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## Qualities That Promote Male Friendship

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

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by

Troy Alan Akins

MA, Walden University, 2015

MBA, Tiffin University, 2012

BS, Ohio University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

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## Abstract

The psychological, physical, and social circumstances surrounding the relationship between friends can be detrimental, especially in males. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the qualities that can be used to promote friendship among adult men ages 30 to 35 in the Northeastern Wyoming area. The theoretical framework for the study was Miller's relational cultural theory. Data were collected from 11 semistructured interviews with men ages 30 to 35. Data were transcribed and analyzed to identify themes. Participants reported that they rely on acts of justice and fairness as well as established understanding to have clarity in friendship, and how they share resources also yields empowerment and vitality in friendship. Findings may be used to develop social structures that can help men resolve conflict and make it easier for them to establish and maintain male friendship.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The development of friendships among adult males is important to an individual's psychosocial development, and there are many emotional, relational, and physical resources that can be harnessed in such friendships. These resources serve to boost the well-being of males, and other people may benefit from their well-being. Men are prone to adverse effects of loneliness in early adulthood and middle adulthood (Stephoe, Shankar, Demakakos, & Wardle, 2013). This is due to the sociocultural, economic, and relational transformations that occur to alter the structure of their life experiences, and for some the structure of their identity and livelihoods (Ahituv & Lerman, 2011). Rankin (2013) found that there are numerous sources of stressors in male-male friendships that may be generated in existing structural relations. Rankin expressed the established expectations for men other relationships such as familial relationships, intergender and intragender sexual relationships, and other commonly researched and discussed relationships. Some men may not be able to effectively handle conflict and potentially complex relationships in an effective manner (Buss, 2009). This can lead to failure in developing friendships with males. The issue of male friendships warranted more extensive exploration to understand the factors that impact friendships among men.

Creating bonds with other human beings enables social growth and development in all individuals. From childhood, children rely on family, friends, and community members as they grow into adulthood. Social support and a sense of connection are perceived as part of an individual's well-being (Davila et al., 2017). Close social contact and interaction between people provide an opportunity for the improvement of a person's

quality of life because they facilitate stronger connections and smooth interactions with people. As people progress from adolescence, the number of friends they have tends to be reduced. By the time individuals get to adulthood, they may only have one or two trusted friends (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). This decline may be attributed to the changing nature of friendship as a person progresses in life. Friendships are determined by the values and characteristics of an individual. To create and sustain friendship, people tend to adjust behaviors to those that are socially acceptable. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, social acceptance is a basic need (Cherry, 2014). Maslow's hierarchy of needs accounts for different motivators of an individual. This hierarchy describes that lower-level needs must be addressed before working on higher-level needs (Oskarsson, Dawes, Johannesson, & Magnusson, 2012).

During early adulthood, friendships play an important role in social development, self-esteem, and social adjustment of men. High-quality friendships can provide men with positive levels of pro-social behaviors, low levels of conflict, intimacy, prevent rivalry, and other negative influencers (Hoorn, Dijk, Meuwese, Rieffe, & Crone, 2016). Potential benefits of a strong relationship with friends are innumerable. Weir (2012) suggested that some men tend to overlook the motives, behaviors, cognitions, and emotions in interactions with friends. The attitudes and behavior of males play a key role in determining the types of friends they create.

As men age, their levels of interactivity and awareness tend to increase so they can decide which types of relationships to retain and which to discard. These relationships determine the extent of friendship between two or more men. A relationship

consists of various interactions between individuals (Fiske, Gilbert, & Lindzey, 2010). Some friendships are permanent whereas others are temporary, and as people age they establish a purpose in life and tend to form closer relationships with people who share that purpose (Perlman, Stevens, & Carcedo, 2015). Men's perceptions of relationships vary, and sometimes men organize friendships and relationships based on fundamental needs, which are instrumental in their personal development (Wrzus, Hänel, Wagner, & Neyer, 2013). Individuals possess the need to develop and maintain at least a minimum number of friendships. Factors that influence friendships include lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships and the desire for acceptance and belonging. The quality of male relationships has an impact on a person's characteristics, which influences friendships.

Friendship between males is influenced by factors dependent on what the male views as important. Some of the factors that influence the quality of friendships among individuals have been mostly associated with the relationship quality as well as psychological functioning (Perlman et al., 2015). There is limited research on close relationships between males and what makes them unique. Research to date has focused on male-to-female relationships and female-to-female relationships (Anderson, 2010). Mjaavatn, Frostad, and Pijl (2016) focused on gender as a whole. Normative social relationships that are favored most in such discourse are familial relationships, which are expected to develop as men enter adulthood and are sustained in their adult life. This common premise suppresses the perceived relevance of friendships among adult males in academic discourse and research. However, these relationships are important for men and

serve as a source of social and psychological support in ways that benefit other prioritized relationships. In the current study, I explored the phenomenon of male friendship in men ages 30 to 35 to understand the nature, qualities, and experiences of male friendship.

### **Background**

Peer relationships of mutual support, trust, and coherence among men have existed in all societies. Friendship addresses support mechanisms that the relating peers can harness for each other (Almaatouq, Radaelli, Pentland, & Shmueli, 2016). In ancient societies, men related over obligations and expectations set for them by attending to tasks that demanded masculinity, collaborating to protect their families and clans, forming armies, and exploring the natural world (Seyfarth & Cheney, 2011). The evolutionary basis for such coalitions has also been established (Seyfarth & Cheney, 2011). Most societies tended to reward such effort, and highly functional men would be elevated to positions of influence from where they would relate among themselves to yield resources and contemplate profound societal problems. Positive friendships among men have always existed. As societies undergo transformation, the sociocultural structures that male friendships thrive on also change, with the potential of presenting interesting dynamics regarding how adult males harness opportunities to relate to and support each other (David-Barrett et al., 2007). In some cases, highly functional men in early adulthood have been found to fall in the category of people who experience social strain and potential fatigue from the social context of their livelihoods (David-Barrett et al., 2015; Maqubela, 2014). Friendships tend to alleviate some of this strain and fatigue, and building and maintaining friendships could have a major impact on an individual's life.

Virtanen (2015) found men's friendships to have the potential of transcending many interactional limitations and problems perceived in culture and gender, and for providing support to help men thrive.

Different circumstances can help create an environment in which an individual has an opportunity to exchange ideas with support others. Social connections with family, friends, and community members can positively influence men's psychological well-being and physical health (Thoits, 2011). Lack of social connections and loneliness may have a correlation with a man's desired social connection and actual social connection with family, friends, and community members (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris, & Stephenson, 2015). It is common to have the feeling of loneliness among many individuals hence they may be prompted to want to renew similar connections and improve survival, social trust, and personal connection (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014). Interactions between individuals can be rewarding for those involved.

Male friendships can be hard to maintain as other priorities take precedence. Men ages 30 to 35 years often have the responsibility of taking care of children, parents, and family, as well as developing careers. This can present challenges for them when trying to keep up with friends. An effort is needed to help them maintain a healthy friendship. The marriage status of many men is likely to influence friendships with other men as seen in married men who tend to have a higher number of social networks as compared to unmarried counterparts (Brannon, 2016). Although having large numbers of friends may provide a variety of social opportunities, close friendships can provide emotional support that may not occur with a large, casual network of friends.

Sustainable goodwill-based friendship between men serves to yield more good for other people and for society in general (Ryding, 2012). Friendships can produce social advantages and promote well-being for the people involved. Perspectives on perfect, solid, or unadulterated friendships have been researched to reveal the social elements that are beneficial to developing a friendship (Niland, 2014). Other views on friendships focus on the balance or structures of sharing opportunities, resources, challenges, and contextual issues in the social or cultural context of relationships (Niland, 2014). Established traits and outcomes associated with such relationships can be used to characterize what friends may look for in each other. In the current study, I interviewed members of a targeted group to explore the qualities they look for in friendship.

Some of the benefits of friendship have been identified at broader levels of health and well-being. Holt-Lunstad et al. (2015) reported that loneliness and social isolation have been associated with determinants of obesity and life longevity, as older individuals with fewer social outlets tend to have poorer physical health. With fewer social outlets, older individuals also tend to have a greater disability with regard to overall functioning (Mendes de Leone, Gold, Glass, Kaplan, & George, 2001). Having friendships is beneficial as friends can help an individual celebrate good times along with providing social support when difficult circumstances arise. There is, however, a significant amount of socially and culturally driven responsibility that accrues toward early adulthood, especially the early to mid 30s, for men. Men could use the support of male friends to understand experiences gained through handling common challenges.

### **Problem Statement**

The psychological, physical, and social circumstances surrounding the relationship between friends can be detrimental, especially in males. According to Whitbourne (2013), in most cases, there is a discrepancy between a person's desired and actual friendships. Mjaavatn et al. (2016) noted that this difference is underpinned by gender, among other factors. Underwood (2004) indicated that from time to time friendships are intertwined within the same gender. Males are likely to belong to ~~an~~ all-male group while females are likely to form an all-female group (Underwood, 2004). These separated gender groups exist from middle childhood to the early adolescence. Formation of these groups is usually determined by the shared characteristics of the individuals in the group. Understanding the differences in these patterns of interaction is useful in understanding interpersonal relationships between different people, as influenced by gender. Most studies have focused on female friendships while others have focused on gender as a whole (Mjaavatn et al., 2016). There has been limited research on male friendship.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study was conducted to explore the qualities of friendship that are sought for by men ages 30 to 35. Individual semistructured interviews with participants from Northeast Wyoming were conducted to gather data. For a phenomenological study, Creswell (1998) ~~recommended between~~ recommended between five and 25 participants.

The study addressed the characteristics and qualities that males look for in male friendship. The study may improve the understanding of the characteristics of male

friendships in the United States for males between 30 and 35 years of age. Research suggested that men feel most lonely at the age of 35 (Moss, 2017). I focused on this age group because this is the period when individuals begin building stronger connections with others, which may affect them later in life. Friendships tend to be of great importance to this age group; therefore, I sought to explore how the social relationships of men in this age group affect their friendship choices. The study was conducted in the Midwest region of the United States, which has a high percentage of socially active males (Brasier et al., 2011). The location was a potential source of useful information because most prior studies focused on the Southern and Central regions of the United States. This location was appropriate for this study because the purpose was to provide a more detailed understanding of underrepresented populations (see Brasier et al., 2011). According to Polednak (2012), this region has one of highest rates of friendship imbalance in the male population.

### **Research Questions**

The study addressed the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What has been the lived experience of males ages 30 to 35 in seeking male friendships?

RQ2: What are the important qualities of male friendships for men ages 30 to 35?

RQ3: What characteristics could help men build a friendship?

RQ4: What role does social connection play in male friendship?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical orientation for this study was Miller's (1976) relational cultural theory, which focuses on how to develop and maintain mutuality between friends. By building friendships, individuals are able to grow personally during their lifetime (Wachtel, 2011). The culture of the friendship can influence the types of interactions an individual may have (Wachtel, 2011). Utilizing relational cultural theory may help the researcher to gain an understanding of how males locate and develop a friendship that is both mutual and growing in a positive manner (Wachtel, 2011). Utilizing relational cultural theory may give insight into the importance of a friendship and how it influences everyone involved. Understanding the growth of friendship among males was essential in this study, and findings offered insights into the depth of development of social interaction. Through relational cultural theory, greater focus is placed on the growth of relations and connections among male individuals (Mereish & Poteat, 2015).

