendship formation. In other words, working alongside another individual for 40 hours a week over an eight-week period may result in clocking over 300 hours. However, if there is not a mutual choice in forming a friendship, a friendship is not likely to emerge.

Communication

Hall (2019) also noted that communication and what was being communicated about between the college students was a significant factor in an intimate friendship being formed. This is in line with Hall and Davis's Communication Bond Belong Theory (2017). In their proposed theory, the authors explain how humans use "striving behaviors" to find relationships that help them belong. This looks like asking about the potential friend's day and making an effort to engage with this person through communication. Interestingly, Hall (2019) also found that if individuals relied on "striving behavior" communication alone without moving to joking communication, meaningful conversations, and intentional time spent together the friendship would plateau after only a few weeks. This again shows the level of work that is involved with friendship formation and friendship maintenance.

Limits of Friendship Quantity

Hall (2019) also explored Robin Dunbar's 1996 proposition that humans can only have 150 friends and therefore they must be organized into levels. Dunbar recently returned to this idea and, in an updated study, reported that 135 of these people rarely get any attention. They claim that the 40% of one's social time is given to one's five most

intimate friends (which they call the “social clique”), 20% given to the next ten who exist in the “sympathy group” (which would constitute as *functional friendships*), and the other 135 receive an average of 37 seconds a day (Dunbar, 2021).

Since friendship requires commitment, like any other relationship, and humans are limited in their time and resources, the number of intimate friendships a person has is also limited. This also means that individuals with many casual friends or functional friends may find themselves without any intimate friendships, since their social energy, as well as literal time, has been used by keeping up with more distant connections. This limitation of “being spread too thin to make true best friends” may be one of the reasons why Twentysomethings struggle to have intimate friendships.

Friendship Maintenance

Making a friend is one thing, but keeping that friend is a challenge in and of itself. Researchers of the field have found that there are certain factors that play into the maintenance of a friendship. The factors that are discussed in this section—playfulness, compassion, conflict, and expectations—are the elements that appear to play the biggest role and will also be specifically observed in the research process. All the following studies used college students as participants.

Playfulness

Demir (2021) studied the effect that perceived playfulness in adult friendship had on friendship quality and overall happiness. Demir defines playfulness as spontaneous and fun interactions between individuals. He notes that playfulness is “not a specific type of play activity, but the ‘gestalt perception’” (p. 2054) meaning that what playfulness looks like is relative to each friendship. This plays into the part of friendship that requires

friends to choose to interact with each other, as discussed above. People choose to interact with other people who find the same things fun, people they can be playful with.

Through the two studies conducted in the research Demir (2021) found that playfulness in friendships was a great predictor of happiness in individuals and friendship quality satisfaction. Demir also introduced a questionnaire focused on same-sex friendships (PQIII-F). Demir developed this questionnaire based on the Play Questionnaire (PQ) II and added friendship (F) focused questions. Demir demonstrated the PQIII-F's promise in finding more research in adult friendship relationships as they pertain to playfulness.

Expectations

Expectations of what friendship entails plays into friendship maintenance and building (Hall, 2019). These expectations are often unspoken and are built through experiences from past relationships. This may also apply to the impact that attachment has on relationships and the need to work through unhelpful expectations to maintain strong friendships.

Compassion

Compassion for others is not only an important part of building a better sense of community but is also that friendship maintenance mediates happiness in reaction to compassion for others (Sanchez et al., 2020). This essentially means that keeping up with and working on one's intimate friendships out of compassion breeds happiness. Sanchez explains that compassion for others looks like 1) mindfulness over disengagement, 2) kindness over indifference, and 3) common humanity over separation. Individuals who can put on these attributes will be more engaged and caring friends, which will

theoretically become reciprocal and benefit both parties (Hall, 2012). This is described by Sanchez (2020) as a “we-ness” wherein intimate friends act communally versus individualistically to better each other’s lives.

Conflict

There is scant literature on how conflict appears or is well done in intimate friendship (Demir, 2015). Because of the ease of dissolving friendships, it is probable that when conflict occurs in friendship it is either ignored or the friendship simply terminated. Oswald and Clark (2006) studied the maintenance and problem solving of friendships and looked at whether it was more of an individual or dyadic process. They used a typology of four problem solving styles developed by Rusbult et al. (1982) to view the ways that problems are solved in friendships. These styles are exit, neglect, voice, and loyalty. The study found that there was better friendship satisfaction when both parties solved problems in the voice category, but also that when only one party wanted to keep the friendship going there was little chance the friendship would survive. This, again, demonstrates the true mutuality of friendship and how it requires commitment and maintenance just like any other form of relationship.

