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Towards a generational transformation of the role and meaning of friendship

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ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT *The thesis sets out to explore the role and meaning of friendships across two age groups. This is attained by a generational interview design where the groups are separated by nearly 20 years. The thesis is motivated by an alleged seismic shift towards the importance of friendships as the nuclear family imagery is on a purported decline in 'contemporary society' as suggested by the academic literature presented in this thesis. The research is based on 14 in-depth interviews divided into two age groups. The respondents live in and around Copenhagen. The research employed the free association narrative interview method to examine practices and ideals of the friendship imagery. The thesis generates epistemological conceptualizations of the roles and meanings of friendships by employing a bottom-up approach in which the respondents explore their own meaning-frame. This is done in addition to a top-down approach where the thesis operationalizes the concepts of intimacy and care in relation to friendships. The results showed an increased appraisal of friends as essential to people's lives similar to that of partners and family. This was conceptualized as 'life witnesses'. The younger age group was highly emotionally dependent on their friends, whereas the elder sample group showed greater diversity with both traditional heteronormative leanings, as well as more progressive social leanings. The thesis points towards the importance of considering friends as essential sources of intimacy and care.*

Keywords: friendships, individualization, biographical narrative, identity, life witnesses, intimacy, and care

Popular Science Summary

"It is as if something is happening in the landscape of love, a landslide or a seismic shift," wrote the Danish science journalist, Lone Frank, in a feature in *Weekendavisen* (Danish newspaper). The seismic shift she refers to concerns how we are gradually starting to move away from good old (heterosexual) romantic love, as we know it from popular culture represented by Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Titanic, to love between friends and love between family members. This also resonates within the world of science, where academic literature on friendships is a growing field of knowledge within sociology. Scholars believe that the framework around the traditional romantic relationship with the nuclear family as the ideal is no longer enough to understand the many ways in which the modern human arranges their social lives. In a world of constant change, it is important to anchor oneself. As divorce rates rise and people tend to settle geographically further away from their families, it naturally brings the mind to friendships as essential anchors. This, I have investigated in my thesis. I have committed an interview design based on two age groups in order to represent a generational divide. I carried out 14 in-depth interviews with people from Copenhagen. The idea was to investigate whether it is possible to see a difference in the paradigms of friendship across the two generations. This prompted the research question: "is there a generational transformation of the role and meaning of friendship?". The research question allowed an examination of both the actual practices of friendships, as well as the underlying ideas pertaining to the very structure of friendships accessible to people. The results showed a clear trend among my sample groups: the younger generation was emotionally invested in their friendships, and used them to "document" their development in life emotionally and practically. This phenomenon of anchoring oneself or documenting one's trajectory through their social interactions was conceptualized as "life witnesses". For the purpose of emotional reliance, the older generation made greater use of their romantic partners. The younger generation associated friendship with intimacy and care, which to them meant being able to be emotionally vulnerable around their friends, checking in with one another, and to disclose intimate matters. Practices of emotional intimacy and care amongst friends were also present in the older generation, but to a lesser extent. The overall trend showed changes in social processes regarding friendships towards increased appraisal of friends similar to that of partners and family. While the results cannot be generalized across the Danish population, the discrepancies between the two groups showed some significance, and it suggests a tendency of a transformation of the meaning and role played by friends.

Table of contents

1.0. Introduction	1
2.0. Literary Review	4
3.0. Methodology and Conceptualization	8
3.1. <i>Conceptualization of the imagery of friendships (top-down)</i>	8
3.2. <i>Theorizing the interview design (bottom-up)</i>	10
3.3. <i>Transparency of language</i>	13
3.4. <i>Sampling</i>	15
3.4.1. <i>Confidentiality and ethical considerations</i>	16
3.4.2. <i>Age</i>	16
3.4.3. <i>Locality and social demographic signifiers</i>	17
3.4.4. <i>Sample challenges</i>	17
3.5. <i>Sub-conclusion on methodology and conceptualization</i>	20
4.0. Analysis	21
4.1. Life witnesses (conceptualization)	23
4.1.1. <i>Networks and flows of intimacy and care</i>	24
4.1.2. <i>Life witnesses</i>	26
4.1.3. <i>Diversity in group 2</i>	31
4.1.4. <i>Sub-conclusion to life witnesses</i>	33
4.2. Importance of shared history (biographical narrative)	35
4.2.1. <i>Discontinuity of biographical narrative (& the importance of sharing)</i>	38
4.2.2. <i>Existential importance of life witnesses</i>	41
4.2.3. <i>Sub-conclusion on the importance of shared life</i>	43
4.3. Intimacy and care (emotional intelligence)	44
4.3.1. <i>Access to emotional language pt. 1: care</i>	45
4.3.2. <i>Access to emotional language pt. 2: intimacy</i>	48
4.3.3. <i>Sub-conclusion to emotional intelligence</i>	49
5.0. Conclusion and discussion	51
6.0. Literature	54
7.0. Appendix	56

1.0. Introduction

This thesis sets out to explore the role and meaning of friendship across two generational groups. The two groups are divided by nearly 20 years in an effort to represent a generational divide. The transformation of friendships has been explored in popular culture for a long time. They may have different approaches, such as Disney princesses favoring sisterhood over princes (Helle, 2020), or the exploration of erotic energy between friends (Hoxer, 2020) to the experience of profound loneliness in the wake of losing a partner (Frank, 2020). What they had in common was the salience of friendships as essential to the modern individual. They all implied a seismic shift in the ‘landscape of love’¹ previously associated with romantic love, or the nuclear family (Frank, 2020). Disney’s heroines are no longer saved by a romantic kiss from a prince, but instead the ultimate love is platonic as seen in Disney movie *Frozen* (Helle, 2020), or Inger Christine Løwe, who has written a novel that questions whether a friendship can be as complicated and intimate as a love affair (Løwe, 2020). It voices a new trend in which young generations are increasingly beginning to regard their friendships as real and legitimate 'love affairs' (Frank, 2020). To them, it is the romantic connections that come and go, and their friendships that are lasting. The focus has shifted from quintessential heterosexual romantic love, to love between friends. In Denmark numbers of singles have been on a rise for the past 20 years, and so has the divorce rates (cf. appendix, fig. 1-5). As people become increasingly independent from romantic partnerships, other social structures, such as friendships, may take its place². The tendency in popular culture is supported by current literature in the academic field of friendship. Roseneil and Budgeon (2004) argues for a decentering of the ‘family’ and the heterosexual relationship in the academic imaginaries if we are to understand the actual network flows of intimacy and care in the 21st century (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004: 136). Processes of individualization in an increasingly changing world renders the individual insecure in terms of making sense of one’s trajectory. Increased divorce rates and families living farther and farther apart also prompts the cruciality of friendships (Völker, 2019: 122), as the individual is increasingly at risk of losing a traditional foundation of continuous emotional support network. Völker argues that friendships reflect the wider institutional and societal setting in which they are embedded (ibid.: 122). This shift in the friendship imagery as reflecting a societal change inspired me to explore the alleged transformation of the roles and meanings pertaining to

¹ Landscape of love also refers to the antique game “*Map of Tendre*”. The map represents the road to romantic love.

² The statistics in the appendix merely suggest a tendency, the numbers are too superficial to suppose a correlation.

friendships. In order to study the alleged change in social processes it led to the research question: *Is there a generational transformation of the role and meaning of friendship?*

In answering the research question the thesis made use of a generational interview design based on 14 in-depth narrative interviews lasting between 1 and 3 hours, with 7 respondents in each group consisting of 4 women and 3 men. The two groups represent two generations with nearly two decades between the sample groups. Group 1 is aged 32-36, and group 2 is between 54-71.

By generating epistemological conceptualizations of the role and meaning of friendships during the interview and by employing a bottom-up approach, the interviewees were able to explore their own meaning-frame. This was done in addition to the top-down approach in which the concepts of intimacy and care were operationalized in relation to friendships in contribution to the conceptual discussion in current sociological friendships literature. From the data I generated, three themes emerged: (1) life witnesses; (2) the importance of shared history, and; (3) intimacy and care.

The first theme conceptualizes the term 'life witnesses' and reveals the importance of sharing both inner and outer world, which means that the respondents in group 1 were highly emotionally dependent on their friends. Life witnesses was defined as *the sincere witnessing and disclosure of inner and outer life events over a significant duration of adult lifespan*. It was important to group 1 to separate friendships from romantic interests, as their partners could not replace the functions of their friends. The term life witnesses were not to the exclusion of romantic partners, but in addition. This was recognized by some respondents in group 2, however, group 2 generally appeared to solely rely emotionally on their heterosexual romantic partners rather than their friends.

The second theme in the analysis explored the importance of shared history in the formation and continuation of identity. Shared life was identified as both reconfiguring, reinforcing, and confirming the respondents' sense of self in the interaction and social context the respondents were immersed in. Respondents in group 1 used their friends to enable the continuation of their biographical narrative and self-identity, as their friends have witnessed their adult life. Some respondents from group 2 identified the importance of friends in facilitating a continuous biographical narrative, but overall, the trend was family oriented, meaning that sharing intimate and vulnerable aspects of their narrative were mainly confined to their romantic partner, or their family.

The last theme explored the two concepts of *intimacy* and *care* in an attempt to map the meaning-imagery of friendships. The theme showed that group 1 homogeneously associated the

concepts with emotional connotations, where group 2 understood intimacy and care as physical or practical, respectively, in association with their friends. This is analyzed using emotional intelligence as a theoretical framework. Group 1 generally had 'high' scores in emotional intelligence compared to group 2, which implied that group 1 are more used to sharing and talking about their emotions.

The analysis revealed an increased appraisal of friends as essential to people's lives similar to that of partners and family. Group 1 was highly emotionally dependent on their friends. Group 2 showed greater diversity, from relying solely on their romantic partners, to emotionally relying on their friends similar to group 1. The thesis points towards the importance of increasingly considering friends as essential sources of intimacy and care. It also found that none of the respondents seemed to consider social media as a replacement for physical togetherness, though it was used in addition. Group 1 appeared homogeneous in their ideas and approaches to both the meaning and role of friendships, as opposed to group 2, who showed highly diverse approaches to friendship. Whether the discrepancies between the groups are a symptom of different stages of life, or a transformation of the meaning of friendships, can be difficult to conclude, and will be discussed further in the conclusion/discussion (Ch. 5). However, there were several respondents in group 2 who related to friendships in the same way as group 1, which demonstrates that the differences between the groups are not confined to life stages. Instead, it suggests a cultural norm, which alludes to processes of social change regarding the friendship imagery.

The thesis is divided into five chapters. First, the introduction introduces the thesis outline. Second, the thesis presents a review of existing research articles that are relevant to this thesis. With this, the scope of the thesis is placed in relation to the field of existing knowledge on friendship. Third, the method chapter clarifies the conceptualization processes of the meaning-frame of friendships in preparation for the analysis. Fourth, the analysis chapter covers the three themes, and is based on well over 200 pages of transcriptions. The analysis explores the themes in a cross-sectional analysis, in which trends and tendencies are supported by continuously applying examples from across the two sample groups. The analysis chapter is the largest section due to the substantial amount of empirical data. Fifth, and lastly, the conclusion and discussion consider whether the generational differences are due to various stages in the respondents' lives, or if there appears to be structural changes across the two groups.

2.0. Literary Review

Friendship is a virtue... to say so much implies that friendship is a noble thing – i.e., that it is worthy to be pursued as an end in itself. Further, friendship is among the most indispensable requirements of life: it is, in fact, valuable not only as an end, but as a necessary means to life... It is an observed fact that men find friendship indispensable in good fortune, in bad fortune, and at all periods of their life. (*The Nicomachean Ethics VIII*, Aristotle, 350 B.C.E)

The following is a review of existing research relevant to this thesis. Based on the research question, I have found it relevant to review how the structure of friendship has been conceived, and how the imagery of the network flows of intimacy and care relating to friendships has evolved over time. In addition, I have also examined how modern social bonds are considered fluid and traversing social institutions, while reflecting societal change. Following, the review assesses theories on the formation of identity in social interaction, and lastly, the review will introduce *emotional intelligence* (EI). These topics provide the framework for the following review.

Aristotle believed in three friendship ethics: the perfect friendship based on endurance and mutual reverence, and the two imperfect types of friendships based on utility and pleasure. While the historical context of which Aristotle's quote is situated will not be accounted for, Aristotle's friendship ethics are presented for the benefit of giving background information on the structures of friendships. The perfect friendship is based on *endurance* – a true friend will treasure and love a friend for their essence or character, and seeing that essence or character is enduring, a friendship is enduring (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E, translated by Ross, 1999: 130). Imperfect friendships are characterized by fleeting matters such as shared circumstance or access (ibid.: 129). Aristotle did not consider the imperfect friendships poor, in fact, they are a necessary means to gain true friendship, as one cannot love someone's character until they know it (ibid.: 134). This means that true friendships entail both utility and pleasure and are a derivative of long-term commitment to a relationship.

Beate Völker (2019) chimes in on the importance of endurance and observes that friends usually tend to know each other longer than e.g., partners. While friendships may reflect the institutional framework within which they are positioned, there is no particular social institution designed around the friendship relationship due to its volitional nature (Völker, 2019: 122). Unlike family and marriage, there are no laws or legality declaring people friends or not friends. This means that opposed to romantic relationships or family, there is no predefined content – it is purely voluntary

and selectively chosen (Mollenhorst, Völker and Flap, 2008; Völker, 2019: 122;). This was a recurrent theme during the interviews, where the respondents noted the voluntary nature of friendships. Another interesting aspect that separates friendships from romantic or familiar relationships is non-exclusiveness. People are free to engage in as many friendly relationships as they desire. It is in essence casual regarding proprietorship. The importance of the non-exclusive aspect of friendship is acknowledged but will not be pursued as it did not appear as a theme during the interviews. In addition, friendships are likely to be dynamic, and according to Gerald Mollenhorst, Beate Völker and Henk Flap (2014), the friendship circle tends to change every seven years or so, but this does not mean, that friendships are broken, rather it implies that some relationships are merely dormant or lesser active (Mollenhorst, Völker and Flap, 2014: 68). While this dynamic is not elaborated in the analysis, it is acknowledged that friendships can revive, and this “potential dynamic in friendship makes the relationship unique and very different from romantic relationships.” (Völker, 2019: 122). This fluid understanding of friendship is useful to identify the malleable texture friendships exhibit, in which there is no one form, instead, it is important to let the respondents define how they relate to their friendships. In addition, Völker argues that technology such as social media has never made it easier to connect – and stay connected with friends. As such, friendships reflect modern societal developments (ibid.: 122). My research showed little emphasis on the role of social media, and will therefore not be pursued.