Based on this theoretical framework, the modern man is expected to undergo development in his social interactions, especially involving close friends. The theory considers the quality of interpersonal connections as the key building block to the mutual empathy between and among male friends (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). The theory provides clarity and creativity and contributes to the understanding of different factors that influence the desire of individuals for more connection with others. This theory also asserts that chronic disconnection between individuals can result in isolation leading to disempowerment (Mereish & Poteat, 2015). Relational cultural theory acts as a therapeutic practice guide for the pursuit of understanding social interaction and, at the

same time, creates a basis for analyzing its development. This framework also provides a basis for the convergence of identities, such as the male gender, to understand the development of the individual's uniqueness and interaction with the more diverse social community.

### **Nature of the Study**

The nature of this study was qualitative. A qualitative approach provides an opportunity to review previous literature on the topic to enhance the accuracy of the information obtained (Gibbs, 2013). The current study addressed the essential qualities of male friendships within the ages of 30 to 35. The phenomenological design provided a psychological viewpoint on how individuals perceive friendship with each other and their lived experiences. The phenomenological design was helpful in exploring how and why male individuals look for a connection with other males. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method used to examine the lived experiences of individuals (Byrne, 2001). The method was developed by Husserl who believed that through analysis of the experience of different people, an individual is able to set aside preconceived notions to fully understand the real phenomenon (Byrne, 2001). Through exploration of the lived experience of individuals, this study provided an opportunity for understanding the meaning of participants' lived experience. Participants in the study described their experiences with a best male friend. Interviews can be helpful in obtaining details of participants' experiences, including their memories, feelings, thoughts, and descriptions of how their experience occurred (see Byrne, 2001).

### **Limitations**

Some limitations in the current study involved the establishment of the most appropriate results for analysis. Findings may reveal the most important factors that influence male friendships. This is also in line with other qualitative and quantitative researches that critically display the dimensions covering male friendships. Based on the current literature, many male friendships are based on the pathological characteristics of individuals in a relationship (Zimmer-Gembeck, Trevaskis, Nesdale, & Downey, 2014). The exploration of the characteristics of male friendships enabled me to identify the primary factors in these relationships.

### **Significance**

Friendships may change over an individual's life as the friendship ends through dissolution or death (Perlman et al., 2015). Early in human development, friends play an important role in an individual's social development (Whitbourne, 2013). The age group of 30 to 35 is an important time in adults' lives as many begin to start careers and families. By focusing on male friendship, this study addressed the different social relationships that are created by individual characteristics and the quality of connection (see Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013).

As people age, they develop an intimate knowledge of themselves through friendships as they become open to feeling a range of emotions and to express these feelings freely without suppressing them. This study on male friendships addressed male friendship experiences to obtain insights into how men can build new such forms of friendship. Trusting people requires deeper feelings of connection, especially in the male-

to-male friendship (Garfield, 2010). Some people face challenges in keeping close friendships. As males grow into adulthood and transition to new careers and settings, they may not understand how to work on building friendships that are different from childhood relationships. The Johari window model developed by Luft and Ingham (1961) represents information consisting of attitudes, experience, feelings, knowledge, intentions, motivation, and skills within or about a person in relation to a group. The Johari window can enable individuals to enhance the relationship within themselves and with others (Luft & Ingham, 1961). For example, when moving to a new location, individuals may not have the tools to identify what types of qualities other males look for when working at building a friendship. There is a risk of peer friendship problems if maladjustment occurs; poor social skills, aggression, and low social behavior are related to low social acceptance (Glick & Rose, 2011). The current study addressed the qualities that are important in a male friendship. A friendship between individuals is viewed as an important part to life as there is a term for friendship in each language around the world (Perlman et al., 2015).

### **Summary**

The present study focused on the qualities of male friendships and the how social connection influences friendship development among males. The study focused on friendships among men between 30 and 35 years of age from the Midwest region of the United States. I also explored the role of social interactions in the formation of male friendship to understand how friendship among males begin, develop, and end. The

purpose of this study was to identify the key factors in the development of male friendship.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of characteristics that males between the ages of 30 and 35 look for or admire when building close male friendships. I asked participants to describe their closest male friend. The friendship could have begun during childhood or recently, and there were no limitations on the duration of the friendship or where the friend lives. I sought to better understand the participants' perspectives on what qualities are important to them in male friendship.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Research for the literature review was gathered using a variety of sources. PsychInfo was searched using broad search terms such as *friendships* and *male*. Other words were used to narrow search results, such as *social*, *development*, *adolescent*, *similarity*, *qualities*, and *gender role*. In addition to articles from PsychInfo, I located other articles from the references of those research articles. Walden University's online library provided access to a large number of the articles used in this review. Additional sources were Google Scholar and the Campbell County Community Library, which was used to find articles that were not online. None of research articles found focused on the qualities of a male friendship. Consequently, most of the information for the review has limitations focusing on the development of friendships and the influence they have on an individual.

### **Literature Review**

Social relationships within genders have been researched in diverse contexts, with some forms of research addressing the nature of behaviors and preferences developed

between or among relating agents (Williams, 2015), while other forms of research focused on implications of such behaviors and preferences (Gupta et al., 2013). There are preferences and behaviors that have been associated with men, which were distinct from women, including that men tend to mirror the desired outlook in their choice of friends (Hendricks, 2008). Literary discourse in this domain has also addressed the source of unique trends observed or hypothesized regarding male friendships, including lower intimacy compared to that seen or hypothesized in female friendships (Usmar, 2015). Male friendships have also been studied in the context of social challenges, conflicts, and complexities, with some research pointing to the role of male allies in alleviating or aggravating aspects of social phenomena (Casper, 2017). As a result of such alliances, male friendships also yield trends that may emphasize certain values in society and sometimes serve to balance out extreme views on how friendship should progress. Nicolaisen and Thorsen (2017) examined the purpose of male friendships for a broad range of adults between 18 and 79 years of age, and found that the number of friends reduced with age but friendships became stronger with age.

The context in which friendships are built or sustained is usually an enriched one, and unlike sexual relationships, social relationships can hardly sprout and thrive over pure physical attraction or connection but may only be facilitated to some extent by such connections. These relationships are contextualized through shared experiences, shared preferences, and possession of shared knowledge, narratives, life history, values, views, and more. On a social level, building a friendship is a common but sophisticated phenomenon. Delgado (2017) explored an enriched context for young people who share

structural determinants of livelihood, noting that the context can be broadened to include sociocultural, socioeconomic, sociopolitical, religious, and philosophical elements of people's lives. Friendships can also influence how people formulate purpose in life and how they select various missions. The process of being in a friendship and the outcomes of such a process can also impact an individual's sense of self and how they formulate their identity. Relationships of this nature may also influence an individual's self-worth, how (and whether) they come to understand certain categories of people, and how they engage in larger social groups (Haslam & Jetten, 2009).

Friendships between men have been known to merge many aspects of their lives (Good, 2012; Williams, 2015). Gill (2008) found men to be relating over the multiple domains of their lives, exchanging positions in the social world, competing with each other, deliberating over biological roles accruing to them in their environments, setting up implicit and explicit rules and norms, and engaging in other enriched exchanges. Men are also capable of operationalizing their criteria for inclusion of other men in their social cycle with incoming peers being ready to review, negotiate, and establish grounds for interaction (Tassara, 2014). Men can also easily escalate the trusted connections that they establish with each other to a family level partly because they are also keen to follow through on the progression of such connections with more capability for detachment whenever a critical element falls apart. Friendships can also merge into other areas of the men's lives, such as economic and sociopolitical domains, as has been seen in men's clubs and social cycles (Milligan, 2016).

Miller (as cited in Jordan & Hartling, 2010) provided a general approach for describing social relations, which may be used to examine the quality of friendships; in the following categories:

- vitality,
- empowerment,
- clarity,
- sense of worth, and
- desire to extend the relationship.

Vitality occurs in friendship through feelings related to being energized, aware, lively, spirited, and renewed. Vitality represents a spectrum of outcomes transcending the physical and mental domains of an individual's contextual existence (Rouse et al., 2015; Younes, 2011). Vitality is also considered to be a basic psychological need (Thieler, 2017) that provides physical and materialistic resources that can supply spiritedness to an individual, facilitate their timely renewal in a situation, and make them lively or aware of how they are progressing in the context of their existence. Vitality can also occur as a characteristic of the alliance with a group that represents friendship (Akin, & Akin, 2015), and this is in the form of the resources and capabilities that become available as a result of the associations that members establish between or among themselves. Vitality, therefore, represents the power that friendship exudes for any of the allied agents to use and deploy at their pleasure and sometimes for the purpose of validating the friendship (Uysal, Satici, Satici, & Akin, 2014).

Vitality is also an indicator of the potential future state of friendship with regard to how it may grow and the emotional or social resources that it yields to promote the growth of the people involved (Iravani & Torkan, 2013). Qualities that yield vitality provide insight into the things that a person wants to regenerate or extend to make their situation better (Edwards, 2013). Vitality helps to restore an individual from a problematic situation, and when manifested in friendship, vitality can occur in the form of shared funny moments, moments of reassurance for issues internal or external to the social relationship, and moments when friends facilitate the physical revitalization of each other. Vitality, therefore, provides important categories of outcomes that enable a friendship to materialize in various dimensions of restoration, growth, and well-being.

Empowerment occurs in social relationships as a form of increased relational capability whereby the people who are relating can accomplish more as a result of the ties that generate resources and other forms of facilitation for them (Renouard & Giraud, 2009). Relational capability can serve as the most important determinant of resource distribution as people can easily understand the meaning of the effort they make in any endeavor based on whom they are investing in, and they can contextualize this to their internal dynamics of cooperation (Tohani, 2017). Empowerment is also commonly desired as an outcome to be generated for parties or groups of interest who are deemed to possess untapped and suppressed potential for performance in various situations or in general life. Pratto (2016) noted that empowerment provides the structures that are needed to create an environment of opportunities, and that social relations are central to empowerment. Friendships are ideal forms of social relations, and the structures that they

provide may span the social, psychological, economic, and physiological domains, among other important domains that may contribute to structural elements of opportunities in people's lives. Empowerment may also signify expanding relations, and friendships may grow when they empower people to relate more widely with other social actors in their lives. Empowerment yields networks that serve as a source of other opportunities and resources for people who acquire it (Ali, 2017).

Due to the expansive nature of the empowerment aspect of desirable friendship, the qualities that fall within empowerment drivers and outcomes can mainly be understood in how the friendship orients friends to the broader society (Leary & Baumeister, 2017) – including how they get a share of such important resources as knowledge, economic resources, facilitation to gain inclusion in social institutions and much more. The current study also looks at a case of people residing in a sparsely populated region where tourism or other sources of increased social relations matter to residents. Strzelecka (2012) notes that social capital is provided by social relationships between individuals enabling them to make direct gains from these relationships and use it to acquire more relational connections. In small communities, rural communities, and communities whose populations are not widely interconnected to others with the abundance of social activity, networks that are established internally need to help contribute to increased external social connections for general social development (Strzelecka, 2012). As such, friendships provide internal connections and empowerment and the context should contribute to people expanding their social dispositions.