Discussion

From healing attachment wounds, to buffering from stress, it is evident from the literature that intimate friendship is beneficial to an individual’s overall life satisfaction and coping abilities. There have been a good number of studies looking at what aids friendship formation and maintains the relationship. However, there is little research focused primarily on how this happens in adults. While college students are no longer

adolescents, they typically live in a physical environment that lends itself to forming friendships and keeping them, which is not the case with many adults.

Mental health professionals aim to help their clients live better and more well-adjusted lives, and so it makes sense for the field to understand a process that leads to more well-adjusted lives as a resource. Williams et al. (2014) note that healthy social support often makes the difference in a successful termination process from therapy. Clients no longer needing therapy is arguably the goal of all counselors. Therefore, it makes sense to understand how friendship happens so that clinicians can assist their clients in building this support. The proposed grounded theory study will aim to understand the process which leads to Twentysomethings forming and maintaining intimate friendships.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY
Grounded Theory

Grounded theory research is concerned with the process of how a certain experience or phenomenon happens (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal is to develop a theory on how an experience develops step-by-step. This is accomplished through qualitative study of an individual's personal experience. Often, as was the case in this study, grounded theory research uses interviews to extract information and develop the theory. The words, themes, and life events spoken by the interviewee are analyzed and broken down into categories that can be summarized and systematically organized to understand what the greater process is of the phenomenon. Through this process, there is also a level of meaning-making of the experiences that will play a part in the reasoning of the results that make up the final presented theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The particular methodology of grounded theory was chosen for this research study because of the value in understanding how adults are making friends and what steps go into making those initial acquaintances into intimate friends that can be beneficial and supportive to one another. Through understanding the process of how best friends are made and maintained, clinicians working with this population of Twentysomethings will hopefully be better prepared to assist in deepening their client's social support connections. It is the goal that a grounded study method of research will show common themes and steps taken by best friends so that a process can be presented.

Recruitment and Participants

Demographics and Criteria

For this research study I interviewed two pairs of female best friends and two pairs of male best friends. The participants were required to be between the ages of 25 and 40 for the purpose of looking specifically at contemporary friendships. All the friendship pairs in this sample ranged between the ages of 25 and 30. Of the eight individuals interviewed, five currently live in the state of Texas, and the other three live in the state of Oklahoma.

Two individuals reported having no religious preferences, and the other six report practicing a form of protestant religion. Three of the interviewees reported their Race/Ethnicity as “Caucasian/Hispanic,” while the other five reported “Caucasian/Non-Hispanic.” The participants self-reported as belonging to the socioeconomic middle-class. Six of the eight participants were married, one was engaged, and one was single. The relationship status, socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and religion of the participants were collected during the demographics survey but were not factors for inclusion or exclusion for the study.

For the purposes of this study, each pair was required to have not had a history of romantic or sexual relationship between the two friends. The friends must have had become friends outside of a traditional university/school setting and cannot have known each other prior to their twenties. The friends knew each other for at least two years prior to the beginning of the study, and both considered the other one of their closest friends, and both consider the friendship of high quality (the discussion on how this was screened for is in the following section).

Recruitment

The participants for this study were recruited with advertising through Facebook and Instagram posts, as well as the ACU Master of Marriage and Family Therapy Alumni listserv email. It was hoped, by using social media, the researcher would be able to find participants from different parts of the country, or at the very least from cities of varying population size, as well as more diverse backgrounds. The participants were not compensated for their participation. The participation in this study was voluntary and the participants were able to stop at will at any time.

Screening and Consent Process

The potential participant (“Friend A”) clicked on a link in the social media posts or email that led to a Qualtrics survey, which contained the informed consent, a screening survey, demographics survey, and a friendship scale. After electronically signing the informed consent through the survey link, Friend A was directed to the screening survey. This portion ensured that the friend pair met the relevant friendship criteria. Using multiple choice and drop-down menu questions, Friend A indicated the following: 1) Age at which Friend A and Friend B met; 2) That Friend A met Friend B outside of a university or college setting; 3) Current age of both Friend A and Friend B; 4) Friend A and Friend B both consider the other their best friend. If the accepted criteria are met on all the questions in this section, Friend A was moved on to the third section of the interest survey.

The third section was the demographics survey. This portion gathered demographic data (gender, relationship status, SES, race/ethnicity, religion) and relevant

contact information (name, email, name of Friend B, and email of Friend B). The interested participant was then directed to the final portion of the survey.

The fourth, and final, section was focused on the quality of the friendship and ensuring that the relationship is an intimate friendship. The friends were not ruled out based on the answers to the following questions, but they would have been taken into consideration if there were too many potential participants. The 10 questions followed a Likert 7-point scale format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) asking the following questions original to this study: 1) my best friend is someone who knows most of what is happening in my life; 2) I feel comfortable sharing private details of my life with my best friend; 3) I consider my best friend one of the top 5 people I am closest to in my life; 4) My best friend helps me cope during stressful times of life; 5) my best friend is someone I enjoy talking to most of the time; 6) If I have an issue with my best friend I can easily confront them about it; 7) My best friend is able to take suggestions that I offer them; 8) My best friend and I have fun together; 9) My best friend and I have had fights; and 10) I am one of my best friend's best friends.

