

# **The friendships of young men**

## **Masters Thesis**

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by

**Desirée Z Rautenheimer**

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Supervisor: **Professor Graham C Lindegger**

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## **Abstract**

### **The friendships of young men**

This study on the friendships of young men aimed to explore how young men perceive and experience their friendships. It also sought to understand whether and how young men negotiate issues of care and support in their friendships. The sample consisted of 10 students aged between 18 and 25 years old. The study was guided by a qualitative design. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the young men. Thematic analysis was used as the method of data analysis. It was found that young men value elements within their friendships such as the opportunity to confide personal information, receive guidance and empathy from friends. The young men value care and support in their friendships, and these are expressed through both relational and instrumental means. While the young men acknowledge the importance of emotional support, they report that it is a precarious matter which needs to be negotiated within the friendship.

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# *Chapter One*

## **Introduction to study**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Friendships are an important aspect of human development and a necessary relationship amongst the variety of bonds that we share with others. A number of studies (Doty, 1993; Zarbatany, Conley & Pepper, 2004) have focused on female friendships and have used these findings as a platform from which to compare male friendships. Thus research on friendship has explored gender as an important factor which influences friendship norms. Few of these studies, however, have explored and demonstrated how young men experience close same-sex friendship and what meaning they attach to their experiences. As such, this study focuses on the meaning of young men's friendship as well as their views on the importance of their experiences.

Recent studies on friendship (Mattis, Murray, Hatcher, Hearn, Lawhon, Murphy & Washington, 2001; White, 2006;) state that cross-sex friendships can offer meaningful and distinct advantages, such as the liberty of young men to talk openly with female friends. These studies seem to suggest that closeness in friendship for men is mostly experienced or shared when in cross-sex friendships. While current research (Mattis et al., 2001) suggests that men learn and benefit from friendships with females in terms of support and closeness, less has been studied on how men perceive closeness and support in same-sex friendships. This study focuses on whether young men form friendships with both men and women and also in understanding how young men experience friendships with males by comparison with friendships with females.

The current study also aims to explore how the young men provide and negotiate care and support in their friendships and whether and how they acknowledge and/or deal with personal vulnerability. What was also of importance was to explore whether there are any novel patterns of friendship emerging among young men.

This study used a qualitative framework. Previous studies on friendships which have used quantitative means (Bowman, 2008) such as questionnaires seem to neglect exploring the subjective experiences of the phenomenon being studied. As such, in-depth interviews were used to explore how the participants experienced their close friendships. The data analysis was done by using thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) rigorous yet flexible step-by-step process.

## **1.2 Objectives of the research**

The following objectives were important in guiding the research process:

- What is the experience and meaning of friendships for young men?
- Do young men form friendships with both boys and girls?
- Do young men experience or provide emotional support to one another? Does the support young men give and experience deal with personal vulnerability?
- Are novel patterns of friendship emerging among young men?

## **1.3 An overview of the chapters**

The first part of this thesis aims at introducing the background to the relevance of this area in research. Chapter two of this report provides an overview of the different elements of friendship. Chapter three describes the qualitative framework which was used. This section of the thesis identifies and describes the methods of research which guided the study. This includes describing the process of research as well as how the findings were analyzed. This is followed by chapter four which includes the reporting of the findings in terms of themes that were most significant. Lastly is the discussion of these findings, which aims to conclude the purpose of the study and also reflect on the discussion.