Friendships are also expected to yield clarity for the people involved with regard to the progression of alliances that emerge, the importance of the social relationships that occur to these people and extend to provide clarity on important issues that are shared between them, including emotions and general issues (Stafford-Bush, 2017; Hamilton et al., 2016). The lack of clarity, as could be the case for emotional clarity, is, in fact, a signifier of lack of friendship in the dimension that it may be manifested, or for the people that may perpetually show lack of such clarity (Hamilton et al., 2016). Clarity makes it possible for relating parties to openly expose themselves to the interactions or engagements that any of them initiates because each one of them understands the progression of such engagements or understands the terms under which they progress – including trust-based parameters and much more (McQuillan, 2016). Clarity is also about the attention that people award to values or value systems that guide their social relationships (Trindade, Ferreira, Pinto-Gouveia, & Nooren, 2015). Values are the constructions that people establish for themselves and others to represent the bounds of their pursuits, desires, and ends (Trindade et al., 2015). A friendship that manifests clarity will, therefore, provide the involved individuals with some view of values guiding their continued engagement with the other people in such relationships.

A sense of worth is the perceived valuableness of oneself in relation to the social context of relationships. It makes direct reference to the selfhood of an individual by assigning perceptions of worth to them (Sharma, 2014). Self-worth should, therefore, be cultivated in friendship because actions that impact on it are interacting directly with an individual's consciousness and may impact on their overall character (Shultziner &

Rabinovici, 2012). A sense of worth may inspire firm resolutions that individuals make in assessing and adopting principles and values from experiences with their friends. If the friendship causes a loss in an individual's sense of worth, it leads to them degenerating in other broader areas of their performance, livelihood, or existence (Vandellen, Hoy, & Hoyle, 2009). Friendship should lead to gains and growth in sense of worth in order to reinforce habits and beliefs that promote an individual's welfare and wellbeing. A higher sense of worth among friends also leads to more meaningfulness of their engagements and commitment to sustain such meaningfulness. It generates more emotional resources and commitments that ensue may also manifest in the form of physical resources and other forms of structural support that they need for their wellbeing (Haslam & Jetten, 2009)

Social relationships that fail to establish proper outcomes for a sense of worth may not yield strong internal structures of engagement and mutual control (Vandellen et al., 2009). On the other hand, relationships that yield a higher sense of worth opens up better opportunities for the people involved to establish stable structures of engagement where each one of them is assured of a default worthiness of such engagement (Sharma, 2014; Haslam & Jetten, 2009). Toxic relationships will therefore not qualify as functional friendship because one or more of the people involved is losing their sense of worth. In some cases, this could be through lifestyle-related behavioral risks that infiltrate initially-healthy friendships without the people involved dispensing their capacity to mitigate them for each other. They are manifested in such social relationships as those that end up in coordinated and extensive drug abuse, violation and destruction of important forms of

structural support that the relating people do not replenish, and other relationships that guarantee ultimate degradation of the sense of worth for the people involved. Oskarsson, Dawes, Johannesson, and Magnusson's (2012) article on genetics and social traits focused on the biology of what influences an individual's attitude and behavior, and this indicates that deeper friendships should help people to gain better control of their dispositions in order to tap into their full potential. The trust that develops in friendship also taps into innate elements of an individual's dispositions and it should therefore not be exploited in a way that degrades them (Oskarsson et al., 2012). This is important as it could also influence how individuals learn to choose their friends based on trust.

Friendship can also be expected to depict the quality of extending social relationships or regenerating into more friendships (Jordan & Hartling, 2010). This manifests in the aforementioned networkability of friendship and the social capital that it yields to the people involved – all research on social relations also highlights on extensibility of these relationships. It also represents a general change in friendships and how individuals grow or gain the capacity for friendship. Friendships create activities that increase this process. Perlman, Stevens, and Carcedo (2015) described the importance of what an individual is looking for when they want to join a social activity with others through utilizing how friendships are developed and portrayed through movies. They find that an individual is able to view the possible highs and lows of what it is like to be friends with someone by being able to assess the emergent personalities of the actors and actresses.

Heasley's (2013) article is one man's own individual journey on the friends that he came into contact with. During this journey, the focus was on learning about the importance of gendered friendship in a male's life (Heasley, 2013). This is an important article as it speaks of the different characteristics and behaviors of a close group of male friends. Through this journey, the man was able to describe the closeness with another male and how they trusted one another (Heasley, 2013). Laursen, Hafen, Kerr, and Stattin (2012) also described the thoughts of individuals and what an individual may go through to be accepted by their peers. While friends can influence one another, there is little knowledge on the types of relative influence there actually is on the relationship, whether it is good, bad or both. In this article, the focus was on looking at friends over the context of a couple years to see how the friendships changed (Laursen et al, 2012).

The experience of friendship also exposes individuals to relationships that prove to be essential and important for them to sustain. Poulin, Deng, Ingersoll, Witt, and Swain (2012) researched family and friend support and how they relate to an individual's own well-being. This research was with American and Chinese individuals (Poulin et al., 2012). This will be helpful in my research as my participants may come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. As participants speak about their friendships with others they could speak about how their family's and friends' support has helped them to ease depression or loneliness. People also find more luxurious opportunities in friendship, as is the case for harmless interpersonal competitive tendencies. Rüter and Mussweiler (2005) researched how individuals will compare themselves to their best friend at times. This entails the importance of the influence that friends have on one another. As individuals

self-evaluate they find traits that they see in others they like and may work at trying to improve those traits in themselves (Rüter & Mussweiler, 2005). Social comparison is a phenomenon where individuals evaluate themselves compared to others (Thibaut, 2017). Evaluating oneself to one's best friend can be good or bad depending on what types of qualities the friend wants to improve in themselves.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Developing and maintaining a friendship can be a challenge for a variety of reasons. Being able to develop a bond between another individual could have a major impact on an individual's overall health and well-being. The literature review helps with bringing forward information about the impacts of a friendship and how they can help an individual physiologically and psychologically.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences that help identify the characteristics that males between the ages of 30 and 35 look for or admire when building close male friendships. In this study of close male friendship, I asked participants to describe their closest male friend. The friendship could have begun during childhood or recently, and there were no limitations on the duration of the friendship or where the friend lives. The research questions were designed to address the participants' perspectives on what qualities were important to them in a male friendship.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

A phenomenological design was used to gain an understanding of participants' friendships through lived experiences. Using the phenomenological design, I was able to explore the participants' experiences with friends to gain information on what qualities were important to them when it comes to building bonds with other males. The phenomenological design enhanced the research capacity for investigating a broad topic in a contextualized setting or with contextual resources, which helped provide important theoretical insights. Interviews were conducted to identify similar themes among participants' responses. The phenomenological design helped me gain an understanding of participants' experiences and how they have been impacted by the friendship (see Lewis, 2015). The qualitative phenomenological design focused on the individuals' own experiences and how they interpreted those experiences.

As the research topic is a broad topic, the use of a qualitative method to obtain information can help with developing research questions (Tracy, 2013). A phenomenological study can be used to develop theories through analysis of the data gained from interviewing the participants (Lewis, 2015). The phenomenological design provided an opportunity to conceptualize social patterns and configurations for what males looked for when developing a friendship. After interviewing each participant, I looked for consistencies within their responses regarding the characteristics that were important in developing friendships with other males. The phenomenological design is useful for locating common themes with the research data (Lewis, 2015). If conflicting information had been observed, it would have provided an opportunity for further research.

Formulating interview questions for participants and asking them to discuss their experiences in building friendships helped with gaining insight into what qualities were important in a male friendship. With the questions being asked to participants through the phenomenological design, reviews can be made throughout all aspects of the study (Lewis, 2015). The purpose of phenomenological inquiry is to identify themes but not generalize findings beyond the sample (Lewis, 2015). I considered other qualitative designs, but they would not have been able to provide data to understand what qualities are important in a male friendship. The biographical design focuses on a description of an individual's life (Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). The participant in this type of study is able to tell their story in chronological order while focusing on different stages of their life similar to a biography. This design focuses more on the different stages of a

person's life rather than the qualities that are important to them when building a friendship. Because other designs were not able to address the qualities of a male friendship, I chose the phenomenological design.

The last design that was considered was the case study. Case studies are used to gather in-depth information through a variety of sources and methods (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Use of this study would be a challenge as the data may not necessarily reach a wider population, while a phenomenological theory was able to adapt to the study of diverse phenomena. The research was focused on the lived experiences of participants' male friendships and the qualities that were deemed important for those involved.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative methodology was selected to research a topic that had not been adequately explored. The qualitative method is used to gather information based on the researcher's perspective (Tracy, 2013). Using the qualitative method, I was able to help identify the characteristics that are important for developing male friendships.

Researchers had been able to identify the positive and negative consequences of having and not having friendships, but there was limited information on the characteristics that are important in a male friendship. Researchers were able to describe loneliness and depression rates among males as they got older. Mental health consequences of loneliness are comparable to an individual's level of depression and their level of self-esteem (Haynes, 2017). Other health-related issues were associated with feelings of loneliness. In the current study, I explored the qualities of a male friendship by targeting the characteristics males look for when building friendships.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

### **Sampling and Participant Characteristics**

For the study, 11 participants were interviewed. In a phenomenological study, Creswell (1998) recommended having between five and 25 participants to ensure adequate data. Selecting participants in the current study was based on maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling is a purposive sampling technique in which the researchers look for variation in participants' perspectives. I gained insight into the phenomenon of male friendships. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) male, (b) residing in the Northeast Wyoming area, (c) between the ages of 30 and 35, and (d) have or have had at least one close male friend. Males between 30 and 35 years of age had adequate information and experience with friends, and therefore were able to provide an understanding of the qualities they admire in their closest friend. I focused on this age group because males between these ages tend to focus on family and careers, which makes established friendships even more valuable. Males in this age group have had experience with the most important challenges encountered in maintaining male friendships. Participants were males whose closest friend was also a male.

The process of accessing participants involved communicating with people who were engaged in some activity in the Northeast Wyoming area, especially business owners, and requesting their assistance in identifying participants. The goal of using business owners was to recruit participants from a wide variety of locations and professions. Establishing communication in this manner also helped me identify males

who had the potential for contributing relevant data. Those who were interested went through the consent process, and interviews were scheduled to fit participants' schedules.

### **Interviews and Data Formatting**

Data were collected through interviews with participants. At the beginning of the interview, the consent form and confidentiality forms were explained and signed.

Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder. Background information provided insight into the participant and his experiences. I established rapport and asked questions about the participant's best male friend experiences, why the friendship was established, what could shake it, and what they expect from it. Research indicated that focusing on relationships between people and using factors that help describe situations can become the context of the research (Mai, 2016). Information in the interview provided valuable insight into the participant and the male friend that he was describing. Gathering information about the participant and the male friend also provided insight into how qualities of a male friendship may have changed over time. The information obtained in the interview focused on the personal experiences of the participants. Initial prompts addressed the friendship of the male participant and the qualities of his best male friend that he admired or looked for the most when building a friendship. The conversations also focused on how the participant began the friendship with another male. The focus was the participant's similarities and differences with his male best friend, as well as perceptions of other male friendships that he observed.

To format the data, it was organized in files for each interviewee that are formatted via transcription so that all data is eventually represented in text format. The

advantage of effectively organizing raw data is that it can become independently inspected (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Organizing improves the reliability, and improves the ability to research, track, and gather information at a later date (Baxter & Jack, 2008). All hard-copy files, recordings, and transcriptions were locked in a secure filing cabinet in the home office of the researcher. The filing cabinet itself takes a specific individual key to open.