Once each of the survey sections had been submitted and Friend A had been selected as an official participant, the researcher contacted Friend A, and a link to the informed consent and demographics survey was sent to the friend partner ("Friend B"). Interviews were scheduled once Friend B signed the informed consent and filled out the survey.

Data Collection Procedures

I conducted interviews as the primary source of data collection. The friends were interviewed conjointly. The interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes and took place over the

video conferencing software Zoom. The interviews were recorded via Zoom as well as voice recorded through a cell phone as a backup for transcription. The interviews were casual and semi-structured.

Interview questions focused on the process of how the friends went from meeting each other to considering each other intimate friends. A list of the grand tour questions, sub questions, and follow-up questions can be found in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the systematic flow of grounded theory research design. The analysis was broken down into three phases of coding: open, focus, and axial (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Open coding began during the interview process. Memos were written after each interview, noting the process that was described. This is where themes, commonalities, and overall evaluation of the process was happening. As described by Creswell and Poth (2018) open coding continued after the interviews were transcribed, which was done using Otter software. I read over and familiarized myself with the interviews to see what other points of interest and process statements were made, and then coded line-by-line the processes that appeared to be happening (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In the second phase, focus coding, all of the initial codes that had been found were clumped together into categories. The goal was to find what elements of the initial codes needed to be focused on and emphasized in order to understand what was actually happening in the experiences of the friends. This part pulled together what events and themes that the pairs of friends discussed that were common among multiples of the

pairs. I then re-coded the transcripts with the emerging categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Finally, the third phase was axial coding. This step happened when the thick descriptions were developed in order to support the categories. The processes of how these categories connected were established, which will in turn developed the theory. Axial coding is the phase that pulled all of the data together and attempted to make sense of the gathered information (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Storage and Protection

The gathered data from the interest survey and the interviews were stored securely at the Marriage and Family Institute on an external drive. Any identifying information, including names and email addresses, were stored separately from the data. The transcriptions were de-identified to protect the confidentiality of the participants. This identifiable data will be kept for a total of three years.

Trustworthiness

As a Twentysomething who is outside of her hometown and college town, this study comes out of a place of curiosity as I, and peers that I observe, work towards the obstacle of intimate friendship and fight against loneliness. Because of this, my bias is that I want a process to be unveiled. I would love to find a script for finding the relationships that are described in the literature above which buffer stress, increase happiness, and provide overall a higher quality of life. I would like to find out what builds healthy and successful intimate friendships looks like, so that I may employ that in my clinical practice as a marriage and family therapist as well as my own relationships.

The trustworthiness of this study comes through thick descriptions in the reporting of the results below and having an external auditor review the process of the study, the results, and the delivered process results. Thick descriptions use detailed descriptions, quotes, and specific instances of the process being discussed by the participants. This aids in the trustworthiness of the research by reporting the data clearly and fully so that readers have the chance to draw their own conclusions and see specifically how the results were drawn from the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, having an external auditor will ensure that the results are being analyzed correctly and alleviate any biases that may have affected the results.

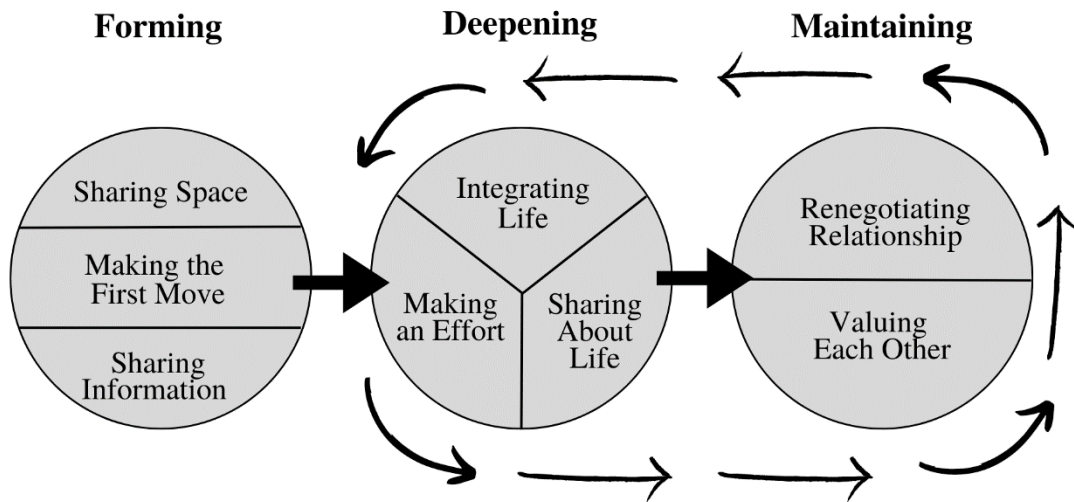
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS: PHASES OF FRIENDSHIP

Through the analysis of the data collected from the interviews it became evident that there were three phases which contributed to the best friendship process of Twentysomethings, with each phase holding its own individual set of processes to propel the friendship forward. The phases developed from the analysis are as follows: Forming, Deepening, and Maintaining. See figure 2 for a depiction of the model.