## *Chapter Two*

### **Review of Literature**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Friendships are an important part of one's identity, as has been evident in research investigating relations among young people, and identity can in turn be constructed through the friendships people make. According to Bohnert, Aikins and Edidin (2007) emerging adulthood between 18 and 25 years old, is marked by instability, a lack of adult responsibilities, and commitments that afford individuals the opportunity and time to explore prospective life courses related to identity, work and worldviews. Although this study explores the close friendships of young adult males, it is vital to be aware of the importance of friendships throughout the human life span. Radmacher and Azmitia (2006) report that emotionally close, intimate friendships can offer important developmental opportunities for adolescents and emerging adults, for instance creating a sound environment or "comfort zone" in which to explore and validate their identities. Furthermore, although emerging adulthood is hypothesized to be a period of development and exploration, few studies have examined changes in close friendships during this period (Bohnert et al. 2007). According to Felmler and Muraco (2009), friendship is underrepresented in the social scientific literature, in which the large majority of studies are on the romantic or marital ties of young adults. Most of these studies also lack in exploring the meanings and make-up of emerging adult male friendships during this transitional stage in development. Therefore one of the aims of this study is to explore how this population relates within close friendships, and also their personal experiences thereof. This includes their personal understandings and performance of masculinity within these friendships, whether they show vulnerability and also how they demonstrate care and support.

## 2.2 Elements of Friendship

The bond created through friendship is a potentially important aspect of human development. According to Seymour, Reid and Bloom (2009), developing and maintaining close intimate friendships satisfies the universal need for interpersonal relationships. Friendship is a relationship marked by vulnerability, altruism, openness, impulsiveness, and a need for belonging, traits that often tend to be attached to femininity (Butera, 2006). In simpler terms, the essentials of friendship are reciprocity and commitment between individuals who see themselves more or less as equals (Hartup, 1992). According to Berndt and Hanna (1995) intimacy within friendship is defined as a process in which one person expresses important self-relevant feelings and information to another, and as a result of the other's response comes to feel known, validated, and cared for (as cited in Rotenberg, 1995). Consequently, according to Bauminger, Finz-Dottan, Chason and Har-Even (2008) intimacy does not necessarily mean closeness, but rather the ability to negotiate closeness. Therefore, Bauminger et al., (2008) suggest that intimacy within friendship incorporates several abilities such as to seek support, provide support and being comfortable enough to negotiate within the friendship. Therefore, emotional intimacy is seen to be one of the distinguishing features of close friendships; however, intimacy may be expressed in many different ways. Moreover, intimacy may be expressed and experienced as verbal or non-verbal means of communicating closeness within friendships. According to Guerrero and Chavez (2005), prosocial behaviours such as shared activity, self-disclosure and supportiveness appear to be important elements associated with emotional closeness and relational satisfaction in friendships. One of the most extensive lines of investigation has been on sex differences in personal disclosure in intimate relationships (Rotenberg, 1995). As such, Simpkins, Park, Flyr and Wild (2006) suggest that perceptions of relationship qualities are likely to differ based on gender and the type of friendship quality. However, the elements of closeness within friendships should not necessarily be viewed as gender specific but rather are ingredients to ensure a fulfilling and sustainable friendship. Despite the extensive empirical differences in friendship attributed to gender, researchers caution against placing too much emphasis on gender distinctions (Felmlee & Muraco, 2009). Therefore, probing the friendships of young men may contribute to the limited literature on how male friendships are experienced with less focus on comparison to female friendships. Furthermore, as urged by Seidler (1994), "we have to take

seriously men's accounts of their experiences", recognising the meanings they attach to those experiences, such as their friendships in particular. In addition, Brooks (2007) supports this sentiment by stating that "researchers have rarely looked at how men *do* feel or experience intimacy and emotionality in their relationships with other men" (p.18). However, Brooks does acknowledge that a few scholars have turned their attention to the daily lives of men as a way of appreciating how those meanings are understood, struggled with, accepted, or rejected (2007). As such, exploring young male friendships may contribute to existing literature by considering "masculinity as a relational experience" (Brooks, 2007).

In her study Butera (2008) explores the practice of men's friendships making reference to the differences between 'mateship' and friendship. According to Butera (2008) friendship involves an open invitation to show vulnerability that allows for guards to be let down and all aspects of the self to be exposed in the company of the close friend. However this construction of friendship may be viewed differently by different people, depending on what their needs may be and what purpose the friendship fulfils in their lives. White (2006) further elaborates that friendships offer comfort during difficult times, a means for the expression of fears, emotions, and fantasies. Furthermore, it offers companionship, acceptance and greater self-understanding (White, 2006). These attributes appear to be an intimate invitation to sharing someone's personal life experiences, which makes it a delicate area of research. As such it is necessary to sensitively explore the level of intimacy within male friendships. The afore mentioned qualities are further enhanced by a "shared history" which reflects the availability of mutual past experiences that led to feelings of closeness (Zarbatany et al., 2004). These mutual past experiences pose the potential to be further explored as the shared history may give insight into how the friendship has evolved through these experiences.