### **Analytical Strategy**

The researcher first wanted to maintain familiarity with all the data that is collected from the field and proceeded to analyze it qualitatively. In qualitative data analysis, there is no single way to write up the overall results and a variety of approaches may be applied (Smith & Davies, 2010). With reading the transcriptions from the participants' data, it provided an idea of their experiences with their friend. After reflecting over the experiences gained in interacting with clients, transcriptions were created directly representing what they said. From there, they were reviewed repeatedly and the goal was to gain an overall understanding of what the data was trying to express. The next goal with the data analysis was to begin to identify certain comments that have relevant meaning to the research being studied. While locating certain comments, it is important to put the information in order to express the information that engages the reader (Smith & Davies, 2010). The strategy used therefore represents these as codes. With this study, the research was to obtain relevant data to help gain an understanding of what qualities were important for a male friendship.

The information being expressed was needed to illustrate the qualities of a male friendship. There are therefore some “extracts” from the raw data that help with providing evidence for the study (Smith & Davies, 2010). The entire data set provided codes that were reviewed approximately six times to identify patterns as subthemes, which were reviewed further to provide main themes. This approach also applied framing. For a framing device, time is utilized to help reflect the unfolding of time in the participants’ life (Smith & Davies, 2010). Utilizing time as a framing device was useful to showcase how certain experiences were connected with others. The other framing device used alongside this was prevalence, which included locating common themes and tendencies. Locating the most common themes could be expressed first, with any type of deviations communicated later (Smith & Davies, 2010). Utilizing prevalence helped with identifying information that was merging together or separate. The researcher maintained a view of Jean Baker Miller’s framework, which provided items to which friendship qualities may be aligned. The analysis, therefore, checked for how the qualities expressed align to the five major elements of vitality, empowerment, clarity, sense of worth, and extending friendships or expansive nature of the relationships. The researcher utilized inductive analysis and deductive analysis. Through use of inductive analysis the researcher will look for objects to identify and classify them based on the characteristics or distinguishing features (Morrison, Haley, Sheehan, & Taylor, 2011). Deductive analysis will then be utilized to compare data with what has already been defined, and if the new data fits with the data that has already been established, or it requires a new category (Morrison, Haley, Sheehan, & Taylor, 2011). Use of inductive analysis and

deductive analysis will continue to occur until all categories are defined and the connection within the data categories are developed (Morrison, Haley, Sheehan, & Taylor, 2011). The trend was deemed sufficient for providing insight into the major themes representing qualities that are desired to establish friendship among men.

### **Research Reliability and Validity**

Proposed research findings for this qualitative study were verified in comparison to validated as verification is commonly used for qualitative studies. Member checking is a verifying tool to help assess, validate, and verify the data that is collected (Birt et al., 2016). Utilizing such verification can help with keeping the overall qualitative design while maintaining reliability and validity to the researcher themselves (Morse et al., 2008). The use of qualitative study verification refers to the different mechanisms used in the research study to ensure reliability and validity (Morse et al., 2008). The current study focused on the cross-comparison of views in a thematic analysis so that the themes were yielded via member checking and internal affirmation derived from the data. Through identifying any problems that may exist in the study, the problems can be located and self-corrected if following the proper principles of a qualitative study (Morse et al., 2008). Going back and forth between the qualitative design and how the study was implemented helped in seeing whether such elements as data results aligned with theoretical expectations. Thinking theoretically also helps with the development of ideas from the data that must be verified in the data that has been collected (Morse et al., 2008). It requires the researcher to look at things at a broad perspective as well as a narrow

perspective in small measurements, consistently checking and rechecking, and build a strong foundation for the study (Morse et al., 2008).

Validation for member checking consists of a few steps. The initial step for validation through member checking consists of gathering data from the participants within the study (Creswell, 2009). Once the data is collected the second step would be to review the data and develop analysis (Creswell, 2009). Developing an analysis helped with identifying certain themes along with categories. The third step through the use of member checking would be to interpret the data that was collected by the participants (Creswell, 2009). Once the data was reviewed I had an opportunity to place data within certain themes and categories. The fourth and final step with member checking would be to give the information back to the research participants, allowing the participants to judge the overall accuracy and credibility of the data gathered (Creswell, 2009). Through the use of member checking, participants are important in directing and being involved with the research (Creswell, 2009). Participants were able to review the data for accuracy and to add to the data that was already collected.

Qualitative researchers can also ensure congruence through proper development of the inquiry's objective, literature, recruitment of participants, data collection, and analysis (Morse et al., 2008). Having data and development in validity helped with systematically checking the data. Verification of findings can help the researcher in identifying when to move on, stop, or adjust any of the data process to help with reliability and validity (Morse et al., 2008). In the study, I was actively attending to the

data as it emerges, as it is formatted, and as it was reviewed and analyzed – a concurrent approach that reinforced validity and enhanced overall capacity for verifiability.

Verifying data was an important aspect of developing quality qualitative research. Use of member checking can be useful in verifying participants data by exploring the data by returning the information back to participants to check for accuracy of the data disclosed (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Providing participants with the opportunity to review the data that is presented to the researcher could help decrease the bias a researcher may have by confirming the data (Birt et al., 2016). Participants had an opportunity to make any adjustments to the data presented before me was able to finalize the data gained by the participant.

The second verification method used for the qualitative study was using a peer reviewer. A peer debriefer would be selected to review and ask questions about the qualitative study so the data would resonate with the people other than the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Use of a peer review will help provide an external check of the research that is conducted (Creswell, 2009). Peer review verification strategy can support the research with questions about the methods, meanings, and interpretations that participants provide (Creswell, 2009). The peer review strategy assisted the study by providing an increase in data from both the participant and the researcher. Use of peer review can help with the accuracy of the data that has been collected (Creswell, 2009).

Verification strategy consisted of working with the methodological coherence. The methodological coherence is helpful in ensuring congruence with the research question and components of the method being utilized (Morse, et al., 2008). For

methodological coherence, it is important that the question being asked is in line with the method, which also is congruent with the data and analytic procedures (Morse, et al., 2008). This was important for the research study as things that coincided helped things in order.

The second step with the verification strategy was that the sample must be appropriate. Participants in the proposed study would have to represent or have proper qualifications for the research topic (Morse, et al., 2008). Being able to adequately, replicate, and have information that is able to account for all attributes of the phenomenon through the proper sample size is important for verification of a qualitative study (Morse, et al., 2008). Being able to replicate the data was important with verification.

The third step to verification strategy was to collect and analyze data concurrently. Collecting and analyzing the data at the same time can help develop an interaction between what is known and what is still unknown (Morse, et al., 2008). Using this method helped with creating the reliability and validity as expressed earlier.

The fourth step was thinking theoretically. Thinking theoretically helps with the development of ideas from the data that must be verified in the data that has been collected (Morse, et al., 2008). Thinking theoretically would require the researcher to look at things at a broad perspective as well as a narrow perspective in small measurements, consistently checking and rechecking, and build a strong foundation for the study (Morse, et al., 2008).

The fifth step in verification strategy was the theory development to help view things from a micro and macro perspective. Viewing the theory development in this method can help with the research process and as a template for possible further development (Morse, et al., 2008). With all the steps for verification strategies together they helped develop a reliable and valid research study.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Those who were involved in the study were adult male participants who were chosen freely on whether or not they would want to participate. With this study, there was no apparent harm in participating in the study. There was no participant who experienced difficulty talking about their friendship, if there was the plan was to let them know that it is okay to withdraw and that their participation would not affect them in any way. All participants within the study were given a consent and confidentiality form. These forms were completed and signed by the participants to actively participate in the study. Participant's confidentiality will be protected by their participation in the study. Use of files, audiotapes, and transcripts were utilized for this study. Once tools were done being used they were locked away in a filing cabinet that takes a key to open within the researcher's office. The only individuals have access to the confidential information were the researcher and another professional who may be assisting in validating the results of the research. With the interviews, all identifiers of personal information were removed from all transcripts to help keep participants information confidential.

### **Summary**

The chapter presents the methodology for the research on the qualities that can build a male friendship. The research design, research methods with regard to the type of data applied, its collection, the sampling protocol and participant characteristics, a highlight of analytical strategy, as well as considerations made with regard to research validity, reliability, and research ethics.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the lived experience that helps identify the characteristics that males between the ages of 30 and 35 look for or admire when building close male friendships. I focused on close male friendship by asking participants to describe their closest male friend. The friendship could have begun during childhood or recently, and there were no limitations regarding the duration of the friendship or where the friend lives. The research questions were crafted to address the participants' perspectives regarding what qualities are important to them in a male friendship. Four research questions guided the study:

RQ1: What has been the lived experience of males aged 30 to 35 in seeking male friendships?

RQ2: What are the important qualities of male friendships for men ages 30 to 35?

RQ3: What characteristics could help men build a friendship?

RQ4: What role does social connection play in male friendship?

This chapter includes a description of the setting and the context in which the data were collected. The participants' demographics and characteristics are presented, which is followed by a description of data collection and data analysis methods. The chapter also includes a presentation of the results and a summary.

### **Setting**

Participants were recruited via flyers placed throughout Northeast Wyoming and by word of mouth. The participants who elected to participate in the study were aware of my educational status and purpose of the study. There were no preexisting relationships

with participants. I explained to participants that the data would be kept confidential and that only I would know about their involvement in the study. No identifying information was shared, and I obtained written consent prior to asking any questions and receiving any responses from participants in the study. No personal or organizational connections at the time of the study influenced the results.

### **Participant Demographics**

There were 11 participants from Northeast Wyoming. Table 1 contains demographic information for all 11 participants in the study.

Table 1

#### *Participant Demographics*

Participant	Gender	Profession	Age
A1	Male	Accountant	30
A2	Male	Coal miner	33
A3	Male	Chiropractor	32
A4	Male	Teacher	31
A5	Male	Office manager	34
A6	Male	Electrician	34
A7	Male	Marketing	31
A8	Male	Firefighter	33
A9	Male	Coal miner	35
A10	Male	Truck driver	31
A11	Male	Teacher	32

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through semistructured interviews with 11 participants in April and May 2019. The interviews were conducted in Wyoming. The semistructured interviews took between 20 and 30 minutes. Each of the semistructured interviews were audio-recorded with the use of a digital recording device. I asked each participant

demographic questions at the beginning of the interview to obtain information regarding their age, profession, and home location in Wyoming. The information provided information to ensure that participants met the selection criteria to participate in the study. No changes in the data collection methods were necessary, and no events occurred that prevented the participants from completing the semistructured interviews. I was able to obtain all of the necessary information from participants in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the semistructured interviews were completed, I transcribed the interviews and gave each participant a copy to validate the information or to make necessary changes. No changes were needed. When analyzing the data, I reviewed the transcripts to locate subthemes and main themes. For coding and the development of themes, I used an open coding procedure that included labeling subthemes and main themes that were relevant for the research questions. The themes were categorized based on the four research questions so the findings could be associated with the appropriate research question. Once the main themes were established, I reviewed the transcripts to find additional main themes, subthemes, or similarities between the two types of themes. I used framing to describe main themes and subthemes provided by participants. Through framing, I used prevalence to locate common themes and tendencies to identify merging information. Prevalence enabled me to identify friendship qualities that were important in building a male friendship.

