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The Meaning of Friendship
An investigation of what it entails to be a friend among young men and women

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Bachelor thesis: SOCK04, 15hp

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Supervisor: Malin Åkerström

The concept of having friends has been around for centuries. It is a natural part of one's life and yet, it is not until recently that scientist's has acknowledged it as a scientific topic. This study aims to investigate what it entails to be a friend today and which types of friendships exists, in contrast to the historical definitions and theoretical discussions addressed in Ray Pahl's book *On Friendship* (2000). Two focus group interviews were conducted, with one male and one female group, to find out how the concepts of friendship, acquaintance and best friend are defined today. The concepts on how to become friends together with what impact Facebook has had on friendship today was also discussed in the interviews.

The interviews showed that the core in friendship has maintained similar over the years, but the practice has changed. Women search for an emotional connection to their friends. Someone who will always be there for them and who they can open up to about anything, while the men look for commonalities, whether it being in common values or sharing a joke in a situation. They both however, are founded in finding comfort in another person. It also showed that men are starting to look for more emotional connections, and women more active ones, meaning they are starting to look beyond what it expected of them.

One problem that remains today is the question of whether men and women can be just friends, but the problem now lies in how the people outside of the friendship views them. It was also evident that the span between acquaintances and friends is quite large, with even more variances in between, mostly because of the mass use of Facebook and the way it has redefined how we maintain our friendships.

Keywords: friendship, friends, acquaintance, best friends, Facebook

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Human beings are social creatures. Making friends is one of most fundamental experience we will have as social creatures (Österberg, 2007), but despite that, friendship has just recently been addressed as a research topic (Österberg, 2007; Pahl, 2000). Friendship is something that is part of the private as well as the public. It can be analyzed both philosophically and ethically, as an individual condition or a social reality.

Therefore the purpose of this thesis is to examine the meaning of friendship, briefly discussing how it has changed throughout history, both practically and theoretically, but mainly the meaning of "modern friendship". The focus will be on how it is defined today and what being a friend implies, and what impact social networking sites has had on how friendships are made and maintained today. The questions that are going to be answered are as follows:

- What is an acquaintance*?*
- What is a *friend?*
- What does it take for a person to transition from acquaintance to friend?
- Does social networking sites play a role in friendship today?
- Is there a difference between men and women?
- If so, what is the difference between men's and women's definition?

The questions will be answered with the help of historical background combined with a qualitative research method to examine how the concepts are defined today. The study is limited to young adults, having gender as a comparison, intentionally leaving out issues of class and sexual orientation. The method that has been applied is focus group interviews. Two groups were interviewed: one male and one female group and the discussion revolved around their views and definitions on friendship today and if they experience that social networking sites has an influence on friendship formations.

The data from the interviews will be analyzed on the theoretical basis of Ray Pahl's terminology and definitions, combined and compared with the historical development of the concept of friendship.

Following this introduction is a historical overview of how the term friendship has been defined throughout history, and what is has implied. After that there is a discussion covering previous research done within the topic, which is followed by a discussion about the theoretical and methodological approach this thesis will take. The last part analyzes the

content drawn from the focus groups interviews and a summary/discussion regarding that analysis.

2. History and Background

To get a view of how friendship has been defined and practiced throughout the years, this part will address the history of the concept of friendship. From the Greek philosophers up until 19th century and the modern society.

2.1. Ancient Greece

To perceive a friend, therefore, is necessarily in a manner to perceive oneself, and to know a friend is in a manner to know oneself. The excellent person is related to his friend in the same way as he is related to himself, since a friend is another himself. (Aristotle, quoted in Pahl, 2000:21-22)

As mentioned in the introduction, the history of the concept of friendship has not drawn much academic attention. Still, friendship *has* been discussed. The quotation above is from Aristotle and shows that the meaning of the term friendship was discussed by the Greek philosophers, more than 2000 years ago. Aristotle was the first one that developed a proper theory around the essence of friendship, but other thinkers such as Platon and Socrates also reflected about the meaning of the concept. Aristotle most famous analyses concerns the distinction between different types of friends. He distinguishes between three types: friends of utility, friends of pleasure and friends of virtue, claiming that the latter is the only form that establishes a relationship between whole persons (Pahl, 2000). The quote given above is an example of Aristotle's view on virtuous friendship. He believes it is one of the essential ingredients of the good life (Pahl, 2000). Virtuous friends are the ones that are bound together, where each person provides a mirror in which the other may see himself. Friendships of utility and pleasure on the other hand are shallower. These are the friends that help you move or that you play tennis with. It can be compared to a process, whereas the friendship of virtue is an activity (Pahl, 2000; Stern-Gillet, 1995). The difference is that a process is undertaken for the sake of a goal. The goal differs from the action itself, and can therefore be described independently from it. This makes the process, seen on its own,

incomplete and imperfect. In contrast, an activity embodies its own end, and is therefore complete at any time you pursue it (Stern-Gillet, 1995).

Going in to the Middle Ages, the ideologies of friendship were largely based on the ones from the ancients. But with one major difference; they had to be translated to the Christian faith (Österberg, 2007). This form of friendship was the accepted form of friendship within the church and the monasteries and emerged fast in the Western Christian traditions (Österberg, 2007). With the development of the cathedral schools, a new and distinctive approach to friendship was consolidated. Instead they viewed friendship as an important and valuable part of Christian life. Some of the Christian letters showed that friendship could also be of practical use, as well as a being valued for its own sake (Pahl, 2000).