As opposed to this thesis, much current literature on friendship focuses on cutting edge practices of friendships such as the most individualized people in society categorized by living outside of the “cohabiting conjugal couple relationships” in an effort to explore the unconventional, counter-heteronormative practices of personal life (Roseneil, 2007: 85). The thesis attempts to fill out the theoretical gap, by exploring similar structures in a heteronormative middle class population sample in Copenhagen. Roseneil and Budgeon suggest that the traditional nuclear family may be on a decline in certain areas of society which underlines the importance of understanding intimacy and care outside of the heteronormative structures. Roseneil quotes Jeff Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Catherine Donovan (2001: 85) “one of the most remarkable features of domestic change over recent years is... the emergence of common patterns in homosexual and heterosexual ways of life as a result of these long-term shifts in relationship patterns’ (Roseneil, 2004: 412). The thesis will complement the literature on domestic change in ‘queering’ the friendship imagery, following the epistemological-theoretical argument of incorporating queer theory when analyzing heterosexual

practices of intimacy and care. Following the ideas presented by Roseneil, this means that one “should seek to frame research questions from non-heteronormative standpoints, making a conscious effort to think outside and beyond heterosexual familial relations” (Roseneil, 2004: 410). By employing queer theory’s attention to the socially constructed nature of the homo-/heterosexual binary, it is possible to discern the “fluidity which exists between homosexual and heterosexual identities and practices”, thus work from knowledge on friendship practices amongst queer structures and apply these to heteronormative patterns (ibid: 411). Roseneil discovered a tendency of people relying on their friends to a similar degree as partners or family. Especially regarding “provision of care and support in everyday life, and friendship operated as a key value and site of ethical practice for many” (ibid: 413), which highlights a reliance on friends in addition to kin and partners. It is in this line of thought that the thesis will contribute to the current literature albeit without focusing on cutting edge individuals in society, however, it will consider the framework of queer structures presented by Sasha Roseneil.

The fluid nature of the role and meaning of non-related relationships, is explored by Petra Nordqvist who questions the traditional family paradigm in her study of choosing a sperm donor in lesbian parentage. She elaborates on the concept *kinning*, an idea initially proposed by Jenner Mason (2008), concerning the constructivist nature of everyday interactions and ‘role-play’ that actively creates relatedness (Nordqvist, 2014: 269). Nordqvist argues that *kinning* is the *practice* of family, not the physical blood bound traditional notion of family. While I do not focus on the parent/child dynamic, I employed the concept of *kinning* in the analysis as a framework. The framework is applied to understand how the respondents relate to their friends using family terminology to describe how they are connected through their practices, which underlines a playful approach to traditional social structures.

The second theme of the analysis pertains to the importance of shared history in the formation of identity in order to explore the depths of the role of friendship. Anthony Giddens proposes a framework of a biographical narrative in which identity is sustained and reflectively understood. He argues that an individual’s identity cannot be found in behavior or in other people’s reflection – it must originate in the ability to sustain a narrative (Giddens, 1996: 70). The narrative is sustained in the interaction with other people, and must continuously and selectively incorporate external events in order to keep the ‘story’ going (ibid.: 70). This is done reflectively by considering the past, present and future simultaneously. I find Giddens’ interpretation of identity fruitful in

understanding the role of friendships in the formation of identity sustained in the social interaction. The thesis explored the existential importance of friendship in a precarious modernity defined by increased social risk (Giddens, 1991: 3; 109).

Finally, the thesis draws on emotional intelligence (EI), in which it explored how the *meaning* of friendships are understood across generations. EI is a skillset focused on perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions effectively (Salovey and Mayer, 2005: 281). Salovey and Mayer define emotional intelligence as a “set of skills or competencies rather than personality traits” (ibid.: 282), indicating that EI is a learned ability. The concept, or skill, is understood as an ability that grows and improves the more it is used or trained. For the sake of the analysis, it is used as an indicator revealing how often a person talks or shares their feeling-world and may suggest how often the respondents engage emotionally and intimately with their friends. The thesis uses feeling-world to describe how feelings are experienced or mapped to the individual.

It is upon this presented theoretical framework the thesis explored contemporary cultures of the role and meaning played by friends. From literature on friendships, Nordqvist, Roseneil and Budgeon levitates the point of challenging the social bonds connecting people – whether in a family, or as a source of intimacy and care, they believe the bond transcends traditional ideas of heteronormative notions on family or romantic relationships. In this line of thought, the thesis positions its theoretical point of departure. The constructivist imagery of social structures is useful to conceptualize the narratives my respondents disclose in the interviews. Several notions covered in the literature review will be revisited in the following chapter on method, as well as in the analysis.

3.0. Methodology and Conceptualization

The grounds for the research consist of 14 in-depth narrative interviews lasting between 1 and 3 hours. The two target groups comprise of people aged between 32-36 years of age (henceforth referred to as *group 1* or G1) and again between 53-71 (henceforth referred to as *group 2* or G2). The age groups were deliberately chosen to represent a generational divide, in which there are 39 years between the oldest and youngest respondent, and nearly 20 years between each group. The interviews were conducted face-to-face initially, and were later conducted using video conferences due to Covid-19 restrictions. This did not turn out to be a considerable issue. The interviews were conducted in Danish, and so was the analysis. I have translated the quotes used in the analysis to English afterwards. The interviews were recorded with the intention of transcribing the interviews, and the analysis is based on a total of 256 pages of transcriptions. Due to time constraint, I ended up with 14 interviews, 7 in each group. There are 4 women, and 3 men in each group in order to get a gender balanced perspective on the theme. The ideal would be equal numbers, but based on the result, the gendered difference turned out to be somewhat insignificant to my research. That is, there were greater differences across generations than between genders.

The first section in this chapter will introduce the conceptualizations of the imagery of friendships which was the foundation of the preliminary top-down work which enabled me to produce the themes and initial concepts explored in the semi-structured interview design. The second section of this chapter will run through the epistemological considerations in generating the data from a bottom-up logic in which the data was used to generate concepts relating to the role and meaning of friendships which are ultimately explored in the analysis. Lastly, the section will consider the biases associated with the sampling methodology, and how I have chosen to approach this matter.

3.1. *Conceptualization of the imagery of friendships (top-down)*

This section will present the research upon which my imagery of the friendship is based on. Much of the research I have encountered on friendships have presented data showing a transformation of intimacy and care. To many scholars such as Sasha Roseneil, Shelley Budgeon, and Beate Völker, this transformation is an inevitable result of an increasingly individualized society in which people are conscious- or subconsciously turning away from heteronormative practices where the nuclear family is at the centre of intimacy and care. Instead, people are seeking to spread out their reliance

on their social circles to include that of friends for intimacy and care instead of putting all their ‘emotional eggs’ in one basket, e.g., their romantic partner (Roseneil, 2004: 413). This shifts the structural way people organize their social lives. According to Beate Völker (2019), this is partly due to increased divorce rates and long geographic distances between families (Völker, 2019: 122). This development positions the individual increasingly at risk of losing a traditional foundation of continuous emotional support network. The thesis explores how friendships are increasingly important in the light of the processes of individualization and heightened precarity of social risk (Giddens, 1996: 10). To operationalize the alleged transformation of intimacy and care the thesis proposes a generational interview structure. This is done to investigate whether there has been a shift in the ideas structurally available to us over the past 20-50 years. According to Roseneil the hypothesis is somewhat clear; people are increasingly abandoning inherited structures of heteronormativity and are instead increasingly relying on their friends in a “changing and insecure world” (Roseneil, 2007: 93). This was widely disputed in the 1990 by scholars like Anthony Giddens (1990; 1991; 1992) and Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002). They all discuss processes of individualization, and a transformation of intimacy amid modernization. Their focus on the de-traditionalization of family and romantic relationships prompts increased self-reflexivity and opens for new possibilities in the heteronormative imagery. Giddens argued for the emergence of the pure relationship where there is equality both sexually and emotionally between men and women, and plastic sexuality, which is sexually devoid of the idea of reproduction (Giddens, 1992: 2-3). He is inspired by the homosexual community where partnership was continuously negotiated due to negated gender roles (Giddens, 1996: 15-16). This approach highlights a conscious shift towards an egalitarian partnership much more similar to friendships in their structural nature. This comparison blurs the conceptual lines between heteronormativity and queer theory’s attention to the constructive nature of binary ways of organizing social practices. This is helpful to understand the importance of the constructed ways in which the respondents in my research organized their social networks. Newer research agrees with the abandoning of heteronormative structures and argues that the transformation is partly due to a shattered imaginary of the nuclear family as being inconsistent with lived experiences (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004: 136). While these hypotheses both argue for a tangible transformation they appear to mainly focus on contemporary experiences. Hence, I wanted to explore the alleged relationship transformation by use of a generational interview design. Drawing inspiration from Roseneil and Budgeon I used

the concepts of intimacy and care as primary concepts in understanding how the respondents understood those concepts in relation to their friendships. The concepts of intimacy and care are employed in section 3 of the analysis in which the *meaning* of friendship is explored. The other two themes in the analysis, life witnesses (section 1) and the importance of shared history (section 2) explores the *role* of friendships across generations, whereby the data is generated from a bottom-up approach. This will be explored below (section 3.2.).

Based on the imagery of friendship it was my expectation that the results from the interviews would prove fairly progressive tending towards a decline in the heteronormative nuclear family imaginary, and an increased appraisal of friends as essential to people's lives similar to that of partners and family. It turned out to be somewhat accurate with group 1 being highly emotionally dependent on their friends, while group 2 showing greater diversity with both traditional and progressive leanings.

3.2. *Theorizing the interview design (bottom-up)*

This section of this chapter will familiarize the reader with the epistemological considerations in the generation of the data from a bottom-up logic. The concepts and themes explored in the analysis emerged from the data derived from the interviews. The themes explore the *meanings* and *roles* of friendship in the respondents' lives.

The interview process was not symmetrical between the two groups. For group 1 I was inquiring on current friendships and those of the recent past. For the second group (G2) I was inquiring not only about these but also about friendships of the distant past. I took this approach because I wanted to explore how group 2 has experienced changing friendships over time to see if there were any similarities between group 1 and group 2 which may hint towards changes due to different stages in life, rather than a structural transformation in how we approach friendships. To tap into memories, values and ideas available to group 2 in retrospect, I started by asking questions relating to their upbringing, including questions such as "where were you born?", and "how did you experience your childhood?" and who were their best friends, and so on in order to set a context, and build-up a report on how their friendships have changed over the course of their lives. I separated the interviews into three categories: (1) upbringing, parents, siblings, childhood, and secondly; (2) friendships then, how they have changed, and how current friends are organized, and

lastly; (3) other relations, including partners and children (if any). This was done to provide context to the questions – a buildup to maintain a degree of coherency to their accounts of their past.

My questions maintain the structure of the question-and-answer approach in which I select the topic and theme, and the sequence of the questions in my words. According to Mishler, this way of organizing an interview can have the effect of suppressing a respondents' replies (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008: 302). In order to mitigate the aspect of leading on with my language during the interviews I tried to maintain a neutral language and adopted the respondents' own words by taking notes during the interview. Each time I came across a significant choice of words during the interview I would subsequently follow-up with inquiries on the meaning and values of the words chosen. A significant choice of words could include “safety”, “normal”, “complicated”, or “warmth” etc.³. This not only allowed me to gain interesting insights to the underpinning values relating to given situations, but it also opened new aspects to friendship that appeared not to be available to the respondents before. Following the approach proposed by Hollway and Jefferson, *free association narrative interview*, I wanted to tap into a storytelling approach instead of merely asking questions (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008: 308). The objective was to enable the respondents to attach their own meaning to their stories, and to reach their point, instead of trying to satisfy my questions, or their idea of my presumed goal. It was entirely crucial to avoid the interviewer effect in which the respondents will respond with answers they believe I am looking for. Consequently, I continuously modified my questions and ended up using a bottom-up approach with open-ended questions in a strict semi-structured design. An example of open-ended questions included “who are the most important people in your life?” which allowed the interviewee to create their own meaning frame, instead of asking “how important are your friends?” which I asked the first couple of times during the interview setting. The first attempts at posing questions in a closed way solicited various inefficient responses, including clarifying questions, such as “in relation to what, me or my family?”, or was answered by very broad and abstract responses, such as “they [my friends] are my fundament”. This was an underwhelming success. With the modified and more open-ended questions it increased the prospects of the respondents tapping into a storytelling approach, in which their own assessment of the ranked importance of their social network was more evident. After clarifying which people were the most important in their lives, it allowed for the second

³ Translated from Danish: tryghed/safety; normal/normal; complicated/kompliceret; warmth/varme

question, how important are your friends, to arise more fluently and naturally. It also enabled the interviewees to set the tone of their own biographical understanding of their relations. This enabled me to generate data that reflected a bottom-up approach to the conceptualizations of the themes presented and explored in the analysis (for more, see section 3.5.).

Following the ideas proposed by the free association narrative interview, I have been conscious about my visibility as an interviewer and a person. I strived towards being a good listener and not to impose my own words or *meaning-frame*. The thesis employs meaning-frame to describe the values associated with a given concept. Hollway and Jefferson (2008) discuss the importance of *gestalt*, which relates to the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of parts:

The principle of gestalt is based on the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of parts. Max Wertheimer, the founder of gestalt psychology, objected to the way that, in his view, modern science proceeded from below to above. He believed that it was impossible to “achieve an understanding of structured totals by starting with the ingredient parts which enter into them. On the contrary we shall need to understand the structure; we shall need to have insight into it. There is then some possibility that the components themselves will be understood” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008: 306)

Acknowledging the importance of the participants own meaning-frame and storytelling narratives, I attempted to steer clear of offering my own insights, or paraphrasing too much, thus risking altering their overall stories. However, I did find it fruitful to offer words when the respondents seemed at a loss. This included:

Julie: Can you call it presence, or is it something else?

Magnus: Yes, you can call it presence, but there is something *more* in presence as well. There is something more *symbolic* in presence - that of trusting each other and being... Have confidence that you can just lower your parades a little and be together, without necessarily having to behave as you do towards strangers.

I attempted to offer or introduce new words consciously, and by deliberately asking if they could relate different concepts to their narrative, they were able to reflect on them. This was done to mitigate the harmful approach I sported to begin with, where I would paraphrase by e.g., summarizing how there appeared to be an importance attached to the concept *presence* between

friends, thus assuming or drumming down their natural meaning frame. By actively engaging the respondents with their own understanding of a concept, it prompted new ideas or aspects from the respondent. As such, I was attempting to generate new epistemological conceptualizations of the meanings and roles of friendships during the interviews by employing a bottom-up approach in which the interviewees were able to explore their own meaning-frame. This was done in addition to the top-down approach in which I tried to operationalize the concepts of intimacy and care in relation to friendships in order to contribute to the conceptual discussion in current sociological friendships literature. I thereby generated the data from which the themes, explored in the analysis, emerged.