Inductive and deductive analysis was used. Inductive analysis was used to identify and classify data for characteristics and important features. Deductive analysis was used

to compare the data that were established and to make sure that the incoming data fit with the data that were identified in previous interviews. Both analysis methods were used until all of the categories were developed.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I established evidence of trustworthiness by using member checking to assess, validate, and verify the data. Member checking enhanced reliability and validity of the data. I reviewed and interpreted the data and developed themes and subthemes for the study.

Once the themes and categories were developed, I returned the transcripts to participants to allow them to check the accuracy of the data they provided. The participants had the option to add to or change any data that were collected; no participants chose to alter or add any information to the data provided.

The second method used for evidence of trustworthiness was peer review. Peer review provided an insight and verification strategy that supported the research methods and interpretations of the data. The peer review affirmed the reliability of the data for the study.

### **Results**

The results are organized according to the research questions. The first research question and results are related to the participants' lived experiences regarding developing friendships. The second research question and results are related to the participants' views on important qualities in building male friendships. The third research question and results are related to the participants' views on personal characteristics that

are important in building a male friendship. The fourth research question and results are related to the participants' views on the role social connections play in building a male friendship.

### **Research Question 1**

**Friendships are scoped within shared experiences.** Participants focused on experiences that they shared with friends, either short-lived, lifelong, or intermittent, to classify the friendships and to determine the kind of friendships that may be built with certain people. Participants were capable of initiating friendships when an individual reappeared in their life to have shared experiences, with differing standards in how each assessed the person's worthiness for friendship, as described by a participant:

You know I really think it comes down to similarities and not only hobbies but um, in other activities that you know, you know enjoy. Not simply that, just that it is 100% dependent almost like a third a sense of entertainment. I assume there are a lot involved interactions and mainly a lot experiences together.

Men that are more open for new friendships allow interactions to get personal for much longer before making deductions on personality, and mainly focus on immediate behavioral traits that can be deduced from the experiences. Those that are slower at this process attempt to use immediate priorities and perceptions on personality or social standing of the individual and what perceptions are heavily anchored on shared experiences.

**Friendship as a relatively flexible process progressing within shared experiences.** Men allow close friendships to access multiple elements of life endeavors

and also allow for diverse forms of friendships to emerge in each select domain of these endeavors. As participant one stated

So um, obviously I have known my best friend since I was 16 or 17 years old. We went to college together; we both lived in Gillette together. We then moved to Laramie around the same time and we see each other a couple times a month. Those build up experiences that have been made that are either planned or unplanned. Not the big activities at times it is the little activities like hanging out and just watching tv. When you do not feel like doing something and about being comfortable.

A friend at work can easily gain status as a friend at home once that individual is found to be suitable, and friendships can emerge in any of the niches that occur frequent in any objective manner. Both for the men that are less receptive of new friendships and those that allow for fewer controls in friendship exhibit a lot of flexibility in how that individual may view a friendship.

The former introduce a broader value set and much more lenient priorities once friendship is established and this also aligns to them not demanding a lot of consistency from friends in how certain priorities are met. Those that are open from the start are also showing flexibility by even allowing friends to change the criteria for social relationships within bounds of assured mutual support. Participant 11 explained flexibility with friends:

I am not one to nag my friends and I am always open to make new acquaintances, you never know how it will go. So I let everyone show what they believe in and

what they love, you know, whatever background and culture they might have.

Then we negotiate that along the way. It's not like you can even predict the good in a person but as you engage, it comes out. And of course you also introduce your own standards if they are on the extreme side of things.

**Coherence versus flexibility in ideological views.** There is divide over the extent to which friends should express ideological views that conform to what each participant wants or holds as their views in such domains as religion, politics, and general views about life. As participant three stated,

If he helped me out or I helped him out it, if we need each other there will always be a resource, regardless of political opinions, opinions on anything else really, it does not really matter, what the current viewpoints are there, it is someone you can count on. They know you as a human and not as you know you like blue or red.

Some participants see coherence as the main expectation that is to be fulfilled while others see flexibility as important because they also may benefit from it whenever their views change. Most participants generally prefer coherence because they see it as a way to avert most conflict. However, a substantial number of five of them are flexible in how they accommodate different views on religion, politics, and important life issues.

**Understanding the other helps to sustain coherent coexistence.** Friends are expected to show understanding in two main ways; one is by recognizing the relative abilities and weaknesses of the other person that they are relating with, and the other is to communicate the fact that they are recognizing these abilities and weaknesses. They can

communicate their understanding in action and in moral support. As participant one stated,

It basically comes down to the sense of family that he is going to be there for me through thick and thin. I get that sense of you know, the same thing like I guess its just the sense of family.

They can therefore attend to the problems that overwhelm their friend in order to display a state of understanding. Understanding is also viewed as a demonstration of the other person's willingness to represent their friend in situations where their friend cannot represent himself or herself. As participant two stated,

That is exactly why I feel that way, I have a lot of female friends and there are times where you want a male friend there for. Just to have that sense of "I get you bud" because sometimes you do not want to talk it out, you just want someone there to hangout with you while you bitch a little bit and they go "man that sucks." And that is all you need to hear, not an examination of why it happened just a "man that really sucks, I know dude, how about that play, yeah that was a good play." Just knowing that someone is willing to hangout with you is a part of it.

It therefore serves to provide a reflection of what expectations may be made with regard to a person's representative capacity based on how they recognize and communicate their view of their friend's abilities and weaknesses.

**Clarity is mainly about justice and understanding.** There is a wide difference in the way people view friendships that suit them even when they talk of similar social

needs but two major ideas are central to such views; justice and understanding. They first think of fairness that can be done to them then talk of how this may apply to the process of reciprocating or to a broader connection of social relationships. Participant six stated,

You know, we live in a world where everyone wants something for themselves and it all depends on whether you are fair as a person. So you meet someone and they have no idea of how to be just and fair, it falls apart pretty quick. This can't go below liking someone because we know some people may just not have the concept of it established from an early age. So if you are to teach them that, well and good, but at this age you may not have that time though.

People that qualify as friends need to have basic capacity to be fair to them, first by being keen to know who they are and what they are up to (either in a given situation, are of life, or with regard to their overall life ambitions), then being able to establish how their interests may relate or differ, communicating this whenever necessary, but at the same time being tolerant enough and helpful. As participant two stated,

There is a mix of positive and negative, but your best friend may also they will drag you into their bullshit as well, like if they get into a bad breakup and they are acting like an idiot, you kind of have to take their side even if you think they are wrong and deal with their nonsense. And sometimes their behavior gets them into trouble to and you have to back them up. Like a crappy Toby Keith song like he picks a fight with somebody and your like "I really don't want to fight this guy but I am not going to allow you to get your ass kicked so I am here." That is a negative impact but part of it as well is that the positive will always outweigh that.

As long as you both survive you can give him shit about dragging you into that situation later and that is just more ammunition to give each other little pokes and stuff. And that is a beneficial relationship as well someone you can tease and go back and forth with and be sibling like.

This reflects an understanding that is based on justice. The way justice and understanding is used to select friends also shows that participants mainly think carefully about it in the earliest stages of encounter with people, but as other qualities take over, they focus on trust then quickly transition to just having fun and helping each other. As participant two stated,

A best male friend would also have be a person that you laugh with a lot, it would be a thing where you are sending each other jokes or you know and you see something funny and they are the first person you think of. But I also think that best male friends may have to have some of the same like faults that you have or even opposing faults to some extent but you can definitely commensurate with each other when you do something dumb.

They retract back to these initial elements of justice and understanding when deeper issues emerge where friendship ties are contemplated or assessed for their relative value. Justice and understanding therefore mainly serve in establishing the structural foundations of relationships and they can determine the continuity of friendships.

**Values can guide decisions.** The qualities that reflect values are general norms that everyone sees as to be important and expect their friend to sustain. Some of the most important ones also link to personal endeavors in how the participants represent them, for

instance; expecting a friend to be honest so as to be able to let them take on some important obligations on their behalf without doubting them. Participant three stated,

Qualities that are important in my opinion are consistency, certainty, and for a large part honesty, communication, and on day to day routine of the engagement of that friendship. Example would be going fishing together as friends two friends we are going to meet up and go fish, plans have been made for most part going to happen there is not going to be any wavering, friends not going to back out. Not going to get together and then decide to go bowling, instead. It is actually going to happen, what plans have been made for.

They expect their friends to know their approach to personal deals with regard to the norms that are held as important, and to not violate such norms. They also expect friends to appreciate their personal preferences with regard to how they interact with people, how they maintain privacy, and how they prioritize certain aspects of their lives (e.g., family, business, or career), and this generates values that are to be upheld in friendship. As participant two stated,

I think having strong male friendships makes you more confident in the way you approach new friendships to some degree because you have expectations and standards. You are like “hey that’s a sheisty move like my best friend wouldn’t do that.” So it helps you hold other friendships to a certain standard.

**Sense of worth is to be sustained in values, faith, and shared commitments.**

Some of the essential issues in how people negotiate relationships that lead to friendship

involve values, their beliefs, and lifetime commitments that may be shared with other people. As participant two stated,

Like I was saying you do not want to be dragged into their situation, but you are dragged in because you are invested in it. Not to sound cynical, but you care about this person and do not want to see them go through it alone. I think that is a big thing too you have to be willing to go and do stuff for them even if it is inconvenient for you.

The participants refer to their sense of worth by using these items and how they influence how they relate to potential and existent friends. They mainly align their sense of values to the ultimate set of the most important values, beliefs, and commitments that may also be prioritized in building and sustaining a friendship. Most participants do not consider hardline over their values and in as much as they express a need for conformity most of the time, they also see sources of difference as to be essential for progress or for expanding their worldview and exposing them to unique experiences. As participant two stated,

I think having been a man for 31 years, and I have some experience at it.

However, I think one thing is to be a good male friend you have to put your ego to the side at times. I think a lot of us culturally are taught that many things are about us, but in reality, it is not, and it is about the group. Because the group props you up and you prop up the group, it is a symbiotic relationship, but part of it too is that you have to be patient. Like patience is such a massive part of that.

Those that prefer to befriend people who express similar values indicate that they may not have the adequate personal time resources and other capacities for negotiating values, mainly because they are already committed to a course where some of the values are important. However, engaging them along any of the values can always result in building acquaintance. How this progresses depends on whether some coherence is attained or whether the engagement progresses conflict. A lot of other factors, including personality and how things go in the external environment also play a role in this progression to influence the perceptions that they develop about the person engaging them on these issues. Participant seven stated,

I have my beliefs but for me and people that I know also look at the personality thing, how someone may behave along the way. You cannot predetermine everything, and there is always room for engagement. Just as an example, if you are looking for someone to hunt with, you will avoid overly weak or soft-hearted persons in that situation. You know, some people have values that lead them to that, and for some; once they experience something they switch to your side.

The participants that allow themselves to befriend people who have different values, beliefs, and different commitments are, therefore, inclined towards learning and gaining new insight more than affirming their established sense of being and worth. Some of them also seek for friends who may extend this worth by helping them to get a better view of themselves and a better purpose in a given endeavor.