### ***2.2.1 Hegemonic Masculinity***

Connell has arguably been the leading gender theorist to write on masculinity and its social construction. In particular Connell's work has been known for his concept of hegemonic

masculinity. According to Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985), hegemonic masculinity is rooted in patriarchy and involves the ability to impose a particular definition of masculinity that is part of what is meant by “hegemonic”. Secondly, hegemonic masculinity is a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power over women and other men, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance (Carrigan et al., 1985). As such, hegemonic masculine standards not only influence social structures but also have the potential to affect personal relationships such as the friendships of men. It is therefore important to consider the effects of the practice of hegemonic masculinity within close male friendships. However, it is also important to challenge uni-dimensional constructions of masculinity within men’s friendships (Hyde, Drennan, Howlett & Brady, 2008).

In their findings, Oransky and Merecek (2009) report that “boys strongly emphasize that a public demonstration of hurt or distress would be met with ridicule from their peer group” (p. 228). In turn, it was urged that peers do the same and avoid seeking out or extending emotional support (Oransky & Merecek, 2009). Thus, it becomes evident that for young men, any demonstration of emotion is regulated according acceptable peer group norms, that is, hegemonic masculinity. This not only reenacts this particular performance of masculinity, it also affirms the masculinity of the actor. Traditionally, the hegemonic masculine manner of communicating within close friendships tends to be less personal as compared to feminine friendships. According to Oransky and Merecek (2009), compared with girls, teenage boys have reported less intimacy, affection and companionship in their same-sex friendship. Contrary to this, Chu (2005) found that although the male peer group culture mitigated against boys developing close male friendships, boys in her study were actually capable and indeed desired emotional friendships (as cited by Hyde et al., 2008). Furthermore, Brooks (2007) assumes that many studies of male-male friendships present a monolithic view on masculinity and deny the possibility that there are many ways to be a man. According to Connell (1992) certain constructions of masculinity are hegemonic, while others are subordinated and marginalized. Therefore hegemonic masculinity is distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). According to Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) masculinities are

constructions of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular setting. It is thus suggested that “boys and men choose the position that helps them ward off anxiety and avoid feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability” within friendship (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) also suggest that men can adopt hegemonic masculine positions when these are desirable; as a result masculinity represents not a certain type of man, but rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices. As such, it is possible for young men to relate differently when confronted by various contexts. For instance, they may perform a certain type of masculinity when relating to a close friend, and in turn may perform differently when faced with a stressful or demanding situation.

### ***2.2.2 Vulnerability within friendships***

According to Tokuno (1986), a friend can act as a role model, reference group, a listener, understanding, a critic and advisor, and a companion. As such, friendship is multidimensional as it carries various meanings and a number of benefits. The multiple functions that friends fulfil and their provisions of support and wellbeing, suggest that having a close friend during challenging experiences would undoubtedly help individuals manage during those situations (Boute, Pancer, Pratt, Adams, Birnie-Lefcovinitch, Polivy & Wintre, 2007). These challenging experiences may include young men entering a transitional phase, such as university life which is a period filled with novel experiences and adapting to the new lifestyle. Seidler (1994) suggests that it is as if, through the process of growing up, men have learnt to leave their emotional selves behind. He also adds that often men are deprived of an emotional language which allows them to identify and articulate their experiences (Seidler, 1994). This type of socialisation allows for men to preserve their masculine identity through managing their vulnerability within friendships, through limited emotional expression or disclosure (Seidler, 1994). Similarly, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) mention that men are able to adapt among multiple meanings of masculinity according to their interactional needs. Another manner of managing vulnerability within male friendship is done through ‘mateship’ which is a constrained subcategory of friendship (Butera, 2008). Mateship is described as a fraternal relationship bound by loyalty and