2.2. Towards a modern view of friendship

Until recently, the twentieth century sociologists considered friendship to be of ephemeral importance. The century began with the powerful assertions of Georg Simmel. According to Pahl (2000), Simmel claimed that modernity is destructive to friendship and stated that "*all the differentiating forces of modern life split us into specialized roles so that our distinctive cluster of roles it too uniquely individualized to be able to relate in a holistic way to another single person*" (as quoted in Pahl, 2000, p. 36). He implies that we would have separate friends for different types of interests and activities, and assumes that friends would respect the boundaries of these differentiated relationships. Generally, modern conceptions of friendship mostly focus on trust, fidelity and solidarity rather than the good, the fine and the rational, but for Simmel the modern type of friendship would be based on discretion because modern people have too much to hide (Pahl, 2000).

In both the ancients and the middle age, the philosophers and writers who addressed the topic of friendship, discussed it in a matter regarding homogeneous groups, more specific, friendships between men, making it seemingly easy to define what it entailed to be a friend. Today the definitions and types of friendship has multiplied. Other forms of relationships, such as siblings, partners, and colleagues, all include a type of friendship, but they all differ from one another. For example, the virtuous friendship talked about by Aristotle in the ancients might today only be seen in romantic couples. Questions like what it means to be a mother or a committed partner was better explored with a female friend than with a husband (Pahl, 2000). Pahl quotes Allan Silver who was professor emeritus of sociology at Columbia

University: "Spouses, lovers, kin and colleagues are friends, to the extent that they treat the objective conditions of their bond as collateral or inessential" (quoted in Pahl, 2000, p. 38). This quote by Allan Silver sums up the modern idea of friendship, although in a very idealistic way. Many sociologists have shown in their empirical research that most people's friendships do have clear boundaries (Pahl, 2000). For example, when you need financial advice you will not turn to your friends.

The aspect of romantic relationships has created an ambivalence when it comes to friendship. Most women feel obligated to refer to their partner as best friend, however when tensions or disputes arise in the relationship, women tend to reach out to their "actual" best friend for sympathy and support (Pahl, 2000).

In general, when it comes to friendship in the modern age, it is not at black and white as depicted in earlier writings. Today you socialize with a lot of different people, calling them all your friend, but you put them in different categories. This may be exemplified by quoting from reflection's by the character Frankie, in Tim Lott's novel *White City Blue* (quoted in Pahl, 2000, p. 18) comes face to face with this reality when he decides to divide his friends into separate groups to decide which one he will invite to his wedding:

> *"For a start there are friends you don't like. And I've got plenty of those. Then there are friends you do like, but never bother to see. Then there are the ones that you really like a lot, but can't stand their partners. There are those that you just have out of habit and can't shake off. Then there's the ones you're friends with not because you like them, but because they are very good-looking or popular and it's kind of cool to be their friend. Trophy friends.*
>
> *[...]*
>
> *Then there are sport friends. There are friends of convenience - they're usually work friends. There are pity friends who you stay with because you feel sorry for them. There are acquaintances who are on probation as friends. There are -."*

2.3. Terminology and definitions

As shown in the previous part the concept of friendship goes back all the way to the Greek philosophers, and with that follows the terminology of the concept. What the word *"friend"*

actually means and how it has been used has also changed throughout history. Starting again with the Greek philosophers, the importance here was that the actual word for friendship, when they discussed it, had a broad definition. The two words used at that time was *philia* (Greek) and *amicitia* (Latin). Philia was the word Aristotle used, but it didn't directly translate to friendship, but *close relationship* (Pahl, 2000). The different types of relationships that was covered under the term *philia* was sorted out in a way that resembled a pyramid. The groups in the pyramid was sorted after the foundation of how the different types of philia arose. At the base, closest to the ground, came the relationships that had their origin in *nature*, which is the love you have for parents, siblings and children. After that comes the relationships that are rooted in *necessity*. These are the friendships that are founded on needs and gives you benefits. Then next layer is made out of relationships that gives you pleasure, happiness and comfort and that are concluded by *amusement*. Finally, at the top of the pyramid lies what is most difficult to achieve: the perfected friendship that you wish to achieve in virtue and wisdom (Österberg, 1997). Although the pyramid helped to capture a lot of the ideas, it made room for a lot of variations and contradictions. For example, the philosophers disagreed on how many people could be included in a real, virtuous friendship. Only two or could it be more? They also discussed what role usefulness had when people became friends (Österberg, 1997).

Contemporary meanings are quite different. Both in the nineteenth and twentieth century the word friendship got a more delimited meaning, in a more every-day matter. Love became the word for warm relationships within a family and for passion between two persons of the opposite sex. The love relationship was both spiritual and sensual, uniting body and soul while friendship was a voluntary, mutual relationship between people who wasn't family or had sexual relations with each other (Österberg, 1997).

The data gathered in this study will both be compared to the historical discussions and findings of the meanings given to friendship as well as the terms and discussions developed by Ray Pahl in his book *On Friendship* (2000). The data regarding friendship on Facebook will be analyzed with the help of Alex Lamberts book *Intimacy and Friendship on Facebook* (2013). His concepts and terms will be used as the modern viewpoint of the concept and hence work as the theoretical base for this study. The analysis will mainly be based on the arguments he makes in chapters three and four: *Friendship and the Self* and *Friendship in Context*, with some excerpt from chapter two: *Friendship, Modernity and Trust*. Chapter three

addresses both what one does and needs to do in order to maintain friendships, and what influence having friends has on you. Chapter four goes outside the self, and addresses friendship in the different stages of life, from childhood to adulthood. It focuses on where you are in your life and what you are doing, and how your friendships look throughout your life. Pahl discusses these matters both how they are in the modern society, but also developing from the original thoughts of the Greek philosophers. In chapter two, Pahl discusses how trust has become a significant part of friendship, and how morality has become an aspect in how we conduct ourselves as friends.