3.3. *Transparency of language*

During interviews, the respondents are unlikely to approach my questions with full transparency. Since none of the interviewees are experts on their own experiences, along with how their experiences may not even be transparent to themselves there will be a significant margin error especially pertaining to group 2 as many of their recounts will have happened 30-years in the past. This I have considered by acknowledging the plurality and ambivalence of meanings and associations. As mentioned before, this has prompted follow-up questions focusing on meanings and associations of chosen words. In doing so, I have shifted focus away from the transparency of their experiences, and instead focused on the transparency of language (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008: 298). The interviews aimed at giving the respondents the opportunity to reflect and talk about who, and what, was important to them in their daily lives. It was crucial, to the extent possible, that they were able to express their own way of valuing their relationships. This prompted the importance of understanding different practices of relating to their significant relationships. Subsequently, I formulated aspirations for the outcomes in advance inspired by the methodological approach by Roseneil and Budgeon (2004: 142). In attending to the narratives of the individuals I wanted to:

- 1) Gain an understanding of how friendships are understood
- 2) Study how people prioritize their friendships compared to family and partners
- 3) Explore the practices of “intimacy” and “care”
- 4) Tap into *what* people needed from friends
- 5) Study how people organize their social lives

6) Understand the values that underpin these practices

My aim was to give the respondents the opportunity to define their own experiences with their varying relationships by open questions. It was a priority that the respondents maintained reflective regarding what was important to them in their own ways of valuing their relationships. The free association narrative interview aims to go beyond the “explicit discourses within which people speak about their lives” (Roseneil, 2007: 88), meaning that data can be derived from giving the participants the time and space to construct their own stories, within which meaning and values progressively grow. Following the notion of “transparency of language” proposed by Hollway and Jefferson (2008: 298), the strategy of employing elaborate follow-up questions such as “what does the word “safety⁴” mean to you?” to avoid assuming to have a shared meaning of value-heavy words, was very fruitful. This allowed the respondents to elaborate in sophisticated manners on what friendship meant to them. Even though a “defining feature of a narrative is coherence” (Hollway and Jefferson, 2008: 304), the actual lived life experiences are seldom truly coherent. I interpreted the stories as a means to understand the participants better, and a way to gain a better understanding of what kinds of ideas are structurally available to the respondent. This underlines a structural approach to “why do we think things”, instead of “what are experienced/happened”. This may show how the two generations structurally operate differently regarding how friendships are conceptualized in the organization of their social lives. Consequently, I was more interested in values and feelings underpinning the narratives.

According to Hollway and Jefferson, current theories of language and communication “stress that any kind of account can only be a mediation of reality” (2008: 299). This means that there cannot be one true account of an interview, as there will be infinite nuances that will vary to an extent to which it will only be a chosen or intuitive mirror of existence. This will inevitably lead to biases as I may see certain patterns that may not be available to others and vice versa. I have tried to maintain transparency in my approach to generating data. The next section will elaborate on the biases exposed in the sampling method, and well as the interaction with the respondents in which I affect the data as the interviewer.

⁴ Translated from the Danish “tryghed” meaning feeling safe.

3.4. *Sampling*

From the onset I had designed a sample consisting of two groups aged 30-40, and between 50-60. I aimed for equal numbers of men and women, and I sought people from the middle-class to be as representative as possible, seeing as 69% of the Danish population belong to the middle class (Juel, Dengsøe and Laugesen, 2019). I found it inappropriate to inquire about income, therefore education was treated as a simple class signifier. Education as a signifier soon proved to be challenging and highly relative as there has been an inflation of e.g., higher education between the two age groups (cf. appendix fig. 6; Albrecht, 2012). This could skew the sample balance, e.g., a person aged 60 with a higher education could easily belong to a higher class, as opposed to a person aged 34 with a higher education that would most likely end up middle class. To mitigate this inconsistency, I allowed a greater educational diversity in group 2. Group 1 all had higher educations, except one. I began sampling for group 1 to begin with. It was important to match the two groups somewhat across generations, so I purposefully sought for a respondent for group 2 that paired with a similar respondent in group 1. My sampling strategy for group 1 was based on convenience, and I therefore mostly interviewed people that I was acquainted with or met during the process of writing this thesis. Hence, most respondents were known to me, but I did not know their stories beforehand. Group 2 mainly consists of relatives to my colleagues or acquaintances and I therefore did not know anyone in group 2 prior to the interviews. Due to the intimate nature of some of my questions, it was important that there was a dimension of anonymity to the interviews to avoid the respondents becoming intimidated by the prospect of me being in their social circle. I therefore excluded people I knew well or would meet in my day-to-day life from my sample. Initially, I sought for respondents via postings in apartment stairwells which got me a couple of respondents in both groups, but the process of only gathering respondents that way was too gradual, and too random. I wanted people that represented a traditional life pattern and ideas, whereby recruiting the sample by chance, I feared I might end up with an extroverted or amenable sample group, which was not my intention. By seeking out people I knew to some extent, or people's relatives, I was able to somewhat control the outcome of respondents by sorting out samples that were too deviant. I began with group 1 to get an idea of possible themes, that I could further explore in group 2. I sampled for group 2 after I had completed the first 5 interviews with group 1.

3.4.1. Confidentiality and ethical considerations

All the respondents were informed about the scope of my research, as well as the intimate nature of some of my questions beforehand. I did not tell them what I was specifically researching to avoid it affecting their answers. After the interview was finished, I would elaborate on the specific scope of my research. The respondents were informed that they could refuse to answer my questions for any reason, and that they can withdraw their contribution to my empirical data at any point in time. I also sought their consent before recording the interview with the intention of transcribing the interview afterwards. All their names and other names they may have mentioned during the interviews are changed. It was important that the respondents felt safe and informed about their participation, especially if I knew their relatives. I have chosen not to include the transcriptions in the appendix, as they may expose information that could be used to identify the respondents even if their names are changed. To ensure the respondents felt safe during the interviews, and to encourage their storytelling, I was conscious about being an active listener by nodding, and by being mindful of maintaining an open facial expression, my body language/position, and so on, in order to appear friendly, approachable, and trustworthy. In addition, I was taking notes and using their own words and structure of their stories to lessen the possibility of intimidating the respondents by a scholarly approach to their narrative. By using their words and storytelling structures it was also my intention that it would show that I listened tentatively, and consequently found their narratives interesting.

3.4.2. Age

I aimed for people within a limited age group (30-40 and 50-60), but due to accessibility I ended up with highly varying ages in group 2 (53-71). Because I wanted to explore and compare generational differences, the ages in each group were supposed to be confined to a decade in order to reduce deviation in cultural references. This was successfully achieved in group 1 with a four-year deviation; however, group 2 has a deviation of 17 years. Four respondents in group 2 are in their fifties and two are in their sixties with a deviation of 12 years, and while I deemed this acceptable there is an outlier aged 71. I decided to include the respondent in the sample because the respondents in group 2 were generally much more diverse in their responses compared to a very homogenous group 1. The aim of the study is to explore whether intimacy and care has developed across time based on a generational interview design, and to that end I deemed the two groups

overall effective because they are separated by almost two decades thereby belonging to different generations (generation X and Millennials e.g.).

3.4.3. Locality and social demographic signifiers

To limit the scope of investigation I wanted to interview people who lived in Copenhagen, however, the two generations clashed somewhat. People aged 50-60 living in Copenhagen are not necessarily representative of a wider social context, because many people tend to move away from Copenhagen when they have kids (Andersen, Christiansen and Knudsen, 2018). Based on this I extended my sample scope for group 2 to encompass people living in suburbs close to Copenhagen, but who had all at some point lived in Copenhagen in their youth. This was in an attempt to match group 1, that all lived in Copenhagen, but where many had aspirations to one day live somewhere else than urban Copenhagen. The location was chosen to represent a more concentrated sample of alternative structures of organizing social lives compared to the rest of the country. If there is a transformation of social structures, it is reasonable to assume that it appears more frequently in urban milieus. It should be mentioned that it is to my knowledge a liberal sample group. This means that the results may be entirely different across generations if the respondents had been more conservative leaning. A possible consequence of this sample bias could be skewed result in favor of a transformation of intimacy and care, whereas a more conservative leaning sample group may be more inclined towards a traditional social organization, which may not show such a great disparity across generations. While this is conspiracy, a liberal sample from an urban milieu does pose a source of bias. As far as possible the participants were purposely selected to include a diversity of gender, occupation, sexuality, relationships status and living arrangement.

3.4.4. Sample challenges

As mentioned, I attempted to match the respondents in the two groups in order to balance the findings, and avoid two entirely different samples for each group. This was done with careful consideration about the demographic signifiers such as education and lifestyle. For the purpose of the analysis, I sought out people who were representative of a traditional lifestyle found in Denmark. This traditional lifestyle pertains to what Roseneil and Budgeon defines as “monogamous, dyadic, co-residential (and primarily hetero) sexual relationships, particularly those which have produced

childrenwill” (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004: 137). This mainly refers to group 2, but the ideals are generally present in the imagery of group 1. Despite these general social demographic signifiers, the uniqueness of the respondents will still influence the data. For example, my data sample includes an actor in group 2, who is very open about his emotions, which may skew the overall sample of group 2. I ‘matched’ him with a professional dancer in group 1 to balance out the artistic lifestyle. This method was generally effective, however, I did include a ‘pair’ of respondents that turned out to be too much of a deviance for my sample. One respondent from group 1 identifies as homosexual, and has several non-committed polyamorous relationships, and does not aspire towards a ‘family’. He was paired with a woman (G2) who has never had a romantic relationship and lives with her sister. My initial idea was to see if they could highlight structures of nonconformity that could be used to further establish a traditional pattern by what it is not. This was not a successful strategy as they were too individualized, and therefore unable to compare to the social configurations the rest of the sample charted. The two respondents are still presented in the statistics, even though I have chosen not to include them in the analysis.

Table 1: Description of Sample Characteristics GROUP 1 (N = 7)

Name	Location	Gender	Sexuality	Age	Race	Kids	Relationship status	Living arrangements
Mette	Cph (Østerbro)	Woman	Hetero	33	Caucasian	0	Relationship	Shared housing (romantic)
Sarah	Cph (Nørrebro)	Woman	Hetero	33	Caucasian	0	Single	Alone
Nadine	Cph (Nørrebro)	Woman	Hetero	36	Caucasian	0	Single	Alone
Nikoline	Cph (Østerbro)	Woman	Hetero	36	Caucasian	0	Single	Alone
Sejr	Cph (Nordvest)	Man	Homosexual	32	Caucasian	0	Other	Mostly alone (platonic)
Magnus	Cph (Nørrebro)	Man	Hetero	32	Caucasian	(1)	Relationship	Shared housing (romantic)
Rolf	Cph (Valby)	Man	Hetero	33	Caucasian	0	Relationship	Alone

Table 2: Description of Sample Characteristics GROUP 2 (N = 7)

Name	Location	Gender	Sexuality	Age	Race	Kids	Relationship status	Living arrangements
Christa	Cph (Østerbro)	Woman	Hetero	54	Caucasian	1	Single (divorced)	Alone
Lis	Cph suburb (Lyngby)	Woman	Hetero	56	Caucasian	4	Married	Shared housing (romantic)
Agnes	Jutland	Woman	Unknown	59	Caucasian	0	Single	Shared housing (platonic)
Lotte D	Cph suburb	Woman	Hetero	66	Caucasian	3	Married	Shared housing (romantic)
Robin	Cph (Frederiksberg)	Man	Hetero	57	Caucasian	2 + (2)	Relationship	Shared housing (romantic)
Otto	Cph Suburb (Køge)	Man	Hetero	71	Caucasian	2	Married	Shared housing (romantic)
Klaus	Cph (Nørrebro)	Man	Hetero	63	Caucasian	3	Married	Shared housing (romantic)

3.5. *Sub-conclusion on methodology and conceptualization*

There is an element of interpretation when attempting to analyze underlying values. To avoid becoming too biased or predisposed to certain patterns I have attempted to analyze the data without preconceived theories, other than the friendship imagery. I have operated with a semi grounded theory, or bottom-up approach, where patterns of values and tendencies revealed itself, instead of imposing certain hypotheses onto the empirical data. In doing so I have gone through all 14 interviews several times in order to codify patterns that emerged across all the interviews. The transcriptions showed three overall themes; (1) the concept of life witnesses; (2) the importance of shared history in the formation of identity, and lastly; (3) the emotional intelligence pertained to the preconceived concepts of intimacy and care. The first two themes deal with the *role* of friendship across the two generations, and the last theme is occupied with the structural and conceptual *meaning* of friendships. The first concept I developed was labelled “life witnesses” by one of the respondents. The concept captured the urgency expressed by the respondents of documenting each other’s life, including internal and external events. As I incorporated the concept into my interview design, it was instantly recognized as a significant imagery by the respondents in both groups. It was predominantly identified by group 1 as an essential aspect of friendships. The concept was applicable to group 2 who identified the vital importance of the *concept* ‘life witnesses’, but not necessarily in relation to their friendship imagery, which emphasizes a tangible discrepancy of the roles played by friends between the sample groups. The role of friendships was further conceptualized by the second theme “the importance of shared history”. The interviews revealed an existential role played by friends in the formation of identity in the act of sharing a life, and thus, anchoring a biographical narrative in the witness function of friendships. This was deduced from statements such as “through my friends, I know myself”. Again, this theme was embodied by group 1, but showed asymmetrical approaches by group 2. This further explored the dissimilar roles inhabited by the friendship imagery across the two generations. Lastly, the meaning of friends was explored by employing the preconceived notions on intimacy and care to understand and contribute the previously recognized attributes of networks of emotional support (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004: 135). The preconception of the concepts stood out in group 1 and was applied and compared to group 2 subsequently to examine discrepancies. The reason group 1 stood out more, may well be due to the homogeneous nature of their friendship imagery.