courage, practical support, toughness, independence and resilience, and it is light-hearted camaraderie, where overt displays of vulnerability or emotion are to be avoided (Butera, 2008). Moreover, exploring close friendships experienced by young men who ascribe to various forms of masculinity may give more depth to individual experiences. According to Seidler (1994), as a gendered pathway of growing up, boys learn that self-control means suppressing feelings and emotions. This often means that boys have to be careful to sustain a particular meaning of their relational behaviour, so that they do not compromise themselves in the view of others (Seidler, 1994). Consequently, the boys' actions are no longer their own but are regulated by those who expect certain behaviours, that is, the society. This observation is contrary to what Wiseman (1986) holds as he describes friendships as fragile because there is little societal pressure for friends to maintain them (as cited in Guerrero & Chavez, 2005). This is particularly interesting because to the degree that friendships are assumed to be personal and not public, they are nonetheless influenced by society's socialisation of gendered relations. Seidler further states that suppression of emotions can lead to difficulty in responding to others in an open and emotionally responsive way (1994). Furthermore, it is likely that future relationships would be affected by this style of responding to emotional cues. However, it is also possible that one may learn or adopt more appropriate ways of responding to emotional cues as relationships evolve and mature. This in essence relates to the nature of friendship as there are different levels and meanings of intimacy within friendships as they progress. Consequently, the different levels and meanings of intimacy appear to be an area of friendship less researched. As such it is necessary to explore how intimacy and vulnerability within friendships is experienced and dealt with by young men. Furthermore, as noted by Wester, Fowell Christianson, Vogel and Wei (2007), there is a lack of empirical exploration of how young adult men's social relations, such as friendships, are related to their ability to adapt to the socialized male gender-role norms they experience.

The lack of intimacy within male friendships results from societal pressures to perform hegemonic versions of masculinity, such as emphasis on competitiveness, strength, invulnerability, and dominance, behaviors identified as counterproductive to sustaining close relationships (Brooks, 2007). According to Brooks (2007), most of the research emphasizes the



differences between male and female friendships and mostly contrast the quality of friendship experienced by both sexes. In most of these studies the feminine friendship style has been depicted as being the standard and ideal for intimate friendships. Cancian (as cited in Wood & Inman, 1993) observed the trend that women were seen to be the experts in relationship management and that ‘feminization of love’ was occurring in the United States. This may have been the beginning of male friendships incorporating some elements from female friendships in order to accommodate a more inclusive masculine manner of intimacy within their friendships. According to Wood and Inman (1993), scholarship consistently portrays women as the “intimacy experts”. This friendship style was regularly described as being closer than that of men, as women use verbal and emotional ways of communicating closeness (Wood & Inman, 1993). These authors contend that “circular logic in which concepts, methodologies, and interpretations that reflect feminine, but not masculine, ways of interacting yield the unsurprising finding that women exceed men in creating and sustaining closeness” (Wood & Inman, 1993, p. 2). Similarly as Wellman (as cited by Brooks, 2007) points out, academic discourse on friendship tends to treat men’s friendships as inferior to those of women because much of the conversation is about helping men adopt behaviours, like self-disclosure, typical of female relationships. As such, these discourses give less attention to how exactly male friendships are experienced as they seem to regard the female quality of friendship as more intimate to that of males. Wood and Inman (1993) advise that men within their friendships generally engage in a distinctive style of showing love and therefore, intimacy. It is also worth noting that it is likely that men within close friendships display vulnerability in a manner which is consistent with their level or intimacy.