3. Previous research

The following part will present what research has been done up until today regarding the concept of friendship.

As mentioned in the introduction, friendship has recently been given a scientific interest in the academic world, resulting in more and more research and studies done on the topic, all of them with different viewpoints and different focus. One area that has attracted particular interest is *gender. (REF in)* A lot of studies has been made with the interest of how gender affect us as friends, ranging from how women act as friends versus how men do, to cross-sex friendship between a heterosexual male and a heterosexual female who do not have sexual relations with each other and what that friendship entails (see below). As seen in history, when men and women had a relationship it was romantic and expressed with the Greek term *eros* (love) rather than *philia* (friendship). Such definitions are still embedded in today's society. In 2014, Schoonover and McEwan did a study exploring how the *audience challenge* affect cross-sex friendships. The audience challenge is one of four challenges developed by O'Meara in 1989, the other three being the emotional bond challenge, the sexual challenge and the inequity challenge (Schoonover & McEwan, 2014). It refers to how people outside the friendship relationship, yet in their network view the friendship. Either they see it as strictly platonic, or they assume there is a hidden romantic agenda from one or both members of the friendship (O'Meara, 1989). Felmlee, Sweet & Sinclair (2012) studied the norms one needs to consider depending on what type of friendship relationship the researched persons were involved in: a same-sex friendship or a cross-sex friendship. The study required the participants to read different vignettes, after which they had to evaluate the appropriateness of the friend's behavior, allowing the scientists to see when a norm was violated. The gender of

the friends was manipulated in the vignettes, making approximately half of the participants evaluating the behavior of a male friend, and the other half the behavior of a female friend. 46% of the sample evaluated a same-sex friend and 54% a cross-sex friend (Felmlee, Sweet & Sinclair, 2012). The common factor in both of the studies is that cross-sex friendship is not the normative appreciated. Cross-sex relationships are encouraged and institutionalized as romantic, thus making it challenging for the members of such friendship pairs to be perceived as strictly platonic to their surroundings. Both of these studies were also conducted on college students, or young adults, ranging from 18-29 years old.

Other studies involving the gender factor are the ones conducted by Migliaccio (2009), studying men's friendship as a performance of masculinity, and by Glover, Galliher & Crowell (2014) who made a qualitative analysis of young women's passionate friendships. The first study analyzes how the social construction of gender expresses itself in friendship among men. The concept of "doing gender" is utilized to explain the experiences of men in their friendship, using men in stereotypical gendered occupations, like the military, in contrast to men in stereotypical non-gendered occupations, like elementary teachers (Migliaccio, 2009). The second study have taken a more focused direction, examining the experiences of women in passionate friendships, meaning a friendship that possesses the characteristics of a romantic relationship such as emotional intensity and physical affection, but is derived of sexual intimacy and desire (Glover, Galliher & Crowell, 2014). Passionate friendship is a unique form of interpersonal relationship, ranging somewhere in between friendship and romantic partnership due to the fact that you cannot define it with broad interpersonal labels.

Moving away from the gender factor, more general studies on friendship has also been conducted. Hiatt, Laursen, Mooney & Rubin (2015) conducted a study, assessing the stability, quality and outcome in different types of adolescent friends. Firstly their goal was to identify categories of friendship that are replicable and distinct. Focusing on dyad relationships, they drew this information from reports on friendship quality from both friends in the dyad. By doing this, they expected to find at least one group who disagreed about the quality of their relationship (Hiatt, Laursen, Mooney & Rubin, 2015). Secondly, they wanted to describe the characteristics and outcomes that developed over-time and were associated to the different friendships. They expected that the stability of the individual perception of friendship quality would translate into consistency in the classifications of dyads into relationship quality groups. Comparing to a romantic relationships, where both people describe the relationships as high quality, the friendship relationships that were described as high quality by both

participants would less likely dissolve (Hiatt, Laursen, Mooney & Rubin (2015). Their results were consistent with their hypothesis. Both high and low quality friendships emerged. The participants agreed that some friendships are better than other. What is unique in this study however, is the inclusion of both friends perception in the dyad, enabling them to identify two additional types of friendships: relationships where participants disagreed on one or both characteristics of the relationship. Differencing from the studies previously mentioned, this study was conducted on a sample ranging from 11 to 13 years old.

4. Method

The following part will present the method that has been used in this thesis and discuss why it was the appropriate method for this particular study.

This study aims to examine how the concept of friendship is defined today in comparison to historical definitions. Seeing that this is a study examining how friendship is defined and looking in to what in entails to be a friend, it was decided that a qualitative method would be more beneficial. Qualitative methods are used to gain more understanding of the nuances and variations of a phenomenon, in contrast to quantitative methods which provides numerical data and statistics about a phenomenon. The aim in this study is to gain understanding of the development of the concept of friendship as well as its contemporary meaning, therefore a qualitative method was the obvious choice.

More specific, the qualitative method that was used was interviews. *Interviews are the preferable choice of method when the scientist needs more insight into things like people's opinions, perceptions, feelings and experience regarding a certain topic (Denscombe, 1998).* In this case, the type of interview that fitted best for the study was focus groups interviews. The focus group is a way to take advantage of group dynamics and to hear different people come together and share their experiences, perceptions, values and opinions regarding a common topic, making the group interaction the way to extract information (ibid.). The focus group format is conducive in making the participants elaborate each other's examples and stories with their own experiences and hence add to the discussion and create more topics to talk about. This study also has a comparative aspect, comparing men's and women's definitions of friendship. This was also a contributing factor in choosing the method. Both groups was given the same questions but their discussions was relatively free, allowing them to steer the direction of the discussion, with some help from the moderator. The study is not

based on a specific category or theoretical perspective, but has an exploratory direction, making the focus group interview the optimal choice for collecting data. The focus group works best regarding topics people could talk about everyday - but don't (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004).