4.0. Analysis

Table of contents

4.0. Analysis	21
4.1. Life witnesses (conceptualization)	23
4.1.1. <i>Networks and flows of intimacy and care</i>	24
4.1.2. <i>Life witnesses</i>	26
4.1.3. <i>Diversity in group 2</i>	31
4.1.4. <i>Sub-conclusion to life witnesses</i>	33
4.2. Importance of shared history (biographical narrative)	35
4.2.1. <i>Discontinuity of biographical narrative (& the importance of sharing)</i>	38
4.2.2. <i>Existential importance of life witnesses</i>	41
4.2.3. <i>Sub-conclusion on the importance of shared life</i>	42
4.3. Intimacy and care (emotional intelligence)	44
4.3.1. <i>Access to emotional language pt. 1: care</i>	45
4.3.2. <i>Access to emotional language pt. 2: intimacy</i>	48
4.3.3. <i>Sub-conclusion to emotional intelligence</i>	49

Over the course of the interviews, I tried to tap into what people use their friends for and explore practices of intimacy and care. I asked broad questions anticipating the respondents would construct their own stories, within which meaning, and values progressively grew, in order to understand what values underpinned these practices. The scope of the interviews was to explore structural differences in respect the importance of friendships between group 1 (G1) and group 2 (G2). The overall picture revealed that group 1 was very homogenous in their attitudes and structural ideas despite varying life situations. Group 2 showed much more diverse approaches to their platonic relationships, and some of the respondents showed impediments accessing their emotional language. Group 1 were highly articulate about their need for emotional support and authentic connection with their platonic relationships. Their practices of intimacy and care were characterized by sharing both internal and external circumstances and events. External events refer to matters outside of the individual such as job-related matters, accommodation, family issues, and so on. Internal events refer to the emotional development, which includes both crises, as well as when the respondents felt elated. Group 1 sought advice and emotional support from their friends

and felt grateful when their friends trusted them for advice and emotional support in return. There was a gendered difference, but it was more significant across generations than between genders in each group. Meaning that the sample groups showed fairly insignificant differences between genders in each group, and instead showed greater disparity across generations regardless of gender. Group 2 were characterized by being more reticent, and deviant in their overall expression when confronted with sharing intimate personal and emotional matters, as well as associating intimacy and care with friendships. This discrepancy was very visible in how readily available emotional language was to group 1, and how difficult it appeared to group 2 to attain the same level of articulation. The analysis will address these findings, divided into three overall themes each with subthemes:

1. Life witnesses (conceptualization)
2. Importance of shared history (biographical narrative)
3. Intimacy and care (emotional intelligence)

The three themes will be explored from both group 1 and group 2, to accentuate the generational differences as well as similarities. In the conclusion/discussion (Ch. 5), it will be discussed whether this is due to naturally different stages in life, or if there is a transformation of the role and meaning of friendships across generations. Each interview showed a unique case with distinct and relevant approaches to platonic relationships, but I have chosen to only include certain cases. They represent a social setting which highlights practices of intimacy and care among friends. The cases presented in the analysis are interesting, but not outstanding. They signify patterns of the importance of friendships that were found more generally across my sample. I will strive towards transparency regarding the cases not included in the analysis by including statistical outline of the tendencies revealed. My data comprising narrative interviews vary by age, life course, gender, locality, etc., but they all display patterns that transcends their diversity, which I will try to clarify in the analysis. In particular, how people invest in their friendships throughout their everyday life; how they perform practices of intimacy and care and explore the values that underpins these processes. This has resulted in the conceptualization of the meaning and role of friendships. The analysis will ultimately attempt to address the following research questions through the proposed themes:

is there a generational transformation of the role and meaning of friendships?

4.1. Life witnesses (conceptualization)

The concept “life witnesses” was labelled by one of the respondents and refers to people that know each other intimately through adult life, henceforth being able to ‘witness’ each other’s development. The ‘development’ implies both internal and external progression. This further establishes ‘life witnesses’ as a concept that demands personal disclosure, as well as actively engaging in friendships as a ‘listener’, and continuously ‘checking in’ over time. As such life witnesses must comprise longevity and disclosure/confidentiality. Distant long-time friends will therefore not be considered ‘life witnesses’, nor will new-found friends. Of course, longtime friends are relative in respect to a generational interview design. Respondents from group 2 with a lifespan of 50-60 years may not consider a 10-years friendship as a life witness, whereas respondent from group 1 with a lifespan of 30-40 years might consider 10-years friendship as a life witness. In this paper I consider the first 20 years of a person’s life to be primarily witnessed by parents and siblings, and I will therefore not focus on the first 20 years of the respondent’s life in terms of friendships. Hence, friendships that are formed while a respondent is in their 20s will qualify as a long-term friend. This allows me to include relative lengths of friendships in my analysis as equally significant, and further allows an element of choice in deliberately choosing friends who become witnesses, as opposed to family which is, for the sake of the analysis, a natural given. I have included questions such as “how often are you in contact with your friends” and “how do you maintain contact” as well as “what do you do, when you are together” to map out how the respondents actually remain in contact with each other, and whether social media plays a role in maintaining friendships. Group 1 did maintain contact through social media such as texting or calling each other up a few times a week, sometimes every day, but did not consider social media to replace physical time spent together. Group 2 also used social media but to a lesser extent such as once a week or every 14 days. Especially group 2 was experiencing a rapid change in social media behavior in the wake of covid-19, in which social media was indeed used as a way to spend time with their friends. However, social media did not appear to play that significant a role in the responses the two groups decided to disclose, so I have decided to not focus on the technological ways in which practices of care and intimacy might also be played out.

Ultimately, the definition of life witnesses was boiled down to *the sincere witnessing and disclosure of inner and outer life events over a significant duration of adult lifespan.*

All the respondents in group 1 identified the concept ‘life witnesses’ in their friendships when I asked them, and few offered the words themselves. Most people in group 2 also acknowledged the concept, but their definition of the concept was different from group 1. Group 2 mainly ascribed life witnesses the documentation of external events in their friends’ lives. The interviews revealed a clear discrepancy between the two generations in terms of how and what they shared with their friends throughout their friendships. In answering the research questions the life witness theme shines a light on a tangible discrepancy between group 1 and group 2.

4.1.1. Networks and flows of intimacy and care

This section will focus on group 1 and look at the networks and flows of intimacy and care between friends that challenge or decenter traditional family ties and romantic partners in favor of platonic relationships. The sample in group 1 generally consider their friends their primary witnesses with whom they share their lives. For the respondents in romantic relationships, this is in addition to and not instead of, their romantic partner with whom they share the day-to-day events of ups and downs. The three respondents in romantic relationships all separate their friends from their relationship, meaning that it is a priority for them to spend time alone with their friends as ‘individuals’, and not as a couple entity. Mette (33) remarks:

Yes, well, a large portion of my friends have known me for much longer than the poor man I live with. First off. He has a great understanding and respect for this fact, and that’s where I really fall in love with him – the fact that he knows his place (laughs). Well, they’ve known me [her friends], or most of them, have known me my whole life – or *our* lives, so it’s like family, but one where I have chosen what to do with them. I have travelled with them, and I have attended festivals with them, I have been to concerts with them, and, well, the thing about having traveled with them, and having lived with them – they have been my starting point. (Mette, q. 23.4: 11)

The quote establishes a narrative in which it is essential to Mette, that her boyfriend respects the importance of her friendships, and jokingly appreciates that he knows his “place” in Mette’s life. Mette is 32, heterosexual and lives with her boyfriend for four years in Copenhagen. In her daily life she works as a political consultant in the Danish government. In her story, her boyfriend is her primary source of intimacy and care on a day-to-day basis, but not to the exclusion of her friends.

Instead, Mette identifies a combination of her friends and partner as the most important people in her life. The quote implies a distinction between her boyfriend and her friends based on the longevity of her friendships, and the intensity of their lives spent together. For most of Mette's adult life, her friends have been her foundation and starting point, and her source of intimacy and care. She considers her friends as *family* after having spent much of 'their' lives together. The quote implies a fluid quality of her friendships, in which they decide how to define their friendships and how to spend time together: "it's like family, but one where I have chosen what to do with them". This echoes Beate Völker, who argues that there are no social institutions designed around friendships – it is much more institutionally fluent than family or traditional romantic partnership, and without any 'predefined content' (Völker, 2019: 122). This corresponds well with Mette's orientation towards her friends, where friendships are what her and her friends want it to be, and a fluid relationship that can change dynamically over the course of time. The dynamic change ranges from living together and spending most waking hours together (Mette, q. 18.2: 8), to living separately with families of their own, without it essentially complicating the relationship. In Mette's narrative it is sometimes hard to distinguish her friends from close family members. To some extent Mette is substituting her ties of friendship for those of blood regarding everyday care and emotional support:

“When it comes to friendships, I think I would call it a family relationship. People from my inner circle are a natural part of me, the vast majority are my peers, and they have become my siblings. It's my family, they are someone I stand for.” (Mette, q. 9.2.: 4)

The quote clearly decenters a traditional heteronormative notion of blood-bound kinship in favor for a social constructivist approach to the verbform of “kinning” relating to actively creating a family of choice. The verb kinning is understood as suggested by Nordqvist, who argues that 'family' is a question of everyday interactions and practices (Nordqvist, 2013: 269). This notion challenges the traditional understanding of the importance of blood-relatedness, which is of diminutive application regarding interaction and practices, and if so, the quintessential framework regarding *family* becomes inoperable, and the common denominator becomes clearer: the concept of intimacy and care. This practice of kinning is often associated with queer formation of families and in cases of adoption or blended families, however, I find it useful to apply the concept in relation to the friendship meaning-frame. Mette further establishes the 'queering' of her friendships:

“[...] If I ever have a child, then some of those childhood friends would be aunts to my child, and I would really like *that*. But then again, they [her friends] are *already* my family. Well, I don’t have to have children to get closer to my friends.” (Mette, q. 34.: 14)

Mette reveals that her desire for having children lies in the thought of her friends being great ‘aunts’ to her children, rather than the thought of the children themselves. While this indeed has comedic quality, it does expose a clear decentering on traditional family ties, where focus on intimacy and care confined to families, lovers, or blood no longer proves fruitful in addressing the full extent of the *networks and flows of intimacy and care* (Roseneil and Budgeon, 2004: 153).

The pattern of distinguishing between the functions of friends and romantic partners echoes in the other two respondents from group 1 in committed relationships. They, too, deliberately prioritizes to spend time with their friends outside of their partnership, thus cementing a reliance on friends. There was a tendency to decenter the love relationships and place importance on friendships in the narratives of the interviewees in group 1. Although all the respondents in committed relationships placed their romantic partners in their innermost circle in their relationship map, it was not to the exclusion of their friends.

4.1.2. *Life witnesses*

This section will explore the conceptualization and role of life-witnesses, and how it is experienced in people’s life. The section highlights a considerable discrepancy between the two groups, as well as explore the role played by friendships across generations. Every person in group 1 considers their friends as their life witnesses to some degree. Three people in group 1 are single, three people are in heterosexual romantic relationships, and one respondent identifies as homosexual and is in non-committed polyamorous relationships. One respondent in group 1 has started “project family” and is expecting their first child, and others are unlikely to pursue a family of their own at all. While group 1 occupies diverse standpoints in life, they are very homogenous in their approach to friendships, both in their rich emotional articulation as well as their structural ideas on friendships.

The term *life witnesses* were originally labelled by Sarah, 32, who lives in Copenhagen by herself. She considers her friends as her “life witnesses” based in the longevity of the friendship, as well as the degree of intimacy they share:

“We usually talk about how we are each other's family, but we've also known each other long - but that we are each other's life witnesses. I mean, this thing, where many of us follow each other and have known each other for so long, it's like... I don't know, but it's something about knowing each other well” (Sarah, q. 11.1: 4)

Sarah and her friends refer to one another as family because they have known each other for so long, similar to Mette's account. In Sarah's narrative the longevity results in becoming each other's life witnesses. Here, life witnesses are based on the fact that they know each other intimately which suggests that life witnesses refer to something 'deeper' than merely knowing what is going on in each other's external lives, it also involves knowing what is going on *emotionally*. Sarah considers her friendship as a mirror of her existence, and by referring to her friends as life “witnesses” it implies that they are documenting or reflecting each other's development or biography. It indicates that by intimately knowing one another and staying informed of each other's lives over extended periods of their lives they become each other's witnesses of life. What they have been through, are going through and will go through is documented and stored in shared life. Sarah continues the existential thread:

“Or, it's what makes things *real* when you narrate things. Or talk about things. And can keep track of each other's lives. Or you, you know, give each other experiences through the friendship. It becomes very philosophical now, but I think it's crucial for one's well-being.” (Sarah, q. 11.2: 4)

Life experiences are becoming real to Sarah in the interaction with her friends. Her friendships are vital in processing her experiences and thoughts, and essentially her biographical narrative. Biographical narrative refers to the sense of self or identity that is manifested through understanding a continuous story of self in the world. This is shaped by reflective awareness in which the self is “reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography” (Giddens, 1991: 53). The narrative combines both external and internal circumstances and incorporates them into a biography of self thus “restructuring the universe of social activity around them” in everyday social interactions (Giddens 1991: 12). This means that in the social interactions a sense of self is achieved by reflecting upon external and internal circumstances that constitute an authentic narrative on a day-to-day basis. In this case Sarah experiences her narrative through her friends as witnesses. In knowing each other so well, both external and internal circumstances are shared and become 'real' in the very interaction of sharing and reflecting life together. This importance of

sharing inner and outer life events were prominent throughout all the interviews with group 1. Both female and male respondents recognized the importance of sharing life events, and found gratitude in reciprocal disclosure from their friends. When I asked them what key elements lay ground for such personal disclosure, they all mentioned varieties of ‘trust’. Both trusting their friends to keep their shared life events within the confounds of their friendships, but also trusting that the information will not be used against them. While this seems like a straightforward consideration when contemplating sharing intimate details from one’s life, they also reflected on the way in which their emotions and stories were handled with care by their friends. When Nikoline (G1) was asked how her friendships differed from her relationship with her family, she responded:

“The difference between family and friends is that you share more with your friends. [...] I trust my friends an enormous amount, and they have just been involved in so much of my life where my family has not been there. Well, my family was not in boarding school with me for example. Did not live with me through college with me and so on. (Nikoline, q. 35: 13).