### ***2.2.3 Support and Masculinity***

According to Addis and Mahalik (2003) role socialization paradigms assume that men and women learn gendered attitudes from cultural values, norms, and ideologies about what it means to be men and women. Consequently, many aspects of seeking help from professionals, such as relying on others, admitting to need help, or recognizing or labeling an emotional problem, contradict with the messages men receive about the importance of self-reliance, physical toughness, and emotion (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Similarly, within male friendships it may be

challenging for an individual who ascribes to these masculine norms to openly seek some form of support from another male friend as this could make him appear vulnerable. Wester et al. (2007) postulate that gendered masculine norms are inherent to gender-role conflict as there is a restriction of emotional expression, which further restricts seeking support. Furthermore, Addis and Mahalik (2003) describe “gender-role conflict as the negative consequences for men’s well-being of adopting particular masculine ideologies”, such as emotional inexpressiveness for instance.

Wester et al. (2007) define social support as the process whereby people manage social resources to enhance and complement their personal resources for meeting demands and achieving goals and psychological health variables. Furthermore, it is suggested that social support serves a protective role primarily during times of stress by enhancing adaptive coping behavior (Wester et al., 2007).

#### ***2.2.4 Self-disclosure***

According to Radmacher and Azmitia (2006) the growth of intimacy in a friendship is mostly measured through self-disclosure of personal thoughts and feelings. It is also suggested that although self-disclosure may be the primary pathway to intimacy in female friendships, a certain level of self-disclosure and shared activities lead to intimacy in male friendships (Radmacher and Azmitia, 2006). This suggestion seems to propose that self-disclosure is an unlikely primary pathway to intimacy in male friendships. Rotenberg (1995) reports that the majority of the studies indicate that females engage in more personal disclosure to same-sex peer friends than do males. It would therefore be crucial to explore self-disclosure between young men and the benefits or importance to intimacy within their close friendships. Berndt and Hanna (1995) caution that intimate self-disclosure does not always have positive effects on individuals and their relationships and that not all self-disclosure involves intimate information.

### ***2.2.5 Psychological Benefits of Friendships***

Long-term friendships appear to have a number of advantages. Grief (2006) reports that adults who have friendships live longer and healthier lives as they are in better physical and psychological health. Therefore friendship has numerous health benefits for individuals in later life (Felmlee & Muraco, 2009). It is also suggested that both frequent interaction and emotionally close friends influence well-being, although psychological well-being also may cause an increase in friendship activity (Felmlee & Muraco, 2009). These friendships are also significant in providing support and general well-being which further reduces the likelihood of mental illnesses such as depression for instance. Mental illness is stigmatized in many communities, consequently seeking counseling for emotional problems from professionals or otherwise, may be avoided by men who do not wish to appear vulnerable (Aronson, Whitehead & Baber, 2003). As a result if men are socialized to not be vulnerable with others and to deal with problems on their own, they are not capable of seeking help when they need it and their health and psychological health needs may go unattended (Grief, 2006). Consequently, Seidler (1994) suggests that as men, it is easy to feel that sharing negative feelings will lead to rejection and abandonment by others. Furthermore, boys often learn to prefer to be on their own than to take the risk of making themselves vulnerable to others (Seidler, 1994). This socialization may lay the foundation within close male friendships to be withdrawn and closed to issues of self-disclosure and help-seeking. As a result, this type of socialization of young boys further reconstructs hegemonic masculinity, thus having a direct influence on their friendship experience as they grow older. As such, they may also not ask their significant others for help when they need it (Grief, 2006). Therefore, it can become quite natural for men to experience themselves as somehow locked within themselves, wanting to reach out to others but feeling unable (Seidler, 1994). However, it becomes clear that many men benefit from early male friendships as well as develop a sense of self through experiences shared across the life span.