Figure 2

Model of Forming and Maintaining Best Friendship as a Twentysomething



Phase 1: Forming Friendship

During Phase 1 is when the friends meet and become acquainted. The actions that the Twentysomethings begin to take during this phase set up the trajectory of the friendship. It may be that it is during this phase that many acquaintances, casual, and functional friends are formed.

Sharing Space

Based on the experiences of those interviewed, friendships started first by sharing space. For the participants in this study this space was either a workplace, a church, or in one case, both. One participant said of their *sharing space* process:

I guess just by going to like church and hanging out with each other more and going to like movies or events. We just kind of got to know each other better. And then from then on out, we hung out a lot outside of church too.

Another participant discussed their process by emphasizing a particular moment that happened soon after they met which drew them together.

Well, we work together. Different departments but the same building. And we both got stuck at one location together...So I have this issue with cupcakes where I see them and I don't take bites of them. I just shove the whole cupcake in my mouth. So, she got to witness that and I feel like she was very impressed.

In both of these instances the friends are making some kind of effort to share space with other people. The first person talked about *going* to church and *hanging out*. The other friend told a story about her not-yet-best-friend being able to *witness*,

indicating there was involvement in the shared space of some kind apart from simply going to work. These are active processes of *sharing* space that seem to have helped to facilitate connection for friendship to form.

More than sharing a physical location where the individuals either attended or showed up to get paid, both parties in each pair seemed to be *open* to sharing the spaces. They were engaged and involved within the larger communities in which they met their soon-to-be best friend. The intentional “sharing” part of sharing space makes this a process and not only a contextual factor.

Sharing Information

Through the sharing of space, the soon-to-be friends begin to exchange information about themselves through conversations within their shared space. This often looks like humor, expressing interests, and talking about their personal values at a surface level. All the friendship pairs noted a natural connection during this phase of their early friendship. This connection seems to be found because the information that was shared between the Twentysomethings was received in a way that created a desire to share more information and begin a friendship. One participant noted that shared interests perked her interests, “when I left [college], I never had a friend who was interested in sports again. And then that, [our friendship] kind of just spiraled from that, I guess.”

Another participant articulated that hearing that his soon-to-be friend had shared interests was just the start, the sharing of more personal information, even in the very beginning, really sealed the deal.

Yeah, we just have a lot of similar interests, not just working in the same field, but also, like even family history, we’re able to talk a lot about just, man, yeah,

this is kind of what's going on with my family right now. This is what's gone on in the past. And even just kind of our upbringing to faith was a huge part of it, we could both relate with, he didn't really grow up with this tradition. And I [didn't] really grew up with this faith. So, we can very much talk pretty openly about where we were and how we're coming to things. And so, it can, it was very easy to go from a very superficial conversation of, we're talking about music, bands, or shows that we like to talking about really just our lives and everything in between, and just relationships.

This theme of sharing deeper and more personal information quickly was found in another participant's story as well.

So, there are a lot of things that I, you can't just go talk to anybody about things I don't want to talk to my parents or [my wife's] parents. And so [my best friend] was kind of a confidant right off the bat there because going back to you know, being a fresh start and not have a lot of people. And so, talking to [my best friend] about a lot of the things there are lots of things that only [my best friend] and [my wife] know. And [my wife] doesn't know that [my best friend] knows, you know. but that kind of thing, just because you need someone to share that with and so he was that right off the bat, too.

One other important element, that both parties in a emphasized, is that the conversation, the sharing of information, happened organically and felt natural. The first Twentysomething said, "I am very much a rambler at times, especially if I'm in a small space by myself. I will talk to anyone about anything. So, I don't think I really gave her a choice but to talk to me." Her friend followed up to this comment, saying "But there was

always something to talk about. It wasn't like awkward like, yeah, it was actual conversation.”

Sharing information is a basic first step in becoming acquainted with another human being, however, it seems from the participants of this study that if the sharing of information had not happened, the next process, *The First Move* would probably have not taken place.

Making the First Move

While the sharing of space and information seemed to create the original friendship, the catalyst for the friendships to move into the deepening phase was one party making *the first move*. Making the first move often appeared as one friend asking the other to go to a movie, come to a party, or get coffee. The key is that, even though friends may start by hanging out in a shared space, the friendship began to feel real once one person initiated sharing time outside of the original shared space. One interviewee went as far as that he felt “relieved” once his now best friend asked him to a movie because it confirmed that they were not simply co-workers.