Nikoline is 36 years old, heterosexual and single. She lives alone in Copenhagen and works with event planning for big political events. In Nikoline’s narrative, she shares more with her friends than anyone else due to her trust in them. Every respondent in group 1 mentions a natural barrier between themselves and their parents, which inhibits full disclosure with their parents. As such, group 1 confides in either friends or romantic partners. In Nikoline’s case, her primary confidants are her friends. As the quote suggests Nikoline has shared her adult life with her friends which has made Nikoline trust them. To Nikoline it is crucial to realize and respect different approaches and perspectives on her friends’ confessions. Even though Nikoline does not always fully understand her friends’ challenges, she knows their different standpoints well and understands the complexities of their narratives. This sophisticated insight goes both ways, and makes Nikoline feel safe in sharing her vulnerabilities without fear of misunderstandings or dismissal of Nikoline’s insecurities. When asked what intimacy meant in relation to her friends, Nikoline responded:

“That means ... It’s probably mostly Tara and Malene - they’re the ones I can talk with about everything, that is, they’re the first to know if something happens. A new man in my life, or moments where I am very vulnerable and upset about something [...]. Moments that are naked in their vulnerability. [...] They know of my sore spots regarding love, and they know where I think things are hard and tough, and stuff like that. I do not have to explain anything. And they listen in a different way. [...] And they probably spend just a little longer thinking about how

to answer, or which response to return, where others might - not out of malice, but might be more dismissive or solution-oriented.” (Nikoline, q. 26: 9)

Nikoline experiences that her friends have an in-depth knowledge of her weaknesses and uncertainties, and that they use this information to support Nikoline in her emotional world with care and emotional intimacy which makes Nikoline feel safe. This suggests a circular process in which Nikoline shares and involves her friends in her inner and outer life giving her friends the tools to navigate her emotional world with proficiency. This then constitutes a foundation of trust which allows Nikoline to continue to confide in her friends. When I asked Nikoline if she considered her friends her life witnesses, she mentioned an ambiguity about her dependency on them for support and as life companions:

Sometimes, I wonder whether I am putting more into the friendships than they are, and I probably do in some ways, because I do not surpass the importance of their children [...]. And it's okay, too, so you can say I agree with you - well, that they are my life witnesses. [...] But I can see that - I don't think I need my girlfriends more than they need me, but I use them much more than they use me. But it probably has a lot to do with the fact that they have children. So, if they had not had it, then it would probably have been something else. (Nikoline, q. 22.3: 8)

Nikoline mentions the ambiguity about her friends putting their families before her. She understands why this is so, but a slight discomfort still seems present. This discomfort is further supported by how Nikoline recalls jealousy in her interview when she thought back on how she felt when some of her friends got pregnant, and how it signified a change in Nikoline's importance in her friends' lives. This indicates that being life witnesses does not require the same degree of prominence in each other's life, instead it relates to *how* Nikoline and her friends share and involve each other in their lives. As such, life witnesses are also a way in which friendships operate dynamically, and not a static title. This gives room for imperfections and varying degrees of intensity in friendships which allocates busy jobs and beginning a family, while remaining close.

Group 1 was generally homogeneous in how they related to their friends, and the significance they put on their relationships. Group 2 showed more diversity, but there were also similar structures. Klaus, 63, is married to his wife with whom he has been with for 39 years (G2). They have three adult children and have recently moved to a small apartment in Copenhagen. In his daily life he works with financial partners at one of the major breweries in Denmark. Central to Klaus' narrative

is a close-knitted male friend group whom he has known intimately for more than 50 years. They are around 10-12 people in the friend group, including the wives. When I asked him if he had other friends than this group, he answered:

“No, those are my primary friends. I've known them since we were little - and know each other's families. I knew some of them before I went to primary school. We were playmates and lived on the same road.” (Klaus, q. 5.3: 2)

The response reveals how Klaus considers the longevity and familiar relations as reason for the group to be his primary friends. Instead of responding with how much time he spends with his friends, or how much fun they have while they are together, it was important to him to mention the longevity of their friendship. This uncovers an underlying value to their friendship – their shared life. When asked what his friends meant to him, Klaus answered:

“Yes, well, they mean a lot to me. It's always nice to get some inputs from their perspective. From someone I have known for a really long time. Uhm, and I think it's interesting to see what decisions they make, and then we get to talk about it. [...] I mean, my friends are part of me.” (Klaus, q. 35: 7)

Klaus appreciates witnessing his friends' progress, and subsequently enjoys being able to reflect on it as well. As such, life witnesses also entail the appreciation of being able to witness other people's lives. Throughout the interview it became clear that it was important to Klaus to be able to share both inner and outer life events with his friends. Klaus's approach to friendships is similar to group 1 in his behavioral patterns, as well as his structural ideas and ideals of friendships. Structural similarities across generations implies that differences across generations may be due to a transformation in intimacy and care rather than a symptom of different life stages. This epistemological question will be further addressed in the conclusion/discussion section (Ch. 5).

Across in the sample in group 1, people of a range of lifestyles, occupations, sexualities, and backgrounds placed high value on their friends and their friendships. Friendships appeared more often in the inner circle than family or siblings. There was a slight difference between those in a relationship and those who were single in terms of the importance of friends, but they all identified their friends, or a combination of friends and partners as the most important people in their lives. Common for group 1 was the articulated need to disclose and share events from both the inner and the outer world in order to make sense of their narrative. Respondents in group 1 also compared

practices of friendship with family thus blurring the lines between traditional family structures, and a more plastic understanding of family/friends. These tendencies were found in three respondents from group 2 as well. Overall life witnesses seemed to have an inherent significance due to the longevity of the friendships across the two groups. This was supported by the importance of sharing internal as well as external events with their friends in a way to constitute an authentic narrative on a day-to-day basis, which was most apparent in group 1, but did appear in some cases in group 2.

4.1.3. Diversity in group 2

Generally, group 2 showed more diversity in their approach to how they related to their friends. Klaus (63) and Robin (57) both grew up in Copenhagen and have childhood friends with whom they are able to share both inner and outer life events with. Their interviews resembled group 1 in many ways, as did Agnes (59) who has never been in a romantic relationship and lives with her sister.

Lotte D (66) considers friends as someone who comes and goes easy. Lotte lives with her husband outside of Copenhagen, and has moved a lot in her life. She is a family-oriented schoolteacher, and has three children. She does have one longtime friend from when she was in her 20s, but apart from her, Lotte D mainly has short-term friends. When she was asked who the most important people to her were in her 20s, she responded:

“[...] I would say that my friendships were very much like ... Making new friendships where I am. It's nice to be close, but then we just kind of drifted apart naturally. This happened whenever I relocated or such. Changed jobs, e.g.,” (Lotte D, q. 5: 2)

While the above quote was a response to her relationships in Lotte's 20s, it is a pattern throughout her narrative; friends came and went. To her, her husband and children have been her constant. This is in stark contrast to group 1 and Klaus that considered a friendship significant due to the life shared over time. In Lotte D's case it could also be a condition from having moved around in her early life, rather than a signifier of structural difference across generations. However, the same narrative is prevalent with Otto (71) and Lis (57), who consider friends as a local convenience, that is; friends come with geographic location. Neither Lis nor Otto have moved around in formative years (0-20 y/o), thus their attitudes towards fleeting friends originates from a different place:

“Yes, exactly. If I had moved to Køge in a single area, it would also have ended up - it wasn't because I was looking for some social environment. It was purely physical relocation that did it [determined his friend group].” (Otto, q. 45: 12)

The quote was a response to the question of whether Otto's friendships changed due to his life events, such as starting a family, or if his friends were cultivated through geographic location. In his narrative it was due to physical relocation. This was further reinforced, when I asked Otto whether his friends were deliberately chosen, or if they materialized organically from his given environments:

“[...] They [his friends] have come like this all by themselves. Depending on the given environment I have been in. I have not gone in and then said: ‘him’ or ‘her’ I want to be friends with. It's something that has just come -...” (Otto, q. 52: 14).

In both cases Otto never deliberately chose his friends, and nor has he kept them for longer periods of time. This further establishes a conceptual limitation to the term ‘life witnesses’: friendships have to have ‘witnessed’ life that can be traced back to different life stages or events. Another tangible discrepancy between group 1 and group 2, was the degree of confidentiality. Again, Robin, Agnes, and Klaus from group 2 showed high degrees of emotional disclosure and confidentiality with their friends similar to group 1, whereas Otto and Lis were much more reserved. When I asked Otto how he defines ‘friendships’ he said:

“... (pause) ... I do not have any personal discussions with them as such. We can talk about general things, but they do not get involved in my personal things and affairs.” (Otto, q. 11: 4)

Otto only shares personal things and affairs with his wife. This suggests a norm in which displays of emotions are confined within the ‘four walls of the home’, and old Danish saying, that refers to a dichotomy between the domestic home and the family, and the ‘world outside’. This culture is often associated with ‘public’ display of emotions as inappropriate. It is sensible to associate this trend with Otto's relatively prominent age of 71, compared to the rest of group 2 that are predominantly in their 50s. While this degree of bluntness is reserved for Otto, there is however, a tendency of withdrawing emotional disclosure from friendships in both Lis (61) and Christa's (57) narratives, where emotions are not necessarily shared with their friends. When Lis was asked what she shared with her closest friends, she responded:

“Well, it can be stuff like joys and worries regarding the kids, and something like that. And one's work, and ... And such, some ... I stand by a crossroads-like decisions, and I have to do such-and-such in my work e.g.,” (Lis, q. 19.1.: 14)

While Lis shares more with her friends than Otto, she keeps them at arm’s length, and talks about external events in her life, such as her kids and her job. The three respondents in group 2 characterizes a traditional heteronormative model of social relationships that values and privileges the co-residential, married couple relationships above all others, in this case their friendships. While they all appreciate their friends, they do not appear emotionally intimate, or dependent. This is in stark contrast to group 1, that insisted on the importance of sharing inner life events as well.

4.1.4. Sub-conclusion to life witnesses

Now, we have assessed different approaches to life witnesses as an aspect of friendships across a sample of two generations. The figure below shows the distribution of the kinds of life witnesses.

Table 1: Distribution of life witnesses

1. Primary life witnesses: <i>Friends</i>	N = 8	Sejr (G1), Mette (G1), Sarah (G1), Nikoline (G1), Rolf (G1), Agnes (G2), Nadine (G1), Magnus (G1)
2. Primary life witnesses: <i>Romantic partners</i>	N = 3	Otte (G2), Lotte D (G2), Lis (G2)
3. Primary life witnesses: <i>Both</i>	N = 2	Klaus (G2), Robin (G2)
4. Primary life witnesses: <i>Other</i>	N = 1	(Christa (G2))

The methodology leading to the above results stem from questions including “how do you prioritize friendships compared to family or romantic partners?”, as well as for how long they have known their friends. The respondents who primarily relied on their partners as life witnesses have several short-lived friends usually in accordance with geographic location, meaning that if and when they moved, they would get new friends in the local area. None, or distant, long-time friends have not been categorized as “life witnesses”. Certain respondents have known their romantic partner throughout their youth (Robin, G2), or would consider their partner as an integral part of their friend group (Klaus, G2), therefore it makes no sense in separating the two categories.

A key element of the definition of life witnesses are the shared inner world insights, meaning that the respondents' friends are to witness their inner emotional development through their adult lives. Most of the respondents consider their friends as life witnesses. This is not *instead* of their romantic partners but in addition. However, their friends still represent a core element of their self-image, and an entity their partners cannot replace, because they have not experienced their emotional development in formative adult years. The respondents in group 1 separate their partners from their friends in relation to distinct functions that cannot be replaced. Everyone in group 1 is positioned in *category 1*: friends as primary witnesses along with Agnes from group 2. It is reasonable to consider that this may be due to different life stages. This means that Magnus (32) or Mette (33) e.g., might end up in *category 2*: primary witnesses consisting of both partner and friends, after decades spent with their partners. Conceptually, this does not negate the importance of friends as life witnesses, seeing as it does not exclude partners, but merely emphasizes the importance of friendships in this constellation. No one in group 1 has any children, while three of them are in a committed relationship. The three respondents currently in relationships, Magnus (32), Mette (33), and Rolf (34) are all conscious about spending time with their friends without their romantic partners. Group 1 consists of very individualized people, who have not spent decades with a partner or their own family. While this does not necessarily counteract a generational difference, it does however make it more challenging to presume whether the discrepancy is due to a transformation in the importance of friendships, or if it is merely a picture of different stages in life.

4.2. Importance of shared history (biographical narrative)

In a society saturated with rapid external change and countless possibilities, Anthony Giddens argues for the necessity to establish an independent identity that is capable of quickly readjusting one's identity and paradigm (Giddens, 1991: 202). As such a reflective identity becomes essential in navigating a constantly changing world. Reflective identity derives from modern social life where social practices are "examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices" (Giddens 1990: 38-39), meaning that social behavior will constantly be altered according to the influx of new data. In a constantly changing paradigm, a reflective identity is required to not lose the meaningful context the self was previously immersed in. As such, according to Giddens, the individual must consciously build their own identity, despite culturally given identity positions (Giddens, 1996: 94). The biographical narrative forms the very core of the self-identity of modern social life. It is an interpretive self-story created by the person in question. Like any other enacted narrative, it is something one must work on, and which requires creative inputs (Giddens, 1996: 95). This identity is molded in social interaction, and by constantly processing past, present, and future. Based on this I would emphasize the importance of long-term friendships, that documents or witnesses different chapters, stories, or 'meaningful' events in life (this is of course subjective in accordance with the person in question). These life witnesses maintain a continuous dialogue "in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going" (Charles Taylor, 1989, cited in Giddens, 1991: 55). When Magnus (32) was asked why it was so important for him to have history with his friends, he observed how it shaped him to some degree:

"I believe that it is part of what shapes individuals, and you are shaped by your experiences throughout life. Ehm, of course you get shaped no matter what, but it [friendships] helps to shape it, and when I have lived through some experiences [with his friends], it has left some perhaps malleable, but at least some traces. I believe that you are constantly shaped by the choices you make and the experiences you face [with your friends]." (Magnus, q. 37.4.: 17)

Here, Magnus acknowledges the impact his friends have had on his identity, or sense of self throughout his life. The response came in wake of the question of why his current girlfriend cannot overtake the functions of his friends, to which he answered that he has specific history with his friends in which she cannot partake. It is important to Magnus that he and his friends have a particular history together, which his girlfriend can never replace (Magnus, q. 37.3: 17). Magnus

values his friendships partly due to shared history highlighting a very specific ‘witnessing’ or identity-shaping function his friends hold. While he also considers his girlfriend as an integral part of most of his social network configurations, she cannot replace his friends. This implies a significance of shared history that transcends his relationships. Ritzer and Stepnisky argue that reflexivity is construed in intimate relations (Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2014: 547), which is prevalent in responses from group 1. They show high degree of reflexivity which is actively reconstructed: “social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about these very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (Giddens, 1996: 70; Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2014: 545). If social practices are constantly examined, reformed, and altered reflectively in social interactions the practice of sharing and making sense of oneself are key to understanding the potential transformation of practices of intimacy and care across generations.