## 2.3 Development and Friendships

### 2.3.1 *Early Childhood and Adolescent Friendships*

According to Hartup (1992), preschool and younger school-aged children's expectations for friendship center on common pursuits and concrete reciprocities. Later, children's views about their friends center on mutual understanding, loyalty, and trust (Hartup, 1992). Furthermore, Hartup's (1992) findings do not discriminate between female and male friendships at this level of development, but rather focus on the different kinds of friendships which contribute to early childhood development. However, developmental research on adolescent friendship has consistently shown boys to have fewer close friendships and to experience lower levels of intimacy within these relationships as compared with girls (Chu, 2005). Oransky and Merecek (2009) further elaborate that compared with girls, teenage boys report less intimacy, fondness, and companionship in their same-sex friendships. This finding further supports the opportunity to explore how young males as individuals view their friendship quality; and not as compared to the friendship of the opposite gender. Chu (2005) highlights that adolescent boys perceive their male peer group culture and their socialization toward masculine norms emphasized within this culture as negatively influencing their abilities to develop close male friendship. This finding emphasizes how boys' social and cultural contexts may have a potentially negative impact on boys' experience of friendship as certain norms govern friendships. The finding also emphasizes a discrepancy in performing dominant codes of masculinity, as individuals experience these codes differently. Consequently there may be a precarious balance between satisfying friendship needs and adhering to masculine norms that specify the close friendships of males. As such, there is not just one 'sex role' for boys and one for girls, as there are multiple patterns of masculinity and femininity in contemporary societies (Connell, 2002). Furthermore, it is claimed that friendships between young males provide them with autonomy and status, not social support, empathy, or nurturance (Oransky & Merecek, 2009). Although friendship as an age-graded task is a highly valued one for adolescents, different individuals approach this task with distinct aspirations and needs in mind (Sanderson, Rahm & Beigbeder, 2005). As such, individuals may enter a friendship with their own needs in mind which the friendship is to

satisfy. In terms of development, friendships may also contribute to the growth of mastery by providing instruction, instrumental aid and opportunities to rehearse skills and knowledge (Zarbatany et al., 2004). These characteristics may later be developed into social support which presents itself in various forms and is important during developmental transitions such as entering the university context.

### ***2.3.2 Attachment and Friendship***

Wise and King (2008) report that the family helps to influence the child's future relationships by molding their self-esteem and self-concept and also their expectations, outlook and interpersonal performance. According to attachment theorists, the child who receives responsive and sensitive parenting from the primary caregiver forms an internal working model of that caregiver as trustworthy and dependable when needed and develops a model of the self as someone who is worthy of such care (Bowlby as cited in Rubin, Dwyer, Booth-LaForce, Kim, Burgess, Rose-Krasnor, 2004). Furthermore, the attachment style experienced in early relationships, especially family, has a significant impact on the quality of future relationships and the skills applied within these relationships (Bowlby as cited in Wise & King, 2008). Rubin et al. (2004) maintain that the quality of the child-parent attachment relationship has been associated with social competence and adjustment/maladjustment from early childhood through adolescence. Wise and King (2008) have found that the family environment appears to offer a promising opportunity of inquiry for gaining an understanding of adult experience in the development and preservation of close and satisfying relationships. On the other hand, early childhood experiences, marked by "destructive emotional training", result in boys' "emotional illiteracy", which is an inability to appreciate emotions and engage in close relationships (Oransky & Merecek, 2009). This emotional illiteracy is strongly connected to the manner in which young boys are socialized by the family, peers and various institutions within communities. Therefore it is very likely that early primary relationships have a direct link to future relationships, including friendships.

### ***2.3.3 Shared Activities and Friendship***

According to Mathur and Berndt (2006), activities done with friends are likely to contribute to the development of friendships of both boys and girls, including to their quality. Seymour, Reid and Bloom (2009) suggest that sporting activity is intimately linked to the development, maintenance and enhancement of peer relationships. As such, activities with friends are a fundamental aspect of the daily lives of children and adolescents because they provide enjoyment, a sense of accomplishment and belonging, and a context in which to explore their social worlds (Mathur & Berndt, 2006). Depending on the shared activity, this manner of interaction may allow for more intimate friendships as a closer bond develops through self-disclosure of personal thoughts and feelings as well as shared interests. In contrast to previous research Mathur and Berndt found that girls did not participate in more socializing with their friends than boys did (2006). This is an indication of the contradiction within the assumption that girls are more sociable than boys who are said to be more physically active. Patrick, Ryan, Alfeld-Liro, Fredericks, Hruda and Eccles (1999) add that adolescents have reported that they develop more intense friendships distinguished by greater intimacy and friendship through participation in activities. This finding calls for further exploration into whether young men in particular experience similar levels of intimacy when participating in shared activities. Furthermore, there seems to be an indication that intimacy among male friendships may not be that different to those of females, as previous literature has suggested.