[My now best friend] wanted to ask me out on a friend date, and he was like, he was like, Hey, you want to watch a movie, I think and then he ended up coming over and met [my wife] for the first time...[I] remember after that, we became friends really fast. Once we kind of broke that barrier of like, let's do that first thing outside of work and church...I was kind of relieved, I was like, it was like one of those things where it's like, we talked a lot at work. But I also talk a lot to everyone at all times. So, I'm like, I'm always talking to a lot of people about a lot of things.

This self-proclaimed extrovert found acquaintances and causal friends easily. However, he seemed to struggle in reaching deep relationships. His now-best friend made the first move to go deeper, which validated his feelings that this friendship was different. This validation gave him (as it did to the other friends when this happened in their journeys) the space to begin being vulnerable and sharing deeper information.

Another friend spoke about his first move moment in a similar way.

We kind of joked with like, oh, we should, we should be friends, you know, and then we'll be like, didn't really act on it that first year. And then like, the next year, [my now best friend] kind of called me out on it and called and said "hey", he said, "we kind of said we'd be friends. But then we didn't do anything. And so this year, we're gonna be friends." And I think that might have been the summer of 2019. If I remember correctly, and then we're after the summer was over, once the season slowed down, like, "Hey, let's go, let's just go grab coffee."

This first move sets off a cycle of mutual sharing of more and more space and information. This pattern repeats itself as a snowball picking up weight and speed all the way into Phase 2: Deepening Friendship.

Phase 2: Deepening Friendship

Phase two is where individuals go from functional friends to best friends. This phase of the process seems to happen quickly and naturally; however, the choices made in this part of the process appear to be intentional and have lasting effects.

Making an Effort

During Deepening the Friendship, the best friends continue *making an effort*. The first move turns into the second, and third, and fourth move. Apart from asking out on “friend dates” this phase’s effort looks like consistency in each other’s lives, finding time to regularly be a part, and to invite the other to be a part of their own lives. All of the friendship pairs discussed regular rituals during this time such as weekly meals or coffee or watching a TV series together every week. The participants also discussed frequent phone calls, texting and sending of videos on social media-anything to connect with their best friend. One participant discussed how she is intentional about *making an effort* in her friendship by keeping tabs and being certain to check in with her friend.

Yeah, like if I know it’s her first day of school or something, I shoot her text or, and that today’s gonna be crazy for you. Like, I just let her know that I’m thinking about her. Even though it’s a busy week, we can still be there for each other.

This friend’s intentionality behind the effort she makes is clear. She knew her friend’s schedule and she was intentional about showing care to her best friend. A similar theme of intentionally can be seen in the quote below.

So, [my best friend] was really intentional about seeking it out about making the effort to hey, we’re gonna be friends, we’re gonna make this work, we’re gonna do this, but then also just seeing the value to invest in it and know that it was something worth investing in, even like, little by little, you know, the coffees eventually would turn into, hey, man I just need to come over I need to talk, you

know. Just the continual investment and continue value regrow, until eventually, it's just like, it holds such a big influence in my life.

Here it is seen how this participant experienced his best friend *making an effort* and the influence this effort truly has on, not just the friendship's growth, but himself feeling valuable as a human. Because his friend made an investment, he is influenced to make more of an investment himself.

Finally, this last quote is important because it not only demonstrates what *making an effort* looks like but also how it plays into the next process of phase 2:

[We] make sure we're both included in pretty much everything that we do. [At times my wife is], like, Can [your best friend] not come to this for like one time?

I'm like, uh, I don't know. Let me ask [him].

The intentional effort to connect daily and weekly in ways both big and small led to the next phase: *integrating lives*.

Integrating Lives

All the Twentysomething best friend pairs spoke about being engaged and integrated into each other's lives. This could be seen through being in each other's weddings, at holidays, meeting each other's parents and extended families, and spending time with the larger system of their friend's world. One participant said spoke about the choice for integration,

Every time we hang out, we choose to do that. And then like, I think, how intertwined our families have gotten, that was definitely us, too, leading that, like, now, [my best friend's] whole family will be invited to one of my family's

graduation parties for another sibling or something like, so that was definitely us driving that. And linking our families and stuff.

Another friend said the following of how their integration level impacted his dating life,

And the good thing was like, even dating someone, she became really close friends with them to like [my best friend] and [his wife]. So, it's like [my best friend] and [his wife] they're both in the wedding on either side. So it's like, not a situation where she hates your best friend, which is good.

Having a high level of integration is vulnerable and can be risky; however, it seems to create a stronger bond and trust between the friendship pairs. Being a part of big life moments and knowing the worlds in which their friend comes from and lives in seems to help build the intimacy which is valuable and craved in best friendships.