4.1.Research sample and interview process

Here follows a short introduction of the interviewees in the two groups:

Anna, 22 years old. Studies organizational psychology.

Rose, 24 years old. Studies service management.

Kate, 20 years old. Studies social psychology.

Lena, 23 years old. Studies stage production.

Wiktor, 23 years old. Studies sociology and literature

Oscar, 23 years old. Studies sociology and psychology

Tom, 23 years old. Studies economics.

The data was collected from two separate focus group interviews: one all-female group, consisting of four people, and one all male group, consisting of three. The participants were all university student, ranging in age from 20 to 24 years old, all studying different things. Some of the participants knew each other before meeting in the session, but not everybody. Everybody did however know me, who acted as the moderator during the interviews. Both of the groups were composed this way intentionally, because of the moderator's knowledge of their readiness to discuss the subject, ensuring that the interviews would provide rich material, and that the subject would not be uncomfortable for the participants.

This convenience sample was chosen because: 1) they had all moved away from home to attend the university 2) they had lived in the new city for more than a year, meaning they had met a lot of new people, having had lots of opportunities to make new friends and 3) they were all at that age where it was most likely that they had already established strong friendship bonds with people in their home town, with childhood friends etc. Due to these factors the participants were likely to have made lots of different relationships with different importance to them, giving them a lot of experience to bring into the discussion.

One of the interviews took 46 minutes and the other 1 hour 10 minutes. I had prepared seven questions (see appendix), same set for both groups that worked as core points in the

interviews, but let the discussion flow naturally, allowing the participants to steer the direction of the discussion. I met both group in a smaller study room at the university, one group earlier in the morning and the other in the afternoon. The room was familiar to some of the participants but not all, so it worked as a neutral space for everyone. To create a more relaxing atmosphere, I offered cinnamon buns to the participants, and placed them around a round tables, making it easier for the participants to see each other and thus making it easier for everyone to take part of the discussion. Both interviews were recorded, with the participants' permission, with the intention to transcribe the material, using it as the data for the study.

5. Analysis

This part will present the findings in the two interviews, in comparison with the historical and theoretical background presented earlier. The analysis will be divided into themes, each theme addressing both the research questions and additional themes that was brought up during the interview. Following the analysis will be a short summary followed by finishing thoughts regarding the study.

5.1. Acquaintances and friends

The discussion around what it entails to be an acquaintance revolved around the same themes in both groups. They both explained it as a very shallow relationship to another person. The women talked about it being a person you know, but you would not "open up to", sharing your deepest thoughts. It's not someone you trust or would confide in. Both groups explained an acquaintance as being a friend of a friend, or someone you've met at a party once. Either way it is someone who's your relationship with is based on one certain event, place or person. Oscar, in the male group created a metaphor for it, comparing friends and acquaintances to the solar system and galaxies in space, with mixed reactions from the rest of the group:

O: "It's like, you are the sun and the planets that orbit are your friends. But there's other galaxies and like … I know they exist and even see them sometimes, but it's not they who are close"

W: "…pretty uncool metaphor…"

O: "*laughter* I thought it was cool!"

W: "'I am the sun in the middle'…"

 Pahl (2000) shares these definitions. He also explains that a relationship with an acquaintance is superficial, not depending on confidences or intimacies. He describes acquaintances as being a product of the situation. When the particular situation is over, when your mutual friend is not present or when the party is over, the relationship usually lapses. One factor however, that has change this fact is the use of social networking sites, specifically Facebook. When presented with the term *acquaintance*, the first example both group gave was "the friends you have on Facebook". This topic will be addressed later on.

Although both groups and Pahl (2000) agreed on acquaintances as being a superficial relationship, both of the groups discussed opportunities and situations for when an acquaintance could turn into something more, breaking from the strictly situational. Anna and Rose, sees no problem in having coffee in addition to the situation where they have previously met with an acquaintance, thus adding to the situations where people get to know each other:

A: "[an acquaintance] is definitely not someone I trust /…/ not someone I would confide in. But I could take a cup of coffee with an acquaintance"

R: "Yeah I think I could to that too…"

A: "it is still someone … like I could stand outside of [the campus cafeteria] and talk to for a long time and introduce as 'this is my acquaintance', I mean, that you even have some sort of connection and easy could have a cup of coffee with"

What both groups agreed on is a common situation in when you consider your acquaintance something more, is when you move to a new city, and the only one you know there is an acquaintance and they even had personal experience of it. The female had the following discussion:

R: "…if you don't have many friends in that new city, then it's easy that you view that acquaintance as your friend"

L: "Yeah, absolutely"

R: "If you are new in a city, then it feels like an acquaintance becomes something more. But like you said, in the beginning you may not open up and not feel any comfort or … trust, but I still feel I could contact them"

A: "Im thinking it depends on, just that initial contact when you are in a new city /.../ if I was new in a city I would call an acquaintance a friend pretty quickly because they are my firm point here. But now I have my circle of friends, and so the acquaintances are very much just acquaintances"

The men's discussion was brief, but came to this conclusion:

W: "My best friend here in Lund, she and I has known each other since we were 15, but then we were only acquaintances, and then I moved into her closet when I moved down to Lund. And…after that it was just bang bang bang! A lot of moments"

O: "Now we come back to the time thing, spending time with each other. That it leads to some form of friendship."