**People who are committed to a course are easier to understand.** People that may be befriended are also expected to have some particular purpose in life, and which

takes up a substantial amount of their commitment. This may include family commitments, career commitments, or some other course of goodwill. As participant two stated,

I feel like, I think in early life like in adolescent and stuff and when you are working on building those friendships that may extend into adulthood. You must learn those values to some extent like because if you expect them to do that for you, you have to be expected to do that for them. Learning that mutual trust can help and especially because at that point in your life you're not in a serious monogamous relationship and those friendships can help model that to some degree like how you treat someone especially someone you care about.

Participants speak of having a higher tendency to befriend someone who is on a unique course that they also are committed to because they bring a more significant a difference to the equation, and may also be fun to hang out with. People that are committed to goodwill missions over something that the participants believe in are also highly attractive as potential friends. They create opportunities for them to spend their extra time wisely while also accomplishing things that may satisfy them.

### **Research Question 2**

Data related to the second research question was focused on a sub-theme and the main theme. Data related to *subjective qualities* was a sub-theme indicating that male friendships tend to rely on certain individual qualities. Data related to *qualities* was a main-theme indicating that males prefer certain individual qualities when working on building a male friendship.

**Individuals are befriended in the process of satisfying subjective qualities.**

The participants provide various accounts of the process of befriending people, and it is mainly a criterion of verifications and qualifications that may be grouped in terms of known categories. As participant ten stated,

I would say best male friends, so for me, I did not have any brothers growing up, but all my “brothers” were all my best male friends. Just like these dudes that I would hang out with and you know you would stay at their house you know their family and you would refer to their mom as your mom sort of thing. The secondary family aspect kind of thing.

Some of these qualifications focus on the targeted individual as an independent entity – how well he is adjusted; just in case the interaction that ensues may impact on specific values that are to be upheld, and on the actual interaction – how the targeted person expresses experiences with the befriender in the shared environment or medium as well as how the befriender feels about the interaction. As participant one stated, “No matter how much you enjoy each other’s company it has to happen organically and I think it should not be forced.”

A lot of the assessments are value-based and therefore explicated best in the context of the selected value. As participant one stated,

I have acquaintances who are on higher levels like my roommate, who is involved in politics, and before being roommates, we were not more than acquaintances. I do have other acquaintances that have similar interest to me that I interact with. I

overall, though tend to stick to the same social network. It is comfortable with my best friend; it is normal as we have some similar values. I mean yeah it is good.

***Trustful individuals are prioritized.*** Trust recurs as a superior quality expressed in the extent to which the participants expect friends to be reliable in sustaining specific outcomes on different occasions. This ranges from the trust over shared information, trust over shared economic resources, trust over shared opportunities, and trust over personal matters relating to an individual's private affairs with others. As participant three stated, "Reliability and trust are important in the experiences that we have had together." Most references to trust indicate that participants expect to establish trust in order to leverage over it by getting certain things done without necessarily having to worry about being failed by the friendships that have developed or are developing.

***Time is an essential resource that should also be shared.*** Participants use the time to understand how friendships are progressing, and peers that waste valuable time are generally excluded from lists of potential friends or unfriended. As participant one stated,

The friendship has built up over time; it is tough to narrow it down to one event. I guess I would call this person my best friend in my freshman year of college, that is when we started hanging out a lot.

The other dimension of their view of time is also concerning how peers help to create valuable time or quality time. As participant three stated, "The time that we are spending together as barring any catastrophic events happen, the plans we made will happen, that is pretty much how it is." This includes how each contributes to creating

moments where an individual's efficiency increases or where the individual's wellbeing and positive feelings are enhanced. Peers or acquaintances that fail to recognize the value of an individual's time or need for more valuable time are generally excluded from friendship prospects. As participant three stated, "This is one of the tougher questions. If you are building friendships as I have relayed to myself. It comes down to time, and it does not happen overnight."

*Care is also essential for humanizing engagements.* Friendship also builds overcapacity to show concern for each other depending on the severity of a situation. Some participants are, however, less demanding of care except for essential occurrences, such as significant life events and when such care can determine the way life may change in the long-term. As participant three stated,

Somebody that you can call in an instant and that they will do whatever they can to help you, but someone you do not have to call. No matter how much time passes, they will still be able to talk to you and help.

Other participants speak of expectations for goodwill exchanges to occur occasionally, and people that are friends are to maintain such exchanges. Such participants also speak of how each initiate acts of goodwill and watch to see whether the behavior that follows up in the short-term will reflect a positive response to such goodwill or not.

**Qualities aligned to vitality and empowerment are centered on sharing resources.** Friendship is developed based on the ability to relate agents to raise each other's spirits, regenerate energy for each other through emotional and social support, as

well as their ability to cooperate in ways that increase each other's functional capacity in their environment. As participant three stated,

There was a situation once we both came to a decision together, and we decided to pack up and flashlight out our way out of a rough situation and we thought, whatever happens, happens man and we were going to have each other's back no matter what we were young at the time, so obviously the scenario was quite more severe from what we perceived than it probably actually was.

Many of them recognize the rural nature of their surroundings as to be requiring lifestyles that generate a connection with people because their region is sparsely populated. Participant four stated,

You know we have low numbers here in terms of the population, and as you need at least a friend or friends that make it lively. There are many opportunities here, but without some close friends, you'd be overwhelmed by this vastness. At least being able to spend your time together, think together, and just do stuff.

Resources that can be shared in personal relationships are, therefore seen to be essential for progress in such an environment. Friends are expected to have the attitude that facilitates such sharing, or at least, one that does not go to impede sharing directly. This ranges from resources at the personal level of individual physical ability which may serve in sharing work and protecting each other to external resources in the forms of possessions that are important in their environments. These environments and the existent culture predisposes individuals to potential isolation if they do not find the right

connections and friends are not only expected to prevent isolation but to also generate freshness and energy in a way that averts mundane life experiences.

### **Research Question 3**

Data related to the third research question was focused on a sub-theme and the main theme. Data related to *subjective characteristics* was a sub-theme indicating that male friendships tend to seek specific characteristics when building a friendship. Data related to *characteristics* was a main-theme indicating that males tend to seek specific characteristics when working on building a male friendship.

**The good intention in behavior or nondeviant behavior is essential.** Positive behavioral traits are generally expected but not rigorously assessed in people that are befriended or maintained as friends. Friends are, however, always expected to help avert behavior that may affect one negatively. As participant two stated,

You can also see yourself in them, and that can be helpful to because you can be the one to be like “hey I know what you are about to do and it is stupid, do not call her at 3 a.m. that is a jackass thing to do so do not do it.” However, I think having that quality of patience is good quality with having a best friend or at least a quality to have if you are that best friend you have to be patient with that person and they have to be patient with you as well.

It is, therefore, possible to befriend someone that prevents such outcomes before assessing the person’s behavior about any standards. A lot of the good behavior that is expressed relates to general decency, ability to recognize and avert risk, and ability to

induce positive feelings in people that may impact on important outcomes within the social domain of life.

***Courage is important for manly duties.*** There are different expectations for courageous acts and a courageous mindset – including the expectation that friends are to not shy off from protecting each other. As participant two stated,

Trust, being truthful, and being there for them. Being there for them, even if you want to or not. Even if you told them not to do it and they do it anyway. You come over and be like a buddy I know and let us go get a six-pack and watch the game talk about it.

The expressions that participants provide to represent the forms of courage that are expected to build and sustain friendship depends on each own experiences. In such domains as occupational domain, immediate surroundings or dwellings, how close people have influenced each, and the context of things that each expects to do with the friends that they have gained. Courage is also to be shown in how one handles his life issues in order to be more admirable for befriending or for remaining a friend. As participant three stated, “I knew that no matter what my buddy had my back and no matter what happened to him, I would have his back.”

***Fun people are preferred for revitalizing and re-energizing.*** The participants emphasize fun as one of the primary goals of friendship, and that friend should be fun in order to make life easier even when things are tough. Friends are relied upon in times of boredom because it can help bring energy to the situation and create an atmosphere of fun. As participant three stated, “As much as I would love to sit on my couch every

moment of every day, my best friend is not going to sit there and watch me play every day.”

Friends also facilitate each other in transitioning from periods of somberness and low moods to normal feelings even if the situation does not necessarily create laughter. Such a transition puts each male in a position where each could quickly gain more happiness. When friends gain happiness, it tends to be reciprocated by sharing these moments with other friends. As participant one stated, “It is over time we have had so many different experiences together and like with family we have had so many experiences of fun and good times together. A sense of camaraderie.”

*Informative people also tend to yield empowerment.* Friends are expected to be open in sharing information that helps one gain more awareness of the world or the occurrences of interest. As participant one stated,

The neat part is that I have experienced things that I necessarily would not have done. My best friend has introduced me to Dungeons and Dragons. He has introduced me to bicycling as an adult that I necessarily am not within my comfort zone that is positive.

Information is a resource that serves both the internal dynamics of a social relationship and the external connections that individuals make with the vast environments that each individual lives in. As independent human beings, each friend may recognize the fact that everyone receives different types of information as each individual makes independent interactions with the world, and that; sharing helps to augment the power of the information possessed by friends. As such, people that keep

information to themselves most of the time are likely not to be considered friends or close friends or be targeted for befriending.

**A person who strengthens and does not weaken is desirable.** People that may qualify as friends are expected to be those that make one stronger, and are not entirely dependent or non-reciprocating concerning generating more zeal and energy for their peers. Physical energy, emotional energy, and re-empowerment in such other areas as financial domain, in knowledge and awareness, depict some of the most important reasons to befriend people that make them stronger. As participant three stated, “There are times when we may need to rely on each other, and during these times it is good to know that we are going to be ok.”

The participants emphasize that; lack of strength in one area often co-occurs with the strength that may be shared in another are. For instance, people that are not economically well-off may be able to provide moral support in order to reflect their capacity for being good friends. As participant two stated,

You know we are social creatures, and it is good to be doing social things with people you complicity trust, and you know you are willing to sacrifice for, and they are willing to sacrifice for you. It is a good thing for that bonding sense. It is a good way to be like if we got together and decided to do something we could it. Moreover, that is a confidence builder two. Many hands make light work. Moreover, it is always better when your friends pitch in and come help out or help you move or help you till up the section of the yard when you are making a

garden or something. It is fun too, it turns something that could be drudgery into an excuse to hang out.

#### **Research Question 4**

Data related to the fourth research question was focused on a sub-theme and the main theme. Data related to *subjective social connections* was a sub-theme indicating the importance of social connection when building a friendship. Data related to *social connection* was a main-theme indicating that males view social connections as an important aspect of building a male friendship.

**Qualities that may extend friendships are also linked to personality and behavior.** On qualities that are considered to ensure that friendships are established in a way that will grow social relations and expand an individual's social capital, participants focus on concrete patterns known to emerge in certain people's behaviors and ways of thinking. As participant three stated,

It is tough you know, I guess friendships at this stage, I assume very rarely are new friendships made unless a major life experience is made. I assume you would make more friends. The friends I have made over the past few years, most of them have been work-related or a friend of a friend. Those would be the other friendships that have developed over the years through work or from a friend of a friend.