An important aspect of this process is how it is a spoken process. While not all of the friendship pairs have stated conversations about becoming friends, all of them noted that there has been communication *about* the friendship to each other.

But I think, too, is like, it's, I'll use a very extreme example, but we like kind of make sure each other are included in the things that we do. Like to the, to the extent that like, you know, [my best friend's fiancé] may someday want to move out of [our hometown]. And [my best friend] was like, "Well, yeah, not unless [my best friend] and [his wife] come with us, you know, that's not happening". And I told [my wife] the same thing. Like, we're not moving unless you know, we make a second house for [my best friend] and [his fiancé] because they're coming too.

Conversations about what the other means to them, about the future and how they want to include each other, as well as speaking to others about their best friendship are all examples given by the Twentysomethings which demonstrate the integrative work of the individuals to intentionally make their best friend their best friend.

Sharing About Life

Interwoven between *integrating their lives* and *making an effort* is the ongoing process of the best friends sharing with each other about their lives. Sharing about life appeared to include a spectrum from childhood history and significant life choices, to what happened at work that day and favorite movies. One best friend put it this way:

There's no part of my life where, like, I wouldn't invite [my best friend] into or have a conversation about. And so, whether that's my walk with Jesus, or, you know, the Thanksgiving that I'm gonna have with my parents, which is going to be eventful, probably. I think I know that like [my best friend] and I are gonna chat about that and talk about it.

His best friend agreed with these sentiments, stating "he's all up in it". This concept of constant and comprehensive communication was discussed repeatedly throughout all the interviews. One Twentysomething noted how special this relationship really was *because of the sharing about life*.

I think for me, I kind of realized it when I was like, because I've never been this way with anybody. But when I was like, okay, something happened. I need to tell [my best friend] even though it has nothing to do with [my best friend]. [My wife] just did this thing. That was cool. I need to tell [my best friend] about that. Like, because I think he would think that's cool too. You know, because I knew

he would care about the stuff that was going on in my life. So, when I realized you know, I think that's when they finally hit me I was like Oh yeah, okay, we have a best friendship.

Interestingly, each of the married participants noted that they tell their best friend as much, if not more, than they tell their own spouse.

Like with your best friend, you share stuff about you and your spouse. It's not like both ways at all. So, like I would tell her everything between me and my husband, but I wouldn't tell my husband everything between me and her.

Through the process of sharing about life, the individuals can find a confidant, sounding board, and counselor, as well as the comforting and healing experience of being fully known by another human being. There is a desire not only to tell the other person this information, but also to hear the information from one's best friend.

Phase 3: Maintaining Friendship

The final phase of this model of intimate friendship formation and maintenance is one that has the potential to continue for the remainder of the friendship's lifecycle. Friends who are in the maintenance phase are already best friends and, through the process of deepening the friendship in phase 2, have a strong foundation and reason for keeping the friendship afloat. Much of the friendship looks a lot like phase 2, meaning that best friends continue *sharing about life, making an effort, and integrating into each other's lives*, however the significance of the added maintenance processes creates a relationship that can grow past the life stage of emerging adulthood and through life changes that may otherwise disassemble the friendship.

Renegotiating The Relationship

One of the questions asked to the Twentysomethings was “What are the barriers that you have had to overcome to maintain your friendship?” All the barriers and challenges that were discussed by the friendship pairs had to do with transitions. Some pairs had to deal with one friend leaving the job where they had met and spent most of their time together, one pair has had to navigate becoming long distance best friends when one friend moved away. Other pairs had to deal with one friend getting married and having children. One pair has had to negotiate through both: “It definitely changed whenever I got married, I feel like. I tried to make sure as a priority, but it did change. And then also like when [my kid] came around too so that’s been challenging.”

The commonality that came up for each of the best friends was their renegotiating of the relationship and how it looked to show up in each other’s lives. Often this appeared in added flexibility to weekly rituals paired with extra effort to make connection points happen. This is aided by the integration of each other’s lives which happened in the previous phase.

One pair that renegotiated after one friend got married noted that often the married friend’s husband is at their weekly dinners. Another friend discussed how renegotiation happened after his best friend left their shared workplace.

We like had to be probably a little bit more intentional about hanging out and stuff. And the only other one, this isn’t like a real barrier, but just like changing relationship, it is a little bit, but when [my best friend] started going out with [his fiancé], and then now they’re engaged in stuff. So now there’s things that like, [he] would probably talk to me about that he’s gonna talk to [his fiancé]

about and that's natural. I mean, I'm married, I get how that works. But kind of that change in relationship where he's got another best friend now, too.

The same pair also discussed later how they will take extra time out of their lives to go support each other and continue *sharing about life*, "I think during those transitions, [we're] still keeping each other involved. Like [my best friend] doesn't have to tell me about what happens at, you know, the media company he works at now. But I'm glad that he does."