Instead of acquaintances, you may see these people as friends of utility, as Pahl expresses it (2000) since they are the people you chose to turn to in your practical need.

That particular situation of moving to a new city was a topic that was brought up in both groups. When you are in that situation, you are vulnerable and alone and very eager to find someone to connect with. The women discussed this actively, mostly with reference to personal experiences drawing examples from moving in to a student corridor, beginning a new class or starting a job in France. All of the discussions revolved around the search for *comfort.* As Lena describes it:

"When I moved down, I moved in to a student corridor … then, in the beginning you don't know anybody so it turns to … you kind of look for one of them to become … your potential friend! /.../ But when you have started to get to know everybody there and it came in new people, then at least I was totally uninterested in them … because I had 'my people' there already, the ones I hanged out with"

She then describes how she and 24 other people moved to France to work at a hotel together. No one knew each other previous to this move, but at location everyone immediately connected to each other, and she quickly found two people there she was sure of would become her best friends. These stories shows that when it comes to finding comfort, as they themselves put it, lies in finding a friend, or at least someone to be with. Pahl put a lot of emphasis on what the importance of having friends is to us. He explains that it is with the help of our friends we confirm out identities, and figure out how to live in a morally acceptable way. We use our friends as a moral-compass. Would he/she approve my behavior? Can I expect him/her to be my friend if I do this/ don't do this? (Pahl, 2000). This could be a contributing factor in the eagerness to find a friend when you find yourself in new surroundings, besides the loneliness. If you don't have someone who acknowledges you …. You will be self-conscious most of the time when you are out it public.

As mentioned earlier, in some cases your acquaintance in that new town would be of comfort, but according to the female group rarely develops into a closer friendship, more than perhaps a friend of utility. They agreed on that the acquaintance could act as a close friends to you at first, but when you make connections to people elsewhere and become close to them, the acquaintance remains just an acquaintance. They put emphasis on that an acquaintance isn't someone you trust or open up to and seeing that these are important factors in who they determine to be their friend, the lack of it will not change that relationship. This matches Pahl's description of women's friendship pattern. Although stereotypical, women's friendship are more or less emotionally based (Pahl, 2000).

Friendship may perhaps not be as emotionally based among men? Although the interviewed men did not specifically discuss this topic, some of their other discussions might give us some hints.. They agree that an acquaintance isn't someone that you are close to, but when discussing what it takes to become friends with someone, they put emphasis on more practical matters, rather than emotional. They discussed you only need to share a certain *moment* with another person, meaning you only need to struck a common instant in a situation, to see them as friends, matching Pahl description that men use the term 'friend' entailing a person they did things with (Pahl, 2000). This will be addressed further later on. This fact makes it more likely for men to at some point see their acquaintances as friends, compared to women. Another issue is the various distinctions being made between various categories. In their discussions, both groups mentions a sort of friend that lies in between just being an acquaintance and being close friends. The men seemed to see this as a certain sort of acquaintance, meaning you have different types of acquaintances:

W: "Everything from … just smiling and nodding when you pass each other, without removing your headphones, to stopping and just 'you son of a bitch, where the hell have you been?!' "

O: *Laughs* "Yeah really! There is a span there"

W: "But I do think there is a large gap between friends and acquaintances"

The women talked about the sort of friends you have, that you still don't share everything with but you hang out with a lot and have shared some moments with. Usually you meet these friends in a group, so it's more the group as whole that is your friend, rather than one person. Similar to the stereotypical definition of men's friendship, it is basically someone you do things with, or as Aristotle would put it, your *friends of pleasure*:

L: "…it depends on what you do with them I think, because with a best friend, I see them as a person you can … tell everything to for example, but with a mate (Swedish: 'polare'), for me, you can't tell them everything but you can hang out with them a lot /…/ there's a lot of pre-parties, there's a lot of going and watching sporting events /…/ it is not an intimate relationship"

As Pahl expresses it, the years before you become an adult, when you are in your early twenties, is the period when you learn most about being a friend. Here's when you have a lot of new experiences, resulting in you experimenting with different types of friendships (Pahl, 2000). What these friendship entail and which one you wish to maintain varies, as seen in the examples from the discussions.

5.2. Best friends

When asked to discuss the concept of *best friend,* the groups both agree that the label of Best friend, is something you only give to very few people. The women put emphasis on the fact that the best friend is someone who's always there for you and who always reaches out to you even if you are at different stages and places in life:

L: "If you've lived in different places then every time you come to a new place you maybe find some close friends there, and then you have…you always have, or maybe not always, a lot of times you still have people from different parts of your life"

R: "…and they who are still there are your best friends. I have also moved around a lot and they who has remained in my life and care about me and they who you try to see as soon as you can, they are the ones I see as the best. Then you have the ones that you are very close to, but you don't talk to now, they become more like…friends"

The men had a similar discussion, but put more emphasis on the length of time that you have known someone. They feel that the people you know the longest automatically becomes your best friend. You have kept them in your life for that long because you feel comfortable with them and like them and intend to continue to uphold the connection to them and therefor see them as your best friend. Wiktor tells:

"It's just that, you can become friends with someone at one stage in life, and be very good friend at that time, men if you at more time and you can continue being friends because you grow in different direction, then they aren't one of your best friends"

They consider the ***closeness*** over time as the determining factor in who they consider to be their best friend, whereas the women put emphasis on how much the ***distance*** affects the relationship. The time factor for the men was not just essential in the length of time you have known someone, but also in how much time you spend on that person. It takes time to build the trust that defines "the best friend", but you also have to make time and put effort into building that trust. And that time may be limited.