Their knowledge of these patterns appears to depend on their experience with social relationships and sometimes their knowledge of actual personalities in objective or scholarly terms. Those that rely on experience have narrower criteria for assessment such

as specific activities or requests that they may use to test out people that they are relating to in order to know whether they will be able to trust them on a higher level. As participant ten stated,

You have a variety of friends and people you spend time with. When you realize that someone is your best friend when you are like, you know, we have spent the entire day together, and I have not gotten bored once. That is probably a good sign. I think to have a common interest to some degree, and you do not have to be alike in interest, having a similar sense of humor or having something you can bond over that is not something trivial like sports. More life experiences and building life experiences, when they are peppering your life with memories that are the best male friend material right there.

Those that seem to have actual knowledge of some common personalities such as introversion and extroversion have broader plans when engaging people to extend social relations, for instance; they may take up the responsibility of bringing more people to the circle and relieve introverted friends of this duty but retain them in the circle. As participant two stated,

I think they are good as you get to meet more like-minded people. Like if your best friend introduces you to someone and they are pretty enthusiastic about this person or are like hey you need to meet this person. You implicitly trust this as you would not be introducing me to some jack and ape that you know I am going to hate with that amount of enthusiasm. But at the same time they can help you as well by telling you “he is a lot to handle don’t set him off,” and it is good to hear

as they may be talking about conspiracy theories and you can be like “uh-huh and that is fine and cool, and I didn’t know that was turning the frogs gay.” However, I think it is an excellent social connection as I think it helps especially if you are talking about meeting or maintaining relationships through that friendship it kind of radiate that trust that I was talking about. When you have a group of friends, you have a built-in group of friends everywhere you go. I think with males, especially in adulthood it can become tough when people start getting busy and getting married and having kids, it is tough to have time to hang out especially if you are leading different lifestyles. Like if you are still single and someone else is married and has three kids, you are leading very different lives. I think social things like going to events together can be a thing or things like fantasy football can help maintain those friends. An example is a group of friends of mine is working on building a canoe right now. Every couple of weekends we get together we hang out in the shop we drink beer to talk about our lives and build a canoe. It is that social thing to be you have to have some time with other people. I am an extraverted person, but I also like times to recharge. I think that helps me out to as it helps to have a mutual project or mutual interest or something we are working towards together.

As participant two stated,

That friendship, fast forward a few years you know both of us go through some hard breakups in college, and it was not one of them cry on your shoulders things you know all the time, but it was where you could tell the other one was down, so

you take them out to lunch. You know you do things like that, and that is how that developed, I think. That would be a moment that I would talk about how they are connected is that thing where you have your social connection outside of that friendship, but then you also have that friendship develop into something where it is like for the big moments in your life, guess who is going to be there.

Such participants are just clear in how they articulate their strategy but not necessarily different from the others whose strategies may work in similar ways but are not articulated in a way that shows more openness and knowledge of personalities. Overall, focus on personality and behavior guides determination made for friendships that may extend social circles. Behaviors that depict creativity are highly desired for all the participants as criteria for inclusion when selecting and maintaining friends. As participant two stated,

I feel that way as not to toot my own horn I have a lot of different friends with different people, but a lot of my male best friends are always one of those things, over time it has become a consistent thing like picking up a hobby. All of a sudden you are into fly fishing, or backpacking, whether you do it a few times or you start into it, it becomes a part of your life which is similar to friendships to you meet someone and hang out and you consistently over time and it becomes almost familial to some extent, your comfort level becomes strong with that person.

All participants view such behavior as to be guaranteeing growth and to be universally desirable. It also spans all endeavors, and they want people that can help them

to access unique solutions to their various challenges and to make their experiences fun too. A lot of the experiences that they want to get in extending social relationships are also falling more on the creative side of their lives. As participant three stated, “A sense of comradery someone to spend your time with as no one wants to be lonely. He introduces me to a lot of people, and he knows a lot of interesting people.” They may use these experiences in creating greater experiences for their families, diversifying their careers, reaching out to people that have abilities that they need to complement their own, etcetera.

**Faith can determine whether personal views are tolerated or avoided.** The participants show that their friends are expected to respect their beliefs in order to coexist well and sustain a friendship. This includes beliefs that they hold about religion and related philosophical views. As participant one stated,

Building new friendships, I think it is great for you to know I think I tend to find those who have similar religious views. I do not feel that I am friends with someone who is not on the same level as me.

Faith is also seen as to be a potential determinant of whether to terminate or sustain a friendship. The participants, however, also express substantial flexibility about the extent to which their beliefs should be recognized, and many of them also accept friends who choose to not focus on their beliefs. They, however, do not easily befriend someone who has extreme views on the opposite of what they believe in.

**Fairness should be attained, and greed averted.** Showing fairness in the sharing of resources (including time and social connections) is also identified as a

criterion over which friends may be selected. People that are not fair are seen to be capable of greed and may thus not make good friends. As participant eight stated,

A friendship that is not time-dependent but a friendship that is built like a brick house and it is there and if you come back to in five days, five years, or five decades it is still going to be there.

This is expected to play out in dire situations where scarcity in resources or unbalanced distribution of resources needs to be addressed. This may be as simple as situations where someone gets a favor done for them but does not intend to reciprocate even when they have the time and other resources to do so.

The idea of justice also keeps surfacing in views of fairness and in how interactions that lead to friendship are expected to happen. The participants use it to understand how peers develop attitudes related to the control of opportunities and whether they can accept them as friends based on these attitudes as participant eight explained:

The bond that you have and what you know about each other and some ways the vulnerability that you share from time to time experiences. Times where you could potentially be vulnerable, and they have helped you out and vice versa. Once you pass a certain point of that you essentially become bonded because you know they are not going to share that experience with other and you are like hey man this guy helped me at a time when I was at my weakest and no matter what I am going to be there for him and vice versa.

Notably, differences in capacity for such control are acknowledged to be existent, but friends are selected based on how they may use it against or for others that they relate with. However, the participants also express a variation of this view based on their perceived needs and how they would like their friends to help fulfill some of these needs. As participant two stated,

Um, I think that immediately jump into your mind are the sort of epic adventures, getting yourselves into some stupid situation and having to get out of it, or getting them out of some stupid situation, or vice versa but also some mundane things too. Like hey I was moving that one time, and you were the first person showed up, or we were at that wedding together, and we drove there together. Even those minor things that I would do with my best friend but would be awkward with an acquaintance.

As a result, their view of a just and fair friend is contextualized to their situation and how ready they are to apply the same to a larger circle of relationships, or how they apply more universal beliefs to conceptualize this idea.

### **Summary**

The findings of this study on how friendships among men are constructed and maintained with regard to qualities that the men are focused on provide critical insight into the dynamics of these friendships and substantially speculates on the nature of some potential outcomes relatable to these social relationships. They establish the qualities required for male friendships to develop and the alignment that there is with Jean Baker Miller's criteria; revealing that these qualities cover all the five major areas of the criteria

and that there are broader insights available with regard to details of the friendship relational processes.

Friendships are understood as elements of growing social relationships because when they are established or sustained, the people that are relating are signifying their increasing tendency to accommodate each other, appreciate, and value their engagement in their contexts. The qualities that they focus on are mainly facilitating them to enrich their experiences and get some surety on how their engagement will progress or what they will yield. They make subjective judgments about the context of the activities that are applied to get satisfactory engagements, but their general assessments detail perceptions about the qualities that span from the precedence of a relationship, its progression, and its established potential for growth.

The process of a social relationship that leads to friendship, therefore, proceeds along lived experiences that are shared in both brief encounters and long-term engagements. However, the friendships that are considered successful and most desirable are the long-term and life-long ones and the qualities contributing to their establishment and sustenance revolve around such elements: trust, courage, value for each other's time, being informative, being fun, having tolerance for the other's values (seen especially for beliefs, justice, and fairness) or being lucky to have coherent values for the same, desirable or good behavior, and being understanding.

Miller's five-item criteria are represented in a more comprehensive articulation of how they reflect the criteria for friendship that can grow, as well as the dynamics leading to such friendship and maintaining it. Miller established vitality as one of the items that

mainly looked at how the people in a social relationship reignite each other, and this category has considerable diversity to how it materializes in the expectations expressed in this study. First, there is the emotional aspect of vitality, which is mainly attained by people that are attending to stressors in the environment by sharing resources that contribute to such attendance. The men's expectations for this are flexible as they allow themselves to look at the emotional burden of friendship in the context of how available the other person can be, and this determines how much they take up for themselves. The physical element of vitality is substantial as they recognize that friends will have to understand and help when their physical resources and strength deteriorate. It is, therefore contextualized to the environment and purpose of friendship. A friendship that grows can span various environments. A person that strengthens the other rather than weakening them is therefore likely to become a good friend successfully.

The empowerment that men require from friendships is supplied through a variety of qualities, ranging from the capacity to be fun and engaging, supporting behaviors that make the other person better, to sharing of resources in ways that make the other person gain more capacity for functioning more effectively and achieving their goals in life. Friends generally help to layout the supportive social structures that make other opportunities to become more accessible and prevent loss of capacity for dealing with important issues in life. A lot of the residents in the region, providing the sample for this study live in the vastness of lands that are sparsely populated, and where farm-related activities and private businesses are the norms. The lifestyle also makes family units and close friendships to be the main source of social connections. Friendships extend ties

beyond the home because they can emerge out of social activities in such areas as bars, in sports grounds, at public events, in school and other institutions, as well as in individual-specific moments of socialization. The friendships, therefore, thrive in situations where people are out to share moments with others, and being ready to share makes it easier to make friends.

Men are also keen to make their relationships unambiguous, and they achieve this by setting determinants of what justifiable engagements are about and also promoting understanding in social relationships with other men. They expect their friends to be fair in how they handle important structural supports of engagement and productive exchange – from time-sharing to the way they use each other's energy and material resources. However, the standards of fair or justifiable conduct can vary widely depending on the nature of the shared space and purpose of the friendship. Most importantly, friendships that are directly supported by the distribution of a specific resource among the friends require fairness in how each one of the draws from such a resource. Men, however, make accommodations for their peers to stretch their relative dependency to the extent that it can be established, and sometimes trust is allowed to prevail without strictly monitoring for fairness. This is especially true in stronger and more established friendships, but it also varies along the dimension of personality and past experiences. Values mediate a lot of the qualities that they establish, and in qualities that yield empowerment; direct and indirect value assessments are indicated. Direct assessments may apply to such issues as those related to determinants of long-term behavior; including beliefs and personality. These elements and others (deliberations made towards external ideals popular in society)

may, in turn, serve to build indirect assessments that may be exhibited in overall trust and general expectations set for making new friends and providing chances for friendships to continue.

The efforts that men make to assess the viability of friendships are, in a way, also meant to safeguard or enhance the friend's sense of worth. Ongoing friendships contribute direct information to such assessments and can be vetoed quickly by reflections that they make on past experiences. They look at how the person that they have befriended has either improved or sustained contributions needed to create fruitful engagements, how they feel about the person relative to own individual capacities, and how an individual's values guide them to make decisions about the friendships. Those that feel like they have fewer contributions in the experiences shared a focus on appreciating the other person in conformity to the values that give them a sense of being. They also go further to acknowledge the ability to objectively contemplate over the contributions made to a social relationship as to be a determinant of your relative sense of worth in the context of the relationship. As such, explicit communication is not always required to establish a perceived state of understanding of the relative worth of one's dispensation to a social relationship. This can however also create impediments in relating to some people under dictates of large cultural distances, but they are also assumptions made for the need for men to be easy-going on each other in casual encounters which can serve to filter out people that may complicate social relationships. Moreover, the general assertive nature of men, especially those of the type that are native

to Wyoming, sets some explicit prompts that can shape interactions and make the qualities come out for their assessment.