The transitions sometimes happened a few years into the friendship, and others within a year of becoming friends. Either way, because of the deepening that happened in Phase 2, the friends were able to negotiate and keep the best friendship alive. Change is a natural part of life, especially for Twentysomethings (Demir et al., 2015; Lane et al., 2017, Shulman & Connolly, 2013), and best friends can maintain and keep their friendship connection close and active through being aware of transitions and being willing to take the time to make the effort and change alongside each other.

Valuing Each Other

While liking someone as a person comes early in phase 1, *valuing each other* represents the choice that the friends make to keep their best friend around. The best friends highly value not only the best friendship as a concept, but also the individual themselves. This is an important part of the maintenance phase of best friendship. When the best friends place a value each other they will in turn choose to prioritize, put effort in, and grow alongside their best friend.

One of the married participants stated the values she puts on her friendship very bluntly, "Listen, best friends are the worst breakups, okay. I'd rather get divorced." While

another participant noted just how close she and her best friend had become in their seven years of best friendship.

But I just consider [her] my closest friend. Like we've been friends longer than any of my other friends that I have. And just that she knows so much about me. And she's, she's like a sister, the sister I never had.

This sentiment of close near-familial bond and support creating the high value was shared among all the friends, including the participant quoted below:

[My best friend is] a really good person, I know that I can rely on him. And so, when my dad passes away, someday, I'll be able to call him you know what I mean? So that's really important, you know, looking forward to the future and stuff as well.

One of the interviewees remarked that this best friendship was different than other friendships and that he values his best friend because of that:

So it's like, yeah, it has felt different with [my best friend] because even those like best friends I've had, we've shared some similar interests and stuff. But we're never, like, me and [my best friend]. [We] are just so aligned on so many things. Like just like so many big picture things, too. So I think that's just like, as far as like friends being able to fully understand you and think similarly enough to you like, [my best friend] is definitely the top one I've ever had.

Many of the Twentysomethings remarked, such as the participant below, that their friend has made them believers in the power, and rarity, of adult best friendship.

I think when you find somebody that you have similar interests within adulthood you have to you have to put in the effort. Because it's busy and life gets in the way, but I think that friendship overall is worth it to put in the effort.

Valuing each other also breeds trust within the friendship. As the two friends think highly of each other they tend to also raise the bar in how vulnerable they are willing to be, how much respect they are giving and receiving, as well as how authentic they are willing to be in more difficult moments in their friendship. According to one friend, this is what keeps them maintaining the friendship. "It's made it really easy to stay friends when I can still see the value in [the friendship]."

During each interview there were comments made about how there was no fear or shame about talking to their best friend about anything, because not only did they value their friend's opinion, but they knew that they themselves were valued by their best friend.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Discussion

The model created through this research is a three-phase model that starts with *forming friendship*, then moves to *deepening friendship*, before entering the *maintaining friendship* phase. The maintaining and deepening phases work in a circular fashion which sustains the friendship. Each of the three phases holds sub-processes that work in tandem with each other in order to push the Twentysomething friends forward in deeper and more intimate friendships.

Throughout this research process it became increasingly apparent, not only how reciprocal the friendship process is, but also how much work and vulnerability are tied into the creation of intimate friendships. This vulnerability is especially evident during Phase 2 when the friends choose to do the hard work of integrating each other into their lives through integrating of families, creating rituals, and knowing each other's worlds inside and out. It is hard work adding a new element to a system, especially when it is so easy to remove the new element if change gets too challenging. However, it seems like the effort is paying off for best friends who have reached the deep relationship and are able to maintain it through the changes and challenges.

During the interviews, every single participant directly communicated about the high value they place not only on the friendship in general, but on their best friend as an individual. Because of this, the process of *valuing each other* in phase 3: *maintaining*

friendship appears to be the key to how the friendships keep going through the cycle of continual maintaining and deepening. There is someone worth *making an effort* for. This attachment is freely given and received by best friends which makes friendships beneficial (Hall & Davis, 2017; Miljkovitch et al., 2021; Sanchez et al., 2020).

When it comes to how this model of friendship compares to friendship formation and maintenance in existing research, the themes that appeared were space (Hall, 2019), communication (Hall, 2019; Hall & Davis, 2017), playfulness (Demir, 2021) and compassion (Sanchez et al., 2020).

Previous research found that time spent together outside of the original environment is a major factor in best friendship formation (Hall, 2019). While the present study did not ask best friends how many hours they clocked before they hit best friend level, all of the interviewees did allude to having spent quality time together outside of their original environment (work or church, in the case of the participants of this study). This is a key part of the *making the first move*, *making an effort*, and *integrating lives* processes.

The results also show similarities to the communication component of both Hall (2019) and Hall and Davis's (2017) studies as a part of the friendship formation process. *Sharing information* and *sharing about life* both highlight communication and exchanging information, meaningfully and playfully, as important aspects of the best friendship process.