T: "I'm thinking that you could have that [trust] to more people but because it takes time to build that trust and friendship, and nurture it then it might be hard to have that with a lot of people. In that case you won't have time to do anything else.

O: Yeah I'm thinking the same. It has a time limit. You have a certain amount of time each day, and with that many best friends … it feels like best friends takes time somehow. You can't be best friends and talk once a year. That feels a little vague, if you even have best friends or not"

W: "Exactly. How much love do you have in you really?"

Another theme that was prominent in both interviews was the way you talked to each other. The women's discussion revolved more around *what* you say to your friends whereas the men's revolved around *how* you talk to your friends. For the women, it was more what you talked about, rather than time that determined how close of friends you were, more specifically, when you go beyond the pleasantries. In the case of the best friend, the women claimed that you have to be able to talk to that person about *everything,* knowing that they will remain by your side no matter what you disclose to them. Pahl comments on such cultural understandings, wondering why the sharing of one's embarrassing and shameful secrets has become so central in the notion of friendship, especially since the relationship between best friends is as close as you get to Aristotle's idea of virtuous friendship.

In the men's case, it's more about brutal honesty, or as they themselves put it "tough love". You have to be able to be blunt and straight forward with your best friends:

W: "It's like this tough love … 'should I cut my hair like this?' 'No! You would look like an idiot!'

O: *Laughs*"Exactly! And with friends is like this: 'Yeah that will probably look good on you'"

W: *squeaky voice* "Are you sure?"

O: *Laughs* Yeah exactly, a bit nicer"

A topic that occurred in the discussion was the importance of actively telling that you consider that person your best friends, giving them that label. For the women it was important, although they couldn't come up with a reason why. The men however, disagreed with each other. The women saw it as more of a competitive thing, that you become possessive of your friends. In the male group, one of the interviewees found it important that it is expressed that you are best friends with someone, whereas another interviewee didn't found as important. Both groups did however agree on the fact than when you talk about your best friend to other people, it was important you use the term 'best friends'. They both agreed that jealousy would easily occur when someone you refer to as your best friend instead refers to someone else as that.

The friends of virtue as Aristotle calls it, or in this case the best friend are ultimately friends of communication (Pahl, 2000). "*Our friends who stimulate hope and invite change are concerned with deep understanding and knowing. Each grows and flourishes because of the other in a spirit of mutual awareness*" (Pahl, 2000, p.79). The men had a brief discussion regarding this thought. That your friends are the ones that shares your worldview but at the same time allows you to grow:

> W: "*...We read about that, that... blah blah blah people only becomes friends with people who affirm their worldview. But that's boring*".

> O: "*But isn't it a bit like that, but then you can challenge it together. We might share worldview in a way, but then there's points where we go in different directions but due to ... that the core is kind of the same, or at least similar, then you can still ... share it [the worldview]*"

When it comes to the virtuous friendship Aristotle claimed that 'a man stands in the same relation to his friend as to himself' (Aristotle, quoted in Pahl, 2000; 78). Our friend is therefore our second self (Pahl, 2000). This view however, seems to has change according to the men. They would rather have people who are somewhat different from you and that "develops" you as a friend, rather than a copy of themselves.

   The interview showed that the interviewees believed that when you have named someone your best friend, it is hard to completely eliminate that person from your life, and furthermore stated best friend relationship were defined by being relationships of trust. Pahl explains that trust lies at the heart of friendship in today's society. There are no rules or contracts between friends today, you simply have to trust them (Pahl, 2000). According to the groups, this is an unspoken rule in the best friend relationship: that they are there for you no matter what. Adding again, the factor of time, the men compared it to the television show *"Who want to be a millionaire?"* making the "security points" the metaphor for the different stages of friendship. Wiktor explained it quite well:

> W: "*It feels a little like "Who wants to be a millionaire?" When you come to the security points it is like 'no matter what you answer you will win 2000 – even if we screw this up together, you are still my friend' and from there you can build yourself back up to become best friend*"

O: "And perhaps that why so few becomes your best friend, because there are so few who wins the million"

5.3. Becoming friends

When it comes to finding friends, both groups came to the conclusion that it doesn't take that much of an effort, as long as you find something you have in common with the other person, making you feel comfortable around them. What that thing is, the two groups had different preferences. The men talked a lot about *moments,* meaning you only need to share a special instant, a joke, a happening or an experience with another person, having that to lean on and thus create more opportunities to have more moments. When Pahl explains what friendship is, he gives a definition similar to the men's idea of a moment: "*friendships exists largely through an involvement in certain activities, which generates sentiments which, in turn, encourage further activities*" (Pahl, 2000, p.14). Although the idea seems the same, the group's idea of a moment is more of a small episode during a situation or activity and goes beyond being solely an activity. It is more something you share with the other person, something that tells you where you stand with each other. According to them it can be anything from helping each other when you are drunk to realizing you both like Monty Python. But the initial moment is just the starting point in building a friendship, you have to maintain what that first moments started and add more moments, again making time the crucial factor in becoming friends. "*Friendship requires time for it to flourish and develop*" (Pahl, 2000, p. 86). When you have established a friendship, it is important, according to Pahl (2000), that the time you offer or give your time is equal, otherwise the friendship is unlikely to form. This is a balancing act: If one has more time and is more available, one might be seen as too demanding. Anna in the women's group talked about such an experience, receiving support from the others:

A: "...just a month ago a friend calls and says 'we haven't talked in two weeks', and just that, if she is worried about our friendship in two weeks, then something is wrong /.../ Then a best friend became more of a responsibility for me, rather than a nice relationship"

R: "And there's where I feel that that's what I don't think it should be."