According to Bohnert et al. (2007), emerging adults may search for involvement in organized activities as a means of forming new, high-quality friendships that meet their social needs and facilitate their transition to college. Given the wealth of literature on friendship, Bohnert et al. (2007) comment that the few studies that have been conducted suggest that the transition to residential college simultaneously introduces dramatic changes and challenges, including the disturbance of long-standing friendships. One of the possible implications of disrupted long-standing friendship/s is the loss of a well established social support network. This support structure is most needed when emerging adult males are faced with a new lifestyle and the challenges which are associated with adapting to college or university. It is therefore important

to further explore the kind of support within friendships that these individuals need when coping with the various challenges experienced in adapting to university. However, acknowledging support may not resonate with aspects of hegemonic masculinity, as it is likely that seeking support may be linked to a portrayal of vulnerability. This may be as parents, peers, social institutions and mass media encourage boys to be more competitive and independent (Felmlee & Muraco, 2009). As a result, it is necessary to sensitively explore what kind of support is needed at this developmental stage, and how this need is dealt with within the close friendships of these young men, in this transitional stage of their lives. Moreover, among the many benefits of strong social support systems, Grief (2006) reports that there is a link between people who give and receive support having higher levels of emotional security than those who are more isolated. Furthermore, involvement in organized activities may also provide young men with a broader setting for feeling socially accepted and satisfied while buffering against feelings of possible loneliness (Bohnert et al., 2007).

#### ***2.3.4 Sports and Friendship***

Organized activities such as sport bring men together and provides them with group norms, well defined goals and social acceptance (Harvey, 1999), as well as friendship. Sport is also said to provide a cultural avenue for men to share mutual experiences with other males that are often based on masculine norms (Harvey, 1999). As such, for young men, sport is also an ideal place to practice gender through displaying masculinity in a socially approved fashion (Curry, 1991). Sport is also one of the primary sites within which hegemonic masculinity is exercised. The friendships formed within the sports subculture are molded by and adhere to the group norms or behaviour such as aggression, athletic aptitude, domineering and vocal challenges (Harvey, 1999). However it is not clear whether these behaviours are practiced in all forms of sport and whether they exist within friendships outside the realm of sports. Harvey further describes that the formation of friendships within the team subculture revolves around the structure and maintenance of groups (1999). It seems likely that the formation and maintenance of these groups exists in organizations and institutions other than sports, such as universities for instance.

## 2.4 Relational Experience of Male Friendships

### 2.4.1 *Intimacy within Friendships*

Communication of social support among the different genders has also focused on men and women communicating differently within close friendships. According to Seidler (2006), when growing up, young men “take on particular bodily disciplines where they learn to conceal their inner emotional lives” (p. 117). Grief (2006) further adds that with men being taught to control their emotions the opportunities to connect with other men and women are greatly hampered. Albrecht and Adelman (1987) have described social support as verbal and nonverbal interaction between receiver and providers that decreases uncertainty about the personal problem, the self, the other, or the relationship. This functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one’s life experience. This statement does not in any way assign a bias in gender, as it functions to describe the ideal communication of social support shared between close friends. According to Oransky and Merecek (2009), a stringent “Boy Code” requires boys to hide their emotions and vulnerabilities so that their “real selves” are kept secret. Consequently, boys learn to habitually and almost fearfully bury their troubles, emotions and anxieties beneath tough pretenses. Conversely, Mattis et al. (2001) report that the level of sharing in which men engage may be determined, in part, by the gender of the friends with whom they are communicating. Sanderson et al. (2005) mention that individuals who engage in self-disclosure, feel trust, and develop interdependence with their friends, experience greater relationship satisfaction and longer relationship longevity. This may further enhance the maintenance of close friendships. Sanderson et al. (2005) further advise that individuals who have developed insecure attachment models in early childhood may be reluctant to pursue intimacy in close relationships, as they lack a secure foundation on which to build such close association. It is crucial that the friendships of young men be taken into account as their own experiences so as to explore their construction of intimacy within these friendships.