Nadine (36), single, and lives alone in Copenhagen. She partly works as a professional dancer. When Nadine was asked to explain what she uses her friends for, her first thought was the importance of sharing whatever was on her mind, to ease her head for thoughts. In trying to elaborate, she describes how her friends sometimes appears to know her even better than herself:

“It also becomes kind of a mirror in some ways.... The honesty they bring is really valuable. It is truly valuable that there is someone who knows me *that* well. Sometimes I can think that I am being myself, but then they tap me on the shoulder, and I realize I have been deluding myself, and I realize how silly I have been” (Nadine, q. 19: 6)

The quote suggests that Nadine is relying on her friends to intimately know her inner world in order to guide her in the external world as well. It implies that there is an ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ behavior or reaction inherent in Nadine’s identity which presupposes a common – but conscious and unprovable – framework of reality. This framework of a common reality appears both fragile and robust. Robust because it is reliable and clearly rooted in the consciousness of her friendships, and fragile because she readily accepts her lack of integrity in ‘self’. In her acceptance, she also experiences a strength in an intensified sense of affirmation in her identity. By recognizing her ‘silliness’ in her alleged delusional narrative, she can find solace in a reaffirmed and reflected identity recognized by interactional conventions. In doing so she has successfully modified her identity and sense of self according to an influx of information and continues the social context within which she is immersed. Nadine has never had a serious romantic partner. It seems that her

primary sources of intimacy and care are anchored in her friendships. When I asked her how important her friendships are to her, she elaborated:

“As mentioned, they are very important. Of course, I can elaborate a little. So, considering that my family lives far away, it is clear that when you go through your 20s and into your 30s and the same friends remain, it becomes clear, that they have helped shape you – or, perhaps it’s the wrong word to use, but you may have gotten to know yourself better through those friends, because they have known you through such formative periods of developments. So, there are definitely some things that I have learned about myself through my friends. I have experienced that. They have also helped to open my eyes to some things that I would not otherwise have come in contact with, or even changed my attitudes outright. So that way, I think friends are madly important. Otherwise, it will be a bit monotonous.” (Nadine, q. 12: 4).

Nadine acknowledges how her friends have influenced her over the course of her adult life regarding attitudes, perspectives, and herself. This further establishes a tendency of friendships being a monitoring and supportive entity of one’s sense of self. As Giddens argues, the self-story must constantly be worked on, and needs ‘creative inputs’ which in Nadine’s case her friends supply, to prevent an otherwise monotonous trajectory. In their function as primary witnesses of Nadine’s development in her adult lives, her friends also function as influencers and observers on her narrative and thus self-identity.

As mentioned before, Klaus (63) has a big group of friends whom he has held on to for more than 50 years. He considers the longevity of his friendships as an important aspect of their friendship. Klaus’s narrative stresses how him and his friends are part of each other because they have influenced one another over the years. When I asked him why it was important to have life witnesses, he said:

“Well, otherwise life will be empty. It’s going to be damn empty, if there is no one who has been following you [through life]. After all, you need someone to follow you [through life] when your parents are no longer there, at some point. My parents are not, and then it’s nice to have someone witnessing what you’re up to, from the outside.” (Klaus, q. 59.2: 10)

Klaus (G2) explains how important it is to have someone witnessing his progress through life, considering that his parents will not be there throughout his adult life. The self-identity is, according to Giddens, "the self as it is reflexively understood by the person on the basis of his or

her biography" (Giddens, 1996: 68). As such, *identity* is continuous across time and space, and *self-identity* is the very continuity that is reflectively interpreted by the individual. Against this background, one can understand Klaus' need to be documented as an attempt to create meaning with his existence concretely anchored and understood across time and space through his life witnesses. If Klaus' actions and development are not documented or witnessed, it is "empty" which can be understood as meaningless. If an important life choice or life event is not 'documented', discontinuity can arise in the temporal experience, whereby it can feel empty, or meaningless.

Another important aspect of Klaus' story was the importance of being able to share his crises with his friends, and the ability to feel safe and vulnerable in their company. When I asked him, what intimacy meant to him, and if it matters, he responded:

"Yes, definitely [intimacy matters]. You must have someone that you can confide in and have intimacy with, otherwise... Where else would you go if you face challenges? [...] That's the very foundation of that group of friends. It's confidentiality and intimacy." (Klaus, q. 40.1.-2: 8)

The importance of being able to be vulnerable and share difficulties or challenges in life is of paramount prominence in the structure of Klaus' group of friends. This marked yet another significant diversity in group 2, where Otto (71), in stark contrast to Klaus (63), does not share anything personal with his friends, underscoring the uneven approach to the practices of friendships and intimacy.

4.2.1. Discontinuity of biographical narrative (& the importance of sharing)

Christa (54) is divorced and lives alone in Copenhagen. She has a daughter, and three friends. A tendency permeating her interview was her rejection of people whenever they got too close. Christa's example is not a generalizable trend across group 2, as it appears to be an individual trust issue rather than a structural tendency. However, she reveals a shadow side to not sharing inner and outer world with her friends (or anyone else). Her case also highlights curious aspects of the formation of identity. This underscores the key role friendships play in people's life. Christa considers herself a highly social person, with easy access to friends, but she draws the line when friendships become too intimate:

“I was very social - that is, extremely. And I still am! So, if I'm in a company, then I'm ... Maybe the most social. So, it's not like I'm thinking "no, stay away" or something like that, I'm open to everyone - really, extremely open to everyone. But then it's like... when they get too close to me [emotionally] that I think "okay, how do I sort this out", right? (Christa, q. 14: 5)

Whenever people get too close to Christa, a natural sorting process occurs in her narrative. As opposed to Klaus, Christa does not approach practices of friendships the same way, instead she seems to push people away as soon as they get too close. When I asked her what people, she considered to be the most important in her life, besides her daughter, she mentioned:

“Well, I would say that I have some girlfriends like... Well, it's not some... Or, let me put it this way; these are girlfriends that I am happy to have, not necessarily talking to every day. [...] They're good to have, but it's not their life I care about. I show interest, and I ask, and all that. But... I'm probably more interested in my own life right now (Christa, q. 23: 12)

Throughout her interview it was important to Christa to underline that she *liked* her friends, but that she did not need them, which makes sense if she pushes them away. Through her 20s and 30s Christa remarked how she felt closest to her parents, as she did not have friends that were good enough to rely on, because she did not trust them, “[...] so I do not trust- I truly do not trust anyone.” (Christa, q. 12: 4; q. 18: 9; q. 18: 10). This was further emphasized as Christa equates strength with the ability to endure loneliness (Christa, q. 24: 13). This might explain why Christa experiences challenges with letting people get too close, and it implies a narrative in which she appears to relish being able to have control over herself, and thereby not get overwhelmed by outside impact. She describes friends as people “[...] who do not necessarily trust each other, but you listen to each other” (Christa, q. 25: 14). However, later in the interview, Christa changed direction somewhat, and observed how important it was to have friends from a biographical narrative viewpoint:

“But it's just ... It ... I think there is a sense of security in the past that you have in common [her and her friends], that you have experienced together, you have experienced each other's family [children, spouses], and each other's colleagues, you have *experienced* something together. And then suddenly you are in a new chapter [divorced, single, etc.], and will experience *that* together. But you keep coming back to that security when you talk to each other: "no, do you remember that time the girls were over the fence?" and stuff like that. So... Maybe *that's* security, that you can always go back to the time when you could say "no, you can remember then? Oh, it was so cozy!". And we have all just entered a new chapter, we have to deal with,

and maybe also a new identity, in relation to getting married again, or getting divorced again, [or being single] etc. I think that is also quite important.” (Christa, q. 27: 16-17)

Christa reflects on how she finds security and a sense of continuity in her friendships from having a shared past. This anchor to her own sense of self perhaps from before she got divorced seems to guide her in the new chapter that she is referring to. A chapter where she seems to find herself a little rattled. Her husband cheated on her years up until the divorce, which may explain some of her current trust issues, even though she has had this tendency throughout most of her life. After the divorce, Christa recalls thinking “who the hell am I now” (Christa, q. 27: 17), which suggests that Christa experienced an ontologically insecure sense of self, by losing a stable feeling of continuity in her biography following the shock of the divorce. Where many of the other respondents find solace in being able to be vulnerable around their friends, and to be able to share personal and intimate issues with them, Christa has been struggling. I asked Christa, if she recalled a time where a friend took care of her, to which remembered the period after the divorce, where she would have wished someone would have taken care of her:

“[...] But I don’t think there was anybody who actually said, - in fact, I confronted my mother with it recently - there was no one who went in and said: "how are you?". Well, there wasn’t.”
(Christa, q. 31: 18)

According to Giddens, the existential question of self-identity is very closely related to the fragile nature of the biography that the individual "creates" about herself. Thus, a person's identity must be found in the ability to keep a particular narrative going (Giddens, 1996: 70). The ontologically insecure sense of self following the divorce, may have been further prompted by not being able to share her feelings about the divorce and affair with people around her, thus never fully integrating the life event as part of her narrative, which may have led to the experience of discontinuity in temporal events relating the sense of self (Giddens, 1996: 69). Christa’s example does not paint a picture of a general tendency in the sample groups, but it highlights a shadow side to not having any friends to confide in and share both inner and outer world. Christa remains somewhat reflective about her feeling-world, thus reflectively experiences her lack of care and intimacy in her life at the time of the event.

As such group 1 was very homogenous in their approach and perceived importance of the practices of sharing both inner and outer world with their friends. Group 2 remained much more diverse,

from Klaus who resembled the structural ideas embedded in group 1, to Christa who never let people get too close. As such, being witnesses to personal development as well as being witnessed – both internally and externally manifests a biographical narrative that *reinforces* a sense of self.

4.2.2. *Existential importance of life witnesses*

According to Giddens a person with a stable sense of self identity is characterized by a sense of biographical continuity that they can comprehend reflectively and communicate with the outside world. By early experiencing trust from relationships the person will establish a protective ‘cocoon’, that filters out many of the perils to self-identity (Giddens, 1996: 70).

Rolf (33) lives alone in Copenhagen and is in a committed relationship. He reflects on how his friends existentially affirms him of his worth. He denotes how his friends by investing their time and sharing their authentic emotions with him makes him feel safe and creates a foundation of care and support in his life. I asked him to elaborate on what his friends meant to him, to which he responded:

“First and foremost, they give me a sense of safety. It's a key feeling in that regard, because ... yes, it's safety and it's stability, and it's continuity. And they keep the loneliness at bay. Even though it is a negation, it still has a very real function to know that there is a basis of support in my life.” (Rolf, q. 18: 5)

Rolf’s account on his friendships resonates with a stable sense of self. The continuity he mentions resonates with the idea that a sense of self is rooted in the *how* we have become, and *where* we are going (Charles Taylor, 1989, cited in Giddens, 1991: 55). I continued to ask him what he uses his friends for:

“... I use them to confirm that I have human value in myself. That is, that I am worth something simply by other people thinking that I am interesting company. Or at least by investing their time and feelings, etc. in me.” (Rolf, q. 19: 5)

Rolf notices how the time spent or invested in platonic relationships offers him support and continuity in his life. Rolf’s account also offers a very reflective understanding of his dependence

on his friendship. Through their eyes, or them being the significant *other*⁵, Rolf is able to objectify himself, and view himself from a distinct position of appreciation. Therein lies the essence of self-awareness, or self-identity; the realization that there is *something* to be aware of. Seeing, as we need others to maintain the objectification in the formation of identity, the “formation and continuation of the self is fundamentally social” (Adams, 2003: 232). Matthew Adams quotes George Herbert Mead: “... it is impossible to conceive of a self-arising outside of social experience” (Mead, 1934: 24, cited in Adams, 2003: 232.). From this viewpoint, Rolf eloquently understands the dialectic relationships between his close relations, and his own self. Another aspect of Rolf’s appreciation of his friends is that by spending or *investing* time in his relationships they signify human existential worth because it is *voluntary*. Several respondents mentioned the fluid nature of volitional friendships as a cause of gratification:

“[...] it always lies in the consciousness of a friendship, that I know, that I have chosen to be friends with them, and vice versa. This is precisely why close friends mean so much - that you know that. There are a lot of other ‘friends’ out there you could become friends with. So, it's another kind of love, but it's... deliberately chosen.” (Nadine, q. 19.1.: 7)

The voluntary aspect of friendships is both free from regulations which makes it fluid and robust in the face of change. It also makes it fragile, as it is free in its nature. Aristotle believed friendship was a noble virtue, worthy in pursuit of itself. As the thesis has discussed, the dynamic of self-identity is established and entangled in our relationship which can appear both robust and fragile. There is a strength in the ability to live separate individual lives without restraints, because the reciprocal care between friends is given without “violating individual autonomy, without self-sacrifice and subservience, and maintaining the affection which constitutes the relationship.” (Roseneil, 2017: 415). Hence, the existential importance of life witnesses lies in the formation of identity from a biographical narrative, in which friends are voluntary witnesses of an adult life span.

⁵ As proposed by Matthew Adam’s use of *other* following George Herbert Mead’s generalized other (Adam, 2003: 232)

4.2.3. Sub-conclusion on the importance of shared life

The importance of shared life was identified as both reconfiguring, reinforcing and confirming a sense of self in the interaction with the respondents' friends. Nadine (G1) accepted her friends' suggestion to alter her identity and sense of self to streamline a common sense of reality, or narrative. Doing this, Nadine was able to incorporate the influx of information, and successfully manage to continue the social context within which she is immersed (p. 36). This is in stark contrast to Christa, where her friends did not appear to play an important role in her narrative understanding of self, which in turn had resulted in ontological insecure sense of self (p. 40). Rolf revealed how he objectified himself through his friends and thus appreciated his own worth. This was manifested in his friends' voluntarily investing time and emotions in him as a friend (p. 41). Klaus (G2) was able to create temporal meaning with his existence by anchoring his development in the social interaction with his friends (p. 42). The importance of sharing history with friends was essential to Klaus, but appeared insignificant to other respondents from group 2, who did not disclose personal matters or feelings with their friends. Group 1, on the other hand, appears to rely heavily on the role of their friends in documenting or witnessing a narrative continuity of their shared life.

4.3. Intimacy and care (emotional intelligence)

The premise of this section of the analysis refers to the concept *emotional intelligence* (EI) which denotes how well people understand and communicate emotions and feelings. Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (2005) describe emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions (Mayer & Salovey, 2005: 281). In my research on whether there is a fundamental shift in the role and meaning of friendships across generations, I find it fruitful to investigate how the two generations tend to understand their own feeling-world. The analysis will show that there is in fact a difference in how articulate the two groups are in understanding their own emotional lives as well as to tap into the language of emotions. Research on emotional intelligence shows that it is a *learned* ability, and that the ability grows and improves the more it is trained – in this case, by talking about feelings. This is significant because it reveals that group 1 engages emotionally and intimately with their friends, similar to how group 2 would share emotional things with their romantic partners. This suggests that group 1 experiences a blurring between romantic and platonic relationships, or, using the idea presented by Sasha Roseneil: a queering of friendships (Roseneil, 2005: 412). In most current research on friendship the thesis presents (Budgeon, Roseneil, Völker, etc.), the concepts *intimacy* and *care* are used as primary emotions when exploring friendships and how they have transformed over time. According to their research the concepts intimacy and care have traditionally been employed in association with family or romantic partnerships, and not so much with friends (Roseneil, 2005: 411). In my research I have used these concepts to operationalize the investment of emotions we put into other people. The two groups were each asked the questions:

1. What does the word "care" mean to you in relation to your friends?
2. What does the word "intimacy" mean to you in relation to your friends?