When it comes to interacting with new people, the women emphasized character similarities and openness as the factor in becoming friends. Anna tells about friends she made in her new class:

"I have two friends that I made in my class that I started this fall and we became… 'friends over night', like, really, it was so easy. Partly because we discovered that we talk in the same way /.../ it was easy to talk to them about important stuff"

The women put more emphasis on what you share **with each other** whereas the men emphasize what you share **together**, which coincides with the general notion of men's and women's friendship. Women's friendships are "face-to-face" whereas men's are "side-by-side", meaning women interact to each other in their friendships, whereas men do it with each other (Wright, 1982). The women did however fall in to a similar discussion as the men, regarding important or "defining moments" of friendship. They both agree that sharing a certain moment is an important starting point in building something new. However, they saw it as the starting point for when you become *best* friends with someone you previously just considered a friend, rather than simply becoming friends with someone. The difference is, this moment happens without much reflection to it. Rose gives a personal example:

R: "...she hasn't lived here in six months so we haven't seen each other that much, and we haven't talked /.../ and then in the fall when we both came back here I experienced a really tragic event during my welcome week and she had a tough time privately, so then I could, I called her, and she came over, and we just started bawling and we hugged. For me that was kind of a breaking point maybe /.../ the only one I wanted to call and talk to and that I wanted to come over was her."

A: "And when that does happen, you might haven't thought of it before but when it happens then it's like 'ah shit it is really just her I want to talk to right now'. I didn't need to reflect on it before but when it happens, it becomes clear."

5.4. Friends and lovers

In Aristotle's view, it was important to separate between *philia* and *eros*. Today, 2000 years later it is still important. The notion of women and men being 'just friends' with each other is more complex than the same sex friendship. In the movie *When Harry met Sally* from 1989,

the main character Harry remarks 'Men and women can't be friends – because the sex part gets in the way, unless both are involved with other people. But that doesn't work. The person you are involved with can't understand why you need to be friends with the other person. She figures you must be secretly interested in the other person – which you probably are.' (quoted in Pahl, 2000; 88-89). Looking back, it seems that the main problem was that men and women couldn't be just friends because of their claimed desire for one another. However, when this topic was brought up in the interviews, the problem seemed to lie with other people. The women mainly addressed this topic. They feel that even if you are really good friends with a man, you couldn't act in the same way you would do with a female friend. For example, they talked about how you could fall asleep together while watching a movie. Doing that with a male friend would give a different impression. They found that you usually need to over-define your relationship and defend yourself, and almost always bring it up that you are nothing more than friends. Especially if one of the persons in the friendship is in a romantic relationship. However, the core problem is how other people view your relationship, showing the relevance of Schoonover & McEwan (2014) and Felmlee, Sweet & Sinclair's (2012) studies. Anna shares a personal example:

"It is so ridiculous really, like you're saying, how other people view it. As soon as it is a guy and a girl, this old, damn view, then it is something between them. I was out last Friday in Malmö with a guy friend, we both stood in the bar and just 'are there any nice girls or guys here?', and then we looked at each other and just well no one is going to approach us anyway because here we stand like a freaking couple. /.../ it looked like he and I were on a date, but we both [had out heads turned in different directions] 'is there anyone else here?' If it had been a girlfriend it easily would have looked like 'oh well there's two girls who's out to find guys'..."

As previously mentioned, some people feel obligated to call their partner their best friend (Pahl, 2000). The men briefly addressed this topic, agreeing with Pahl's statement. Tom feels he can call his girlfriend his best friend, and the rest of the group agreed with his statement:

T: "I would also say my girlfriend is someone I would probably call my best friend. /.../ You become so close, now we live together also. You kind of become really close. It becomes like a best friend"

W:"It feels like thing a lot of people really says, that your partner becomes your best friend"

O: "Yeah someone you hang out with very intimately kind of…and all the time. And especially if you live together. Then you really build it fast."

At the end of their interview, the women chose to discuss another topic related to the relationship issue: being friend with an ex. They agreed it was the strangest form of friendship, if you manage to maintain it. They also agreed with the notion of calling your partner your best friend, but that was also the problem when you tried to create a friendship relationship after you've broken up.

L: "I mean, you've been best friends …"

R: "Best-best friends! You shared everything!"

L: "Yeah! Exactly! /…/ And then you have to go back. Either you remove the person completely from your life, or you become acquaintances or friends. It's really hard to decide what you're going to do"

As Pahl puts is, "on the one hand there is the transition from beginning as friends, and on the other hand there is the transition from being lovers and ending as friends" (Pahl, 2000, p. 88), He brings up the big issue on the matter: if friends should not be lovers, can, or should partners be friends? Both Pahl and the interviewees agree that despite what the philosophers says, the answer must be yes. But for this to happen, according to Pahl, the persons in the relationship has to find a different self in their partner. Another individuality, whose difference isn't so overwhelming, and threatens to invade your selfhood. Then you are truly fortunate (Pahl, 2000).

5.5. Facebook friends vs. "real" friends

When the concept of friendship was being discussed in the interviews, the topic of Facebook and Facebook-friends was brought up without being asked about. This shows that Facebook has become a major influence in how we manage our friendships today. The topic was discussed in both a negative and positive, yet questioning way. According to the interviews, all the aspects of friendship can fit in the Facebook range. From making friends to keeping them. Both groups agree than Facebook is a great help in maintaining your friendships, making it easier to contact and stay in touch with your friends. However, the lack of effort

needed to reach out makes you lazier. Members of both groups said that if they didn't have Facebook, they would have needed to call their friends instead, rather than just tag them in a post in their news feed. The women had a more positive attitude towards this:

A: "… I think the best friend relationship would look different without being able to update /…/ you can confirm the relationship more with the existence of social media. Like this: 'I haven't talked to my best friend in two weeks, I can @ [tag] her name in this funny vine and then'… or I don't know!"