Playfulness was obvious through the laughter and joking in each interview. However, unlike Demir (2021), this study did not find the playfulness between the pairs to be a defining factor in the maintenance phase. The playfulness of these participants

appeared to be a reason the friends enjoyed being together, and potentially a factor within the *valuing each other* process, but it was not a significant theme for that to be certain.

Another part of existing research that seemed to be a factor through this study was the need for compassion during maintenance (Sanchez et al., 2020). Sanchez et al., had noted the “we-ness” involved in intimate friendships, which can be seen through *integrating lives*, as well as the *valuing each other* processes in the model.

Clinical Implications

This research is significant for clinicians in assisting clients understand the process of best friendship and what goes into the recipe to have a best friend. It is the job of clinicians to help clients find and use resources, and building social support is an important and readily available resources to tap into for individuals. This is especially true for Twentysomethings as they work towards the developmental tasks of identity formation and establishing stability as an emerging adult (Jay, 2021).

Clinicians ought to assess their clients for readiness to be a best friend, which may mean assessing client’s level of attachment (Milijkovitch et al., 2021) and expectations for friendship (Hall, 2012). Further, since best friendship is heavily based in mutuality and sharing, it is important for clinicians to help Twentysomething clients prepare to potentially be the one to make the first move and integrated someone into their life. Finally, due to the apparent need for *sharing space*, helping Twentysomething clients find spaces with people they would like to potentially gain as a best friend is valuable.

Limitations

The limitations of this presented research are first and foremost the size of the study, as well the similar demographics of the participants. Having only interviewed four

sets of best friends, all of which live in a similar area of the country and most of which have similar backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses it would be fair to say that the study has limitations in its generalizability. Further, due to the size of this study, saturation was not reached.

Direction Forward

Future research in this area should first expand the study to include a larger and more diverse participant group. This would aid in increasing trustworthiness through potential saturation, as well as increase generalizability. Additionally, it could be beneficial to study longer term friendships to understand in a more complete sense the maintenance process and how that might look as post-college events happens and Twentysomethings mature, to help clients more holistically as they form and maintain best friendships.

While it was outside the intention of this research study to find what benefits of friendship (i.e., happiness, attachment, stress reduction, and social support) are actively experienced by the participants through their best friendships. Future research may look at best friendships to find at what point these benefits start to take effect, as well as what contributes to their creation.

Conflict was not a topic that any of the friends spoke about in their interviews, other than in the context of navigating transitions which produced the process of *renegotiating relationship*. Looking at friendship who have undergone high conflict would be a valuable study in furthering the ability to work with clients navigating friendship challenges.

This research is a starting point for further studies on how best friends affect the family system, as well deeper understanding on the relationship considerations of best friendship. Expanding this study into other stages of adulthood would also be beneficial to not only contrast how it may or may not change, but to work with building social support systems for a wider array of clients.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
328 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29145, Abilene, Texas 79699-9145
325-674-2885



August 15, 2022

Molly S. Burke
Department of MMFT
Abilene Christian University

Dear Molly,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Forming and Maintaining Intimate Friendships as a Twentysomething",

(IRB# 22-090) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. If at any time the details of this project change, please advise our office of the change(s) by email, so that the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Qi Hang".

Qi Hang (Aug 15, 2022 12:37 CDT)

ACU Executive Director of Research

Additional Approvals/Instructions:

WAIVER OF DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT, based on the following justification:

* The research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects, and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:

- If there are any changes in the research (including but not limited to change in location, members of the research team, research procedures, number of participants, target population of participants, compensation, or risk), these changes must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
- Report any protocol deviations or unanticipated problems to the IRB promptly according to IRB policy.
- Should the research continue past the expiration date, submit a Continuing Review Form, along with a copy of the current consent form and a new Signature Assurance Form approximately 30 days before the expiration date.
- When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Expedited or Full Board, submit an Inactivation Request Form and a new Signature Assurance Form. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.
- According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
- It is the investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website <https://cdn01.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp/human-research/overview.html> or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Our Promise: ACU is a vibrant, innovative, Christ-centered community that engages students in authentic spiritual and intellectual growth, equipping them to make a real difference in the world.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Grand Tour and Subsequent Questions

- How did you become friends? What drew you together?
 - What made you choose this friend over another?
- What happened that brought you to becoming *best* friends?
 - How did you know he/she was your best friend?
- What are the barriers that you have had to overcome to maintain your friendship?
 - When life gets busy *how do you maintain* your friendship despite the busyness of life? (i.e., social media, work & family life)
- How have you, or what has made you, stayed friends?
 - What choices did you make to promote this friendship?

Follow Up

- Can you say more about that?
- Could you expand on how that happened?
- In what order did those events/choices occur?