It was clear from the onset that group 1 approached the questions with ease, and understood the concepts with relaxed attitudes which suggests a practice of conceptualizing emotions, and addressing them in sophisticated manners. Some people from group 2 struggled with relating the concepts to their friends as well the concepts in themselves. Group 2 showed diversity in their approaches ranging from great eloquence about their feeling-world as well as the concepts associated with it, to withdrawn and awkward responses.

4.3.1. Access to emotional language pt. 1: care

‘Care’ among group 1 were associated with ‘checking in’ with one another, a way of showing emotional support and interest in their friends’ lives and wellbeing. Some respondents in group 2 understood care in terms of practical utility such as helping out with childcare or offering someone a ride. The concept *care* showed an accurate generational difference amongst my respondents.

“Well, that means you take care of each other a bit - you check in with each other, make sure that - yeah, keep an eye on each other. It sounds a little strange, but you know, "are you okay?" - like. It's not something you need to say, but by having contact, feel it. Caring for me is keeping in touch and making sure to keep up to date on what's going on in each other's lives.” (Nadine, q. 24.1.: 8)

The practices of care in group 1 portrayed a norm of active emotional involvement in each other’s lives. Nadine’s account on care exemplifies a general idea of care in group 1 that appreciates checking in with one another, and being able to give and receive emotional support. It does not necessitate verbally checking in; the act of *showing* that you care is adequate.

“Well, trust ... And love, I think, is very closely related to trusting that you ... That you are there for each other. That you can share things with each other. Help each other. Love each other. That way, I think it's a bit like a romantic relationship. Or another love affair. Also, that one commits to one another.” (Sarah, q. 11.3.: 4)

According to Sarah (34), trust in each other is a prerequisite for love. Trust in that friends are there for each other emotionally. She compares the dynamic to a romantic relationship in how she *expects* emotional investment and support from her friends, and vice versa. This blurring of lines between different kinds of social relationships echoes throughout the interviews in group 1. The queering of relationships was also recorded in group 2. Robin (57) is an actor and lives with his girlfriend in Copenhagen. He is in touch with his emotions and he is extremely well-articulated about his relationships. Being an actor and growing up with his grandmother and his single mother, he believes he has been conditioned into being emotionally expressive, and takes pride in being raised by women, and thus able to express his emotions (according to himself). He explains “that status drop some men experience when they talk about feelings and emotions, well, I simply do not have that” (Robin, q. 11: 14), consequently rejecting a culture of ‘toxic masculinity’ in which men are conditioned to e.g., hide their emotions (Waling, 2019: 366).

“[...] But when I did not see Leo, Mads or Frederik [his childhood friends] for a while, up to a premiere or something like that, I became longing. Well, I've never been able to do without them, so it's been an emotional thing. [...] For me, I think friendships mean a lot because I've been so much alone [parents died young], well, it's a family to me. Well, specifically, because my [biological] family is broken.” (Robin, q. 9: 7)

Robin is both very expressive of his affections towards his friends and echoes the sentiment from group 1 in which they recognize their platonic relationships as essential to their life. In Robin's case, he has never been able to do without them, and he emphasizes the depth of their importance by declaring them his family. After Robin got divorced, he moved in next door to a friend who had also recently divorced. They all had kids the same age that went to the same schools, and their ex-wives, too, were friends.

“Andreas lived in a ground floor apartment. So, I bought the ground floor apartment on M. Road, and then *snap* you know, *snap*, and then we had a network family – that was a word that was described in Politiken [Danish newspaper] during that period. That was what we were. So, we made sure, Andreas and I – in the best understanding with Marissa and Mie [their ex-wives], that we had the children with us at the same time, so, and vice versa. [...] And I have a feeling it has meant a lot. So, the whole M. Road period was insanely safe and created a foundation that is still there to this day. So, he and I are also very-very close. *And* it was amazing [...] It was a several awesome years. So absolutely awesome. Because Andreas was a high school teacher, and I worked in the evenings, so often I accompanied the kids to school in the morning, and then Andreas made sure they could eat at Andreas' in the evening, and then cuddle them. And then when I got home from the theater in the evening, I came in and carried them to bed. Like, every other week. It was amazing. It was truly fabulous. And then when we did not have the kids, we also had fun (laughs). Um, then we hung out at M. Road. And along came all those cliques I have mentioned [other close friends]. Then we hung out on M. Road. And of course, for practical reasons, everyone had to get divorced during the same period, so it was festive, popular, and enjoyable (laughs). (Robin, q. 12: 10)

The paragraph describes a period in Robin's life where his friends were crucial for his well-being, and the significance of his friendship with Andreas in providing care and support emerged as a key theme in his adult life. Many of his friends that remain today were instrumental in providing care and support for him during this time. Robin explains how him, and his friends decentered sexual/love relationships and prioritized their friendships, and Robin and Andreas formed an

unconventional partnership during the years following their divorces and while their children were still young. Many of their friends divorced during the same period, so it was marked as a period of great vulnerability, but also strength in how they all supported each other emotionally. The ease of connecting emotional care with friends which Robin displayed, was not shared by everyone in group 2. I asked Otto (71) if he has provided care for a friend, to which he responded:

“... (sighs) ... Hmm ... Good question. I'm not sure about that. That is not very good. I have offered to drive for someone once in a while. But that's not the caliber you're talking about.”
(Ole, q. 25: 8)

Otto associates the term care with a practical utility. This meaning or connotation of care is supported by Lis (56), who associates care with helping out with childcare. When I asked her if she has provided emotional care for a friend, she regrettably noted how it was not her strength:

“Well, I'm probably not the best at that. I wish I could say yes, and list a whole range of situations where I was the one who offered a shoulder to someone [to cry on], but that's not my core competency.” (Lone, q. 25.1.: 16)

Lis and Otto show a tendency in group 2 of correlating care with practical aspects. Once more, group 2 displayed great diversity in their meaning-frame, in this case, pertaining to the concept ‘care’. Group 1 associated care with emotional support, checking in, and a level of commitment. Despite the diversity of group 2 there was a strong tendency of relating care with practical utility. Thus, the meaning of care showed a generational difference between the two sample groups.

4.3.2. Access to emotional language pt. 2: intimacy

The concept *intimacy* showed a greater discrepancy between the two sample groups than *care*. Group 1 generally understood intimacy amongst friends as the ability to feel safe in their vulnerability, and the capacity to share deeply personal details about their lives. On the contrary some respondents from group 2 rejected the concept entirely in relation to their imagery of friendship. Group 1 was able to elaborate on the concept with complex examples and appreciated it as a virtue in a relationship. Some of the respondents in group 1 even offered the concepts themselves in relation to their practices of friendship, before I brought it up. Intimacy in group 1 was generally associated with confidentiality and being able to share emotional or highly private details about their lives.

“It [intimacy] rhymes with confidentiality and that you are sure of one another. And maybe also have some deeper conversations, or ... Yeah, some private stuff too. [...] So, it is quite intimate to share my problems with another human being. (Magnus, q. 27.: 12)

Some people from group 2, on the other hand, appeared to entirely reject the concept ‘intimacy’ in relation to their friendships. This was evident from the excruciating moments in my interviews where the respondents appeared perplexed as they associated intimacy with physical and sexual practices, and not necessarily an emotional concept. It seemed futile to explain or impose my meaning-frame of the concept to group 2, instead I asked them to define a version that suited them instead.

Erh ... Intimacy can be both partner intimacy, but it can also be ... Well, I'm such a touching person, and I'm looking forward to being able to give all sorts of people hugs [ref. to covid-19 restrictions]. [...] To give a hug, and hold in hand and cuddle in hair. Some are just more tactile than others and I am definitely a touching human being. (Lotte, q. 40.1., 10)

Lotte initially associated intimacy with sexual practices as did Otto, Christa, and Lis from group 2. When I asked her to clarify intimacy, she also identified the concept as a physical attribute, in Lotte's case something associated with her children. This is assumed on the basis of cuddling hair. Common to respondents in group 2 was associating intimacy with physical attributes, and something pertaining to either a romantic partner, or within the family. This could be due to a cultural change in the linguistic expression ‘intimacy’ which may have had a more physical dimension previously, but may possibly have been influenced by the English connotation of

intimacy which also entails an emotional aspect. This would explain why group 1 all associated intimacy with emotional disclosure, and trust, seeing as they have grown up linguistically influenced by the English language. However, several of the other respondents in group 2 such as Klaus and Robin associated intimacy with their friendships as core components of their meaning-frame or imagery of friendships. They recognized confidentiality as a component of ‘intimacy’, which was similar to Group 1. As such the meaning of intimacy in relation to friendship was scattered in group 2, as per usual. However, notions of disclosure and confidentiality was present amongst group 2, just not conceptually linked with the term intimacy. Some of the respondents from group 2 did not fully accept confidentiality as a core factor of friendships, instead it seemed like a dynamic event that could materialize under the right circumstances:

Now it probably depends on how I was in trouble, but there are lots of friends I would be okay about calling if I was in trouble. Without coming up with anything specific. Sometimes I would also call the kids. It depends on the situation. (Lis, 48.1., 21)

The quote suggests that Lotte does associate with some of the values linked to intimacy, to her understanding or meaning-frame of friendship. However, in general group 2 struggled with associating intimacy with friendship. Lis, Otto, and Lotte appeared to mainly confide in their spouses if they had to share intimate details. It was not their first choice to confide in their friendships, instead confidentiality was a component of their understanding of romantic relationships. Group 1 understood intimacy as an emotional core concept associated with friendships.

4.3.3. Sub-conclusion to emotional intelligence

Salovey and D. Mayer conclude by questioning whether emotional intelligence relates to the self-actualized human, or if it is an acquired skill. They argue that emotionally intelligent people are generally experiencing wellbeing, and positive mental health because they are “open to positive and negative aspects of internal experience, are able to label them, and when appropriate, communicate them” (Salovey and Mayer, 1990: 201). This will enable emotionally intelligent people to “effective regulation of affect within themselves and others, and so contribute to well being.” (ibid.: 201). In addition, they argue that EI will empower people to redirect and regulate their moods and emotions in effective pursuit of their goals. My research design does not allow me

to test the propositions of Salovey and Mayer, but my limited findings suggest that EI does not necessarily correlate to well-being or a successfully led life across my sample. Instead, my findings suggest that EI is culturally available rather than individually available. In theory, if EI was a signifier of individual mental health, my data would show varying degrees of successes in life and well-being across generations regardless of stages in life or generational differences. However, group 1 clearly displayed higher 'scores' in EI than did group 2, but not necessarily greater success in life, nor a greater standard of well-being. Instead, my limited findings suggested that the emotional intelligence displayed by the respondents is a signifier of a culture or norm of talking and normalizing shared emotions, and not an individual achievement. Following this train of thoughts, if EI is a signifier of a cultural norm, it would point towards a structural transformation of the *meaning* of friendship, based on how the imagery of intimacy and care concerning friendships turned out to be very dissimilar across the two generations. Generally, group 1 associated care with checking in and emotional involvement in each other's lives, and some respondents from group 2 associated care with utility and practical matters. Intimacy as a concept related to friendships was meaningful to group 1, but inaccessible to some respondents in group 2. The level of articulation between the two groups showed how group 2 were more inhibited in associating the proposed concepts with their friends, whereas group 1 generally showed great range in their emotional language. Group 2 generally displayed an entirely different meaning frame of their friendships, which was much more limited than group 1 in terms of emotional reliance. The ideas or meaning frame structurally available to group 1 displayed comfort and ease when approaching intimacy and care.

5.0. Conclusion and discussion

The thesis has analyzed and discussed different approaches to the role and meaning of friendships. In the making of the thesis, I attempted to generate new epistemological conceptualizations of the meaning and role of friendships. During the interviews, a bottom-up approach was employed to enable the respondents to explore their own meaning-frame. This was done in addition to the top-down approach in which the concepts of intimacy and care were operationalized in relation to friendships. The study of intimacy and care contributes to the conceptual discussion in current sociological friendship literature. The first two sections in the analysis explored the role of friendships in relation to the conceptualization of the term ‘life witnesses’ and in the existential importance of ‘shared history’ in the formation of identity. The last section of the analysis explored the structural meaning of friends in relation to intimacy and care.

The first section, *life witnesses*, revealed that group 1 associated friendship with shared inner world insights. Life witnesses denote knowing each other intimately, thus it is not only knowing what is going in each other’s external lives, it also involves knowing what is going on *emotionally*. This is exemplified by the expectation of the respondents’ friends to witness their emotional development through their adult lives. Another finding, mostly observed in group 1, was the importance of having shared formative adult life together (from the age of 20 and onwards). Shared life with friends often surpasses the time spent with a partner, which prompted the importance of also spending time with friends outside of the relationship, as distinct individuals. Friends as life witnesses were not to the exclusion of their romantic partners, but in addition to their romantic partners. Ultimately, the concept was defined as the sincere witnessing and disclosure of inner and outer life events over a significant duration of adult lifespan. Group 2 were more diverse in their patterns of social interactions. Three respondents from group 2 primarily relied on their romantic partners as witnesses and tended to have more short-lived friends usually in accordance with their geographic location. This suggests a norm in which friends are not considered at the core of their social structures, instead the core consists of romantic partners and the family. Two respondents from group 2 were similar to group 1 in their practices and imageries of friendships. The section showed a tangible difference of the practices and roles of friendship between the two groups.

The second theme, *the importance of shared history*, showed the importance of friendships in the formation and continuation of identity. Shared life was identified as both reconfiguring, reinforcing, and confirming the respondents’ sense of self in the social interaction and context the

respondents were immersed in. The respondents in group 1 homogeneously recognized the importance of the practices of sharing both inner and outer world with their friends. This practice was conducted as a way to make sense of their lives by sharing and reflecting upon their biographical narrative with their closest friends. Following the ideas proposed by Anthony Giddens on the reflective nature of identity, the analysis revealed a role of friendships in group 1 that acted as a monitoring and supportive entity of the respondents' sense of self. By being witnesses to personal development as well as being witnessed – both internally and externally, it enabled the respondents from group 1 to manifest a biographical narrative that *reinforced* their sense of self. As such, the role of the friendships functioned as observers and reflectors on their shared history across time and space. This enabled the continuation of their biographical narrative and self-identity. Group 2 showed similar tendencies in some of the respondents, but overall, the trend was family oriented, meaning that sharing intimate and vulnerable aspects of their narrative were mainly confined to their romantic partner, or their family. Friends, in this constellation of the importance of shared history, were not as existentially important to group 2's narrative, as it appeared in group 1.