The desire to be in social relationships that grow and extend one's connections to the wider social environment is emphasized in ways that put personal behaviors and social dispositions into the spotlight when trying to understand how men build and sustain friendships. All of the men acknowledge the importance of accessing broader connections through friendships but also indicate that personalities and personal preferences can impede such opportunities or shift the burden for attaining them to one party. They, therefore, offer a critical outlook to such extensions and highlight the importance of internal dynamics of friendships as determinants of whether the relations materialize. There are two dimensions to the extensions that are yielded in social relationships among men; one is internal relatedness across different domains of an individual's life, and the other is relating to other people through a friend, especially strangers. The former is easily achieved in most close friendships for the men because they become very open about family relationships and also find the relationships to be useful for achieving multiple goals rather than being exclusively specialized. This progresses smoothly as relations that are introduced are determined in the capabilities depicted by the other person.

There is also the competitive aspect that indirectly leads to friends testing how far a peer can handle certain issues, information, and challenges, and it can be canvassed in perceptions for intellect or other skills. The other dimension is for extending relations by creating more friends to expand the friendship circle and engagements that bring in wider

social patterns availed by society for people to connect to other important life structures and opportunities. It is impacted much more by personalities, experiences gained in such relations, and general behavioral traits that impact on how connections are yielded. There are established personality traits such as introversion and extroversion, that some of them look at to determine the relative social burden that may be left for a friend with regard to these extensions. Much focus is, however, on direct experiences available in the environments where they engage with friends, and more subjective assessments are based on such experiences. Men are, however, mostly accommodative to people that facilitate the core purposes of interpersonal relations and extensions are secondary to this.

The environments in which social relations occur also have important inputs to how friendships emerge and thrive. There is a generally established view of many opportunities for having fun and helping one another as to be dependent on the social and structural landscape of the prevailing society. As such, there are connotations for social categories of people that can be friends and those that cannot be befriended as well as structural issues that may have to be handled in developing social relationships. The effort that is made in the internal dynamics of friendships, therefore, goes to negotiate some of the established rifts that may easily occur between groups and people that need connections transcending across the groups. For instance, established cultural norms in how men relate can impede relations to newcomers in a certain population, but they can also be applied ingeniously to foster such relations. Men, therefore, acknowledge the importance of “being out there” to experience connections with people and be able to establish better criteria for socialization.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to obtain an understanding of the lived experience that helps identify the characteristics that males between the ages of 30 and 35 look for or admire when building close male friendships. I focused on close male friendship by asking participants to describe their closest male friend. The friendships could have begun during childhood or recently, and there were no limitations on the duration of the friendship or where the friend lives. The research questions were crafted to understand the participants' perspectives on what qualities are important to them in male friendship.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings of this study provided insights that can be applied to enhance social relationships either at the individual level or group level. Findings indicated that positive male friendships result from patterns that can be universally accepted as to be integral to beneficial social alliances, and facilitating these patterns can help to reinforce such alliances. Patterns can also prevent social alienation and many social problems that result from people lacking social support. Other than perceiving male-male friendships as a threat to the broader social atmosphere of communities, it is clear that the underlying principles that help to establish and sustain these friendships are based on desirable connections, and they can be harnessed in ways that focus on the friendships, which can also be applied in many endeavors. For instance, the emphasis that the participants placed on issues as justice, trust, understanding, and the need to help each other indicates that they can be engaged in relationships when a context is created and enriched by these

elements. Participants also indicated that the way they apply them is not always contrived to their immediate interests, but they later feel free to dispense the relationships to narrower interests as determined by the participant's needs and views.

The environment in which men relate to each other also determines how they build and maintain friendships. Participants in the current study live in an area that is sparsely populated, which results in social activity being organized around shared interests and proximity. Cultural factors were relevant for some participants, which included preferences shaped by the lifestyles and social capital provided to them by their surroundings. Participants also reported that they move beyond structural barriers of social relations when they make friends in diverse environments. By acknowledging the importance of friendships that last, participants also favored more important relational dynamics that go beyond narrow value-based interests. Some of the values that are universal to engagements that lead to friendship were reflected in what the broader society aspires for, including equality and freedom. This makes it essential that a friend's pursuit be recognized and facilitated in ways that make the friend feel like friendship can be extended to achieve goals that are aligned to these aspirations. The environmental factors of social relationships should be given more priority in interventions that aim to improve the social well-being of people through friendships.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The current study was limited in scope. I explored men's criteria for creating and sustaining friendship but did not examine each participant's friend's assessment of how this impacts the friendship. Findings resulted from the participants' accounts of their

experiences and draw insight into the demands that they make based on the collective input of the sample. The data allow for comparisons to verify the outcomes, but a larger study is needed to address this limitation. A multistage study that addresses the progression of friendship would be appropriate to compare preferences across different stages and draw inferences from data on friendships based on their success rates.

### **Recommendations**

Future research may address the limitations in this study by focusing on social and environmental factors of friendship in sparsely populated regions, as well as the role of value-based decisions, personality traits, and beliefs in successful friendships. Such research may address the under researched dynamics of personal social dispositions in the context of environmental, social constraints to understand how structural elements of society may determine success rates for friendships among certain groups of people.

The challenges that adult men encounter in trying to make friends are also highlighted in the accounts provided on how friendships may fail to materialize or grow. One main recommendation derived from this study is that there are many potential sources of interpersonal conflict, and they can be reduced by societies that make an effort to expose some of the causes of such conflict and make them unambiguous. Value-based sources of conflict are some of the most ambiguous because people who are likely to make a negative assessment based on values are not always informed on the implications of their assessments, and this hinders the development of social relations. Conflicting values are applied at a personal level even though values are not created at the individual level but rather dispensed by society to this level. Conflicting values are not a

phenomenon of personal construction because the people who encounter such conflict profess to be focused on the overall good in outcomes of friendship and positive relationships. People may use conflicting values to exclude people from their social relationships because they do not find ways to resolve such conflicts at an individual level. Society has a substantial obligation in resolving conflicting values to make it easier for people to be friends with each other. Findings also highlighted a major divide between individual capacity for empowerment and interests that may play out at group levels, where facilitation of the individual is not always guaranteed. This also makes it necessary for individuals to take up bolder roles in asserting their interests for extending friendships in order to make up for dormancy at the level of societies and entire communities.

### **Implications**

The implications from the study showcase the qualities that contribute to positive social relations among men, which may impact their well-being. Relationships that bring more vitality by creating a refreshing environment of energy, creativity, healing, enlightenment, and rekindling people's spirits are more attractive and sustainable. These qualities also lead to the most positive outcomes and make individuals feel like they should reciprocate and strengthen them.

The abilities that contribute vitality to friendship are cultivated in an individual's personal will and commitment to be better for themselves and others. For instance, people who choose to be creative in some instances where they are relating to their friends reduce boredom and also establish a desirable personality. As a result, they also

influence others to want to contribute to relationships in the same manner. The lack of this kind of commitment is often seen to be more established in people who have social disorders where interest in creative engagements is suppressed. Such suppression is relative to the social environment and general social atmosphere of the individual's surroundings, and people may use this atmosphere to make permanent judgments on opportunities that are available for them. Social vitality can be facilitated at the community level by creating an atmosphere of creative engagement, a willingness to energize each other, and a generally supportive social environment.

### **Conclusion**

Friendships between men are dependent on qualities that men determine in their direct experiences with others as well as their subjective views on values, justice, beliefs, and faith. Male friendships are aligned with the five core items of vitality, clarity, empowerment, sense of worth, and ability to extend relations. The qualities that may promote male friendships are related to personality and behavior, while subjective views and values also influence their perceived sense of worth. Men rely on acts of justice and fairness as well as established understanding to have clarity in friendship, and how they share resources also yields empowerment and vitality. It is recommended that the environmental determinants of social relationships be given more priority in interventions that aim to improve the social well-being of people through friendships. It is also recommended that positive male friendships be also viewed as developing over patterns that can be universally accepted as to be integral to beneficial social alliances, and facilitating these patterns can help to reinforce such alliances. Additionally, society has a

substantial obligation to provide structures that can help people resolve conflicting values to make it easier for them to be friends with each other.

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## Appendix A: Letter to Proposed Research Study

Date:

Name of Participant:

Address:

Dear (Participant Name),

My name is Troy Akins and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on the types of qualities that are important in males between the ages of 30 to 35 years when developing male friendships. It is implied that this motive has been overlooked involving human interaction and emotion. What is not known, however, are the qualities that males look for when building a friendship. This research will provide insight into what qualities men admire in their best friend.

Your assistance in conducting this much needed research is important. If willing, I would like for you to identify other males within the ages of 30 to 35. Identification of males within the ages of 30 to 35 within the local area would provide an opportunity to identify and contact males for the proposed study. Once identified, I would like to meet with participants to discuss the nature of this study. The participants of this study need to have a best male friend be male between the ages of 30 and 35. The participants are free to choose whether or not to participate and can discontinue participation at any time.

I realize that your time is important to you and I appreciate your consideration to participate in this study. In order to fully understand your experience we need to meet on only one occasion for approximately one hour. Meetings will be held at a professional mental health office. The meetings are designed to simply get to know you and learn about you and your best friend and what qualities you admire in your best male friend. All information gathered during our meeting will be kept strictly confidential.

I would welcome a telephone call from you to discuss any questions you may have concerning this study and your role in identifying research participants. I can be reached at (307) 682-2034 or emailed at [troy.akins@mail.waldenu.edu](mailto:troy.akins@mail.waldenu.edu).

Sincerely,

Troy Akins  
Doctoral Candidate  
Walden University

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of  
Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of  
Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

## Interview Questions:

- IQ1- What is your opinion on the qualities that are important in building a male friendship?
  - o IQ1A – Why exactly do you feel that way?
- IQ2- What life experiences have you had with your best male friend that you perceive as important?
  - o IQ2A- When and where did that happen?
  - o IQ2B- Who else was involved?
- IQ3- How would describe a best male friend?
  - o IQ3A- Why exactly do you feel that way?
- IQ4- Could you tell me what positive/negative impacts your friendships has had on your life?
  - o IQ4A- Could you tell me more about that?
- IQ5- What are your feelings about the characteristics that could help men build a friendship?
  - o IQ5A- Why exactly do you feel that way?

- IQ6- Could you describe to me the role social connection play in a male friendship?
  - o IQ6A- Why exactly do you feel that way?

## Appendix C: Peer Review

To whom it may concern:

After conducting a review of Troy Akins participant's transcripts, I have found that these data appear to be trustworthy and representative. A cursory review of the information shows some level of diversity, including participants from varying occupations near the same age range.

The data collection and data analysis process appear to be rigorously based on the reported information in comparison to the transcripts provided by the researcher. Quotes provided by participants within the study appear to provide an indication of the identified themes: life experience, similar interest, camaraderie, communication, values, trust, time, fun, and overall personality. Within the transcripts, extensive quotes of the received transcripts provide a level of depth necessary to support the findings.

The content is organized well and appears to align with the research questions presented within the transcripts provided. The findings as they are described are interesting and seem to provide further insight into the experiences of positive male friendships.

Well done, Mr. Akins.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Spiker', written in a cursive style.

Shane T. Spiker, PhD, BCBA