The women agreed with the easiness of Facebook when it comes to maintaining friendships, but agreed even more when it comes to changes from acquaintance to friend. When the question of how they define an acquaintance was asked in the interviews, both groups brought up the friends you have on Facebook. Tom explains:

"…most of my Facebook-friends are acquaintances or ex-acquaintances even. They're not even acquaintances anymore, they just stay there after several years after you became Facebook-friends. Unless you clear out now and then … "

Anna and Katarina's discussion follows this thought:

A: "… now I'm happy to sift, because my god how important it is to just keep your closest. And, there's no harm in having acquaintances, you have that anyways, but they're not…"

K: "… its like Facebook, everybody sent friend request and wanted to … 'oh well I have 900 friends on Facebook' and your like 'oh…wow, kind of' "

A: "It's a weird thing, because I remember also thinking it was cool"

K: "And then you actually know 200 of them"

Lambert (2013) argues that due to this factor, the terms 'actual' and 'real' in relation to your friends brings up the question of how authentic your friendships actually are. Social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook are made for people to connect with their strong and weak ties (Lambert, 2013). However, the latter number exceeds the former, proven both by studies done on American and UK student, among other, and in the interviews conducted in this study. For example, the study done on American students show that students possess a

mean of 300 friends on Facebook, but only consider 25 percent their 'actual friends'. In the female group, Lena states that:

L: "I could easily sit alone in my room for the first month, without going out and still get friends on Facebook"

Laughter

K: "Send mass-friendrequests!"

Going back to the women's easiness to connect further with acquaintances on Facebook, this transition can happen both due to Facebooks easiness to talk to one another and due to the nature of its use. Anna tells about her experiences:

"I had some new friends at [the campus cafeteria] /…/ that I have met having a cigarette outside of the school /…/ somebody added somebody on Snapchat, you maybe had each other on Instagram and then when you saw each other in school the next day it became 'Oh I saw that you went running yesterday because you snapchatted'. How fast our friendship in these three weeks has become more than what it was. If social media didn't exist, we would only have the smoking breaks…"

Here she relates how she made a conscious choice to talk to her new found acquaintances through SNSs, developing their relationship to a friendship, making it more intimate. But intimacy with your acquaintances also happens without much deliberation, thanks to Facebook. Modern social psychology emphasizes the importance of self-disclosure in order to establish an intimate relationship, and a survey made on Canadian users discovered that people are more likely to disclose personal information on Facebook than in general (Christofides et. Al., 2009). Although this information may vary, it gives you knowledge about your acquaintances you wouldn't normally have. The women discussed this matter:

A: "Facebook has after all made it freaking diffuse. /…/ but there you share very private things that you probably mostly would have told your friends, but social media has made it easy for you to share with your acquaintances. It feels like such a typical thing when I run into an acquaintance, that you 'oh my god, you've been there, you've done this, congratulations on the engagement'. You know so much about the acquaintances"

L: "And also when it pops up that someone of my friends liked someone else's thing, then you find out about your childhood friends that you have no interest in being friends with on Facebook, but still you 'my god I was in the third grade with this person' and then like 'she's pregnant…..why do I know this?!'

K: "'It is so unnecessary that I know that'

In general, the discussion regarding Facebook mostly varied between the two groups. While the women talked about the easiness to reach out and acknowledge each other as the main way to maintain your friendships through Facebook, the men instead talked about the collection of memories on Facebook as a way to strengthen your friendships. Reminiscing and looking back on the times you spent together, seeing that 'We've been friends since then' works as a way for them to realize the meaning of their friendships. And without Facebook, they wouldn't think of that. But perhaps the biggest and most interesting difference between the groups is while the men claimed:

"But if you think friends, your ten closest friends as we mentioned earlier then I could just as easily keep in touch with them without Facebook"

The women said:

"But if I decided now that Im not going to have [Facebook], then I would have lost a lot of contact with my friends, even if I had had text messaging and a phone."

6. Conclusion

This study was made to examine how the concept of friendship is defined today, in comparison to previous historical findings. Two focus group interviews were conducted in order to find out the difference of acquaintances, friends and best friends in today's society. The interview also addressed the possible transitions from acquaintance to friend and from friend to best friend, and adding the use of the social networking site Facebook. In this study I also did a comparison between the male and female views on these topics.

The interviews clearly showed that we have all types of friendship relationships today, ranging from the person you had a really fun time with at a party once to the closest of friends who would stand by you no matter what. Looking through history it seems that the core idea

of what a friend should be hasn't changed, but rather the approach on how you act as that friend. For example, women are still looking for an emotional connection, now expressed in terms of trust and openness, and men are still looking to the practical and active, now in the form of finding something in common, whether it be values, sense of humor or an interest. The meaning of friendship and the search for a "true friend" may however be changing a bit. In this study the men also express their need in having someone that "develops them", and the women described the importance in experiencing something together with their friends in order to evolve their friendship.

This study left out some issues, such as culture, class and sexual orientation was excluded but could be used in a similar study. The sexuality factor was brought up in the group discussions and would contribute to an even more interesting investigation regarding same sex friendship, since the romantic factor would once again be included.

The influence Facebook has had on friendships today has almost redefined the concept, creating even more questions to study. Regarding to the question of whether or not men and women can be just friends with each other, the discussion showed that there's no problem in that. The question to ask now however, is instead 'Can society allow men and women to be just friends with each other?'

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