The last theme, *intimacy and care*, explored whether there is a fundamental shift in how we understand the meaning of friendships across generations. This was explored by use of an emotional intelligence (EI) framework, which is an ability learned through social interactions. It showed that group 1 engages emotionally and intimately with their friends, and that group 2 mainly shared emotional matters with their romantic partners. The understanding of care and intimacy as concepts were widely disputed across the two groups. Group 1 homogeneously understood intimacy and care as emotional concepts in relation to their friends. Most respondents in group 2 understood the concepts in practical or physical terms, revealing a significant chasm in the meaning-imagery of friendship. Group 1 generally scored 'high' in EI compared to group 2. Considering that EI is a learned skill, it implies that group 1 are more used to sharing and talking about their emotions. This suggests that EI is culturally available rather than individually available across my sample. It indicates that the emotional intelligence displayed by the respondents signifies a culture or norm of talking and normalizing shared emotions, and not necessarily an individual achievement.

The overarching tendencies revealed in the analysis showed a homogeneous group 1 who relied emotionally on their friendships similar to their partners and families. Group 2, on the other hand,

seemed more diverse and tended to rely more on romantic partners, and considered friends as highly important, but ultimately not essential. This could be credited to the fact that group 1 is a very individualized sample that have not spent decades with a partner or have started their own family. This prompts the epistemological puzzle of whether the discrepancy between the two groups is a symptom of different stages of life, or whether it implies a transformation of the meaning and role of friendships. There were several respondents in group 2, that exhibited similar ideas and ideals of friendships as group 1. Structural similarities across generations alludes to a transformation because it demonstrates that the tendencies are not confined to life stages. This was identified through Robin and Klaus' (G2) narratives where their approach to friendships were similar to group 1 in their behavioral patterns, as well as their imagery on friendship. It implies that the ideas on the role and meaning of friendships that are available to Klaus and Robert, is a symptom of a lifestyle, or a cultural norm. If it is a matter of cultural norms, it suggests that group 2 adheres to a different set of norms pertaining to the friendship discourse than seen in group 1. If the two group's imageries on friendship differ culturally it is reasonable to consider that it may be the result of processes of social change. This was further reinforced when I asked group 2, who were the most important people to them when they were young, to which they primarily referred to their romantic partner, or family, as sources of intimacy and care. However, their report was committed retrospectively, which induces uncertainty. Klaus and Robert' response to the question did nonetheless match the responses of group 1 in retrospect, and despite the uncertainties, it hints at a prevailing trend that counteracts the notion that the differences are only due to different life stages. The last theme suggested that EI was culturally available to my sample, exemplified by how they related to different concepts. The section showed that there is a structural difference in the paradigm of friendship across the two generations. It also revealed that emotional concepts were much more accessible to group 1, which suggests a normalization of talking about feelings. Based on this discussion, and given the fairly considerable and pervasive differences between the two sample groups, the thesis argues for processes of social change. While the conclusion or discussion cannot be generalized across the population due to the small sample size, the discrepancies between the two groups appeared rather substantial, and it does hint towards a tendency of a transformation of the importance of the meaning and role played by friends.

6.0. Literature

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7.0. Appendix

Summary vital statistics

Type of movement: Divorces:
number

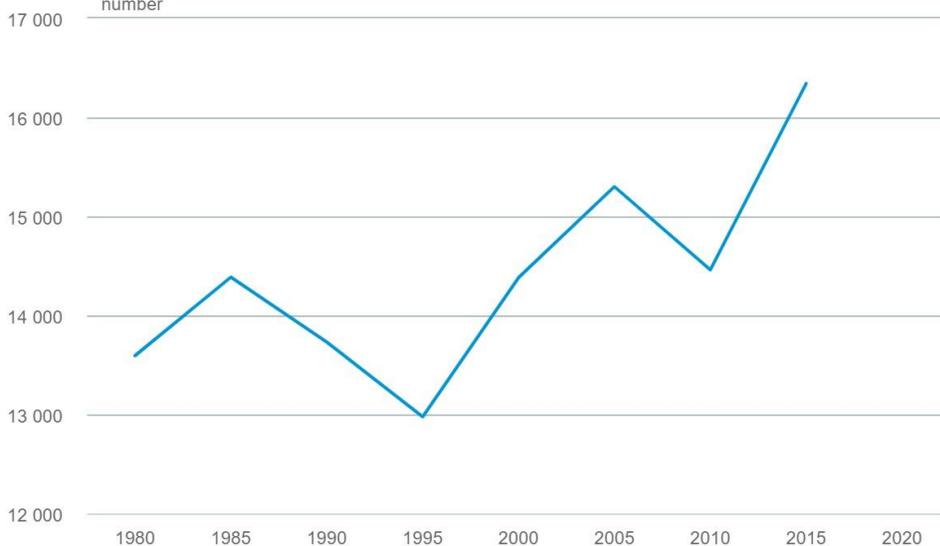


Figure 1: Key figures on divorces in Denmark (source: Statistic Denmark)
(Befolkning og valg (folketal) - Statistikbanken - data og tal, 2021)

Adults 1. January

Family type: Single women:
number

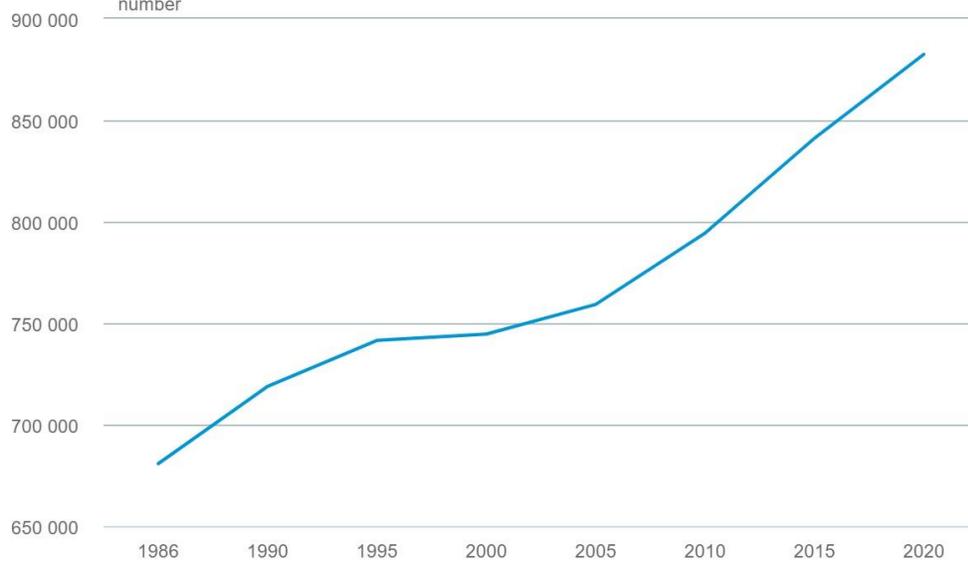


Figure 2: Single women in Denmark, 1986 – 2020 (Source: Statistics Denmark)
(Voksne 1. januar efter kommune, familietype, antal personer i familien, antal børn i familien, køn og alder - Statistikbanken - data og tal, 2021)

Adults 1. January

Number of children in the family: 1 child | Family type: Single women:
number

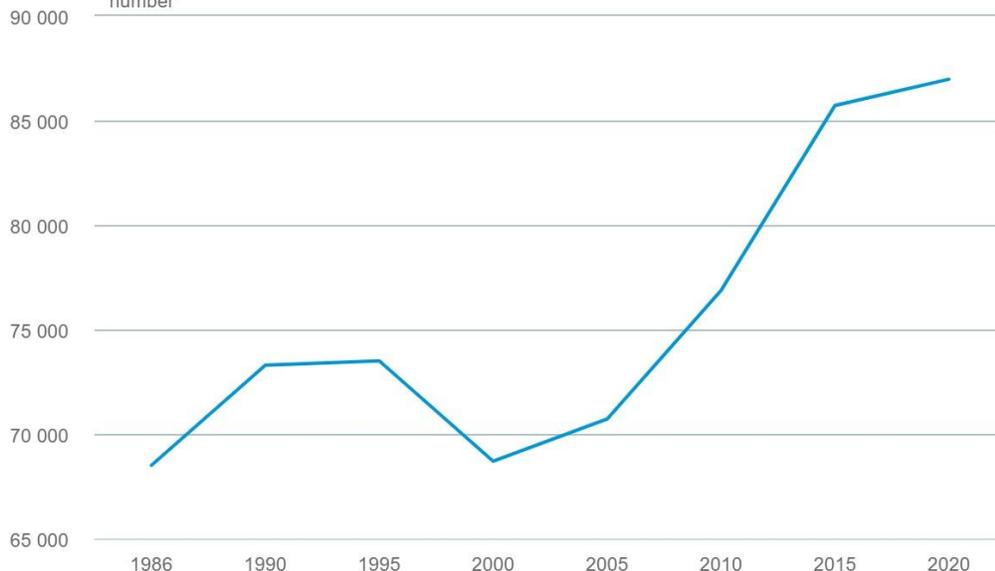


Figure 3: Single women in Denmark with one child (Source: Statistics Denmark)
(Voksne 1. januar efter kommune, familietype, antal personer i familien, antal børn i familien, køn og alder - Statistikbanken - data og tal, 2021)

Adults 1. January

Family type: Single men:
number

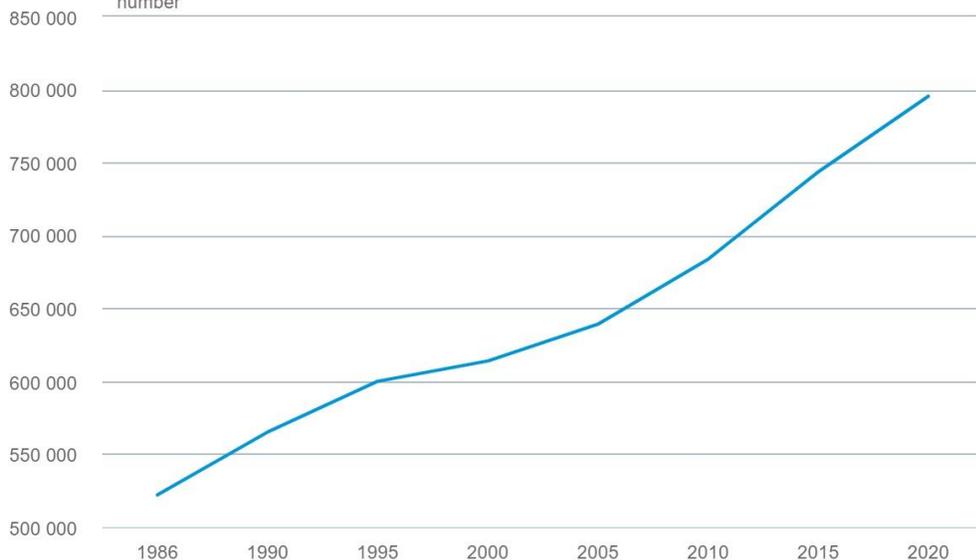


Figure 4: Single men in Denmark, 1986 – 2020 (Source: Statistics Denmark)
(Voksne 1. januar efter kommune, familietype, antal personer i familien, antal børn i familien, køn og alder - Statistikbanken - data og tal, 2021)

Adults 1. January

Number of children in the family: 1 child | Family type: Single men:

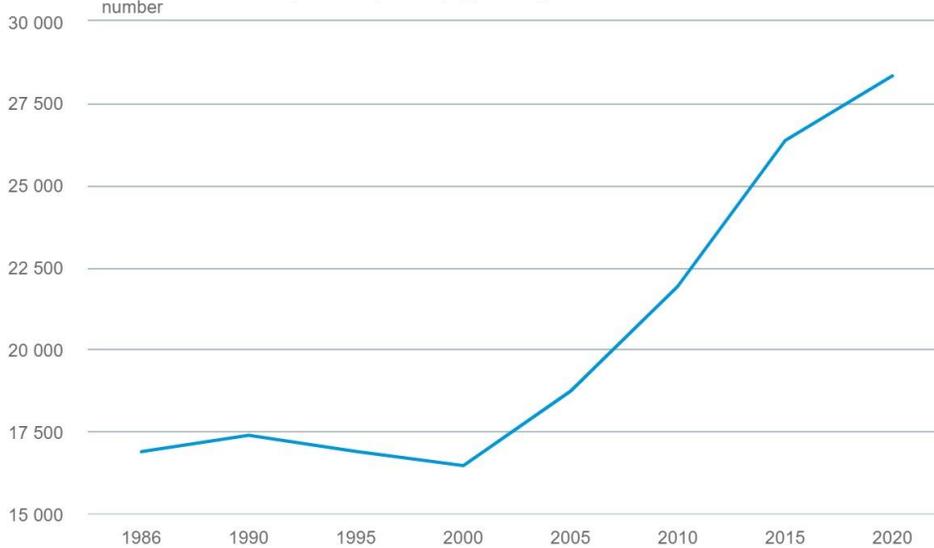


Figure 5: Single men in Denmark with one child, 1986 – 2020 (Source: Statistics Denmark)
(Voksne 1. januar efter kommune, familietype, antal personer i familien, antal børn i familien, køn og alder - Statistikbanken - data og tal, 2021)

25-45 year-olds,

Status for higher education: COMPLETED HIGHER EDUCATION:

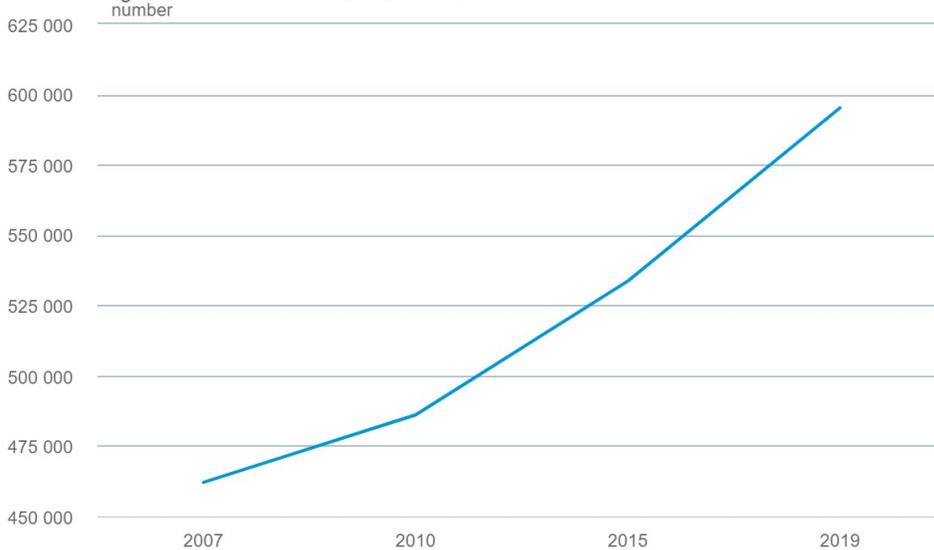


Figure 6: Inflation of education in Denmark, 2007 - 2019 (Source: Statistics Denmark)
(STATUS42: 25-45-årige efter status for videregående uddannelse, alder og forældres højest fuldførte uddannelse, 2021)