### ***2.4.2 Intimacy within Male Friendships***

It is suggested that men are less likely to discuss intimate topics such as sadness and vulnerabilities with male friends (Bowman, 2008). Consequently, within their friendships, men are said to bond without intimacy, focusing their friendships on external activities through which they can share the same emotional experience without having to reveal any details about their personal lives (Harvey, 1999). However, Curry (1991) describes the fraternal bond as a force, link or affectionate tie that unites men. This description of bonding suggests a certain level of intimacy distinctive of close male friendships. Grief (2006) further adds that for some men, engaging in activities is a form of bonding which is less intimidating and should not be underestimated. Similarly Curry (1991) suggests that the meanings associated with friendship for men are grounded in activities, which gives them reason to bond. As such, the mutual enjoyment of shared interests seems to enhance intimacy in male friendships. According to Butera (2008) the traditional idea of mateship employs a mute discourse where communication between mates is kept at a surface level or simply avoided altogether. This kind of friendship relies on the suppression of emotional intimacy. Thus the friendships of men have largely been typified as being activity focused, rather than based on emotional sharing. That is, close masculine friendships typically centre on shared activities, particularly sports (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Olivier, 2000). Harvey (1999) emphasizes that “sport provides a cultural avenue for men to share mutual experiences with other males that are often based on hegemonic masculinity” (p. 92).

Men’s practice of gender has been theorized as a homosocial performance, in which the enactment of manhood is in front of, and approved, by other men (Flood, 2008). This would ensure that dominant masculine codes are maintained and also reconstructed. Rutherford (as cited in Flood, 2008) emphasizes that it is important to expose and critically question dominant social categories, including those of maleness and heterosexuality, which are categories marked as normative, expected, and privileged rather than as deviant, pathological and other. The unpacking of these categories seeks to explain how sexual orientation influences gender practices as well as the friendships across the sexes. According to White (2006), homophobia and heterosexism reinforce unyielding notions about what is ‘manly’ or ‘womanly’ and strengthen

conventional beliefs about gender in ways that compel the suppression of any expression that may seem 'feminine' in men. Furthermore, White (2006) summarizes that these dynamics regulate the entire spectrum of what are considered 'appropriate' gender relations and often negatively influence men's friendships. As such, men are tentative about developing male friendships based on intimacy because of the anxiety of being labeled as different or homosexual (Harvey, 1999). Consequently, the experiences of male same-sex friendships are subjected to gender roles which tolerate appropriate masculine behaviors.

According to Bird (1996), homosociality refers to social bonds between individuals of the same sex, and more broadly, to same-sex focused social relations. Flood (2008) adds that males attempt to advance their position in masculine social hierarchies, using such "markers of manhood", as occupational achievement, wealth, power and status, physical competence and sexual achievement (p. 341). Therefore, male-male friendships take priority over male-female relations and platonic friendships with females are precariously feminizing and unusual (Flood, 2008). Consequently, it becomes understandable how male close friendships with either other males or females are pressured to adhere to norms that guide certain masculine behavior.

According to Doty (1993) "contemporary social-science research on male friendship has developed largely out of studies of women's friendships and has not yet provided useful materials for men's" (p. 360). Similarly, Zarbatany et al. (2004), report that most efforts have focused on explaining friendship intimacy, which has been associated positively with a range of personality characteristics, including femininity and negatively with masculinity. Furthermore, male friendships have been portrayed more often in terms of what they lack in contrast to female friendships rather than how they might be a factor to male psychological well-being (Zarbatany et al., 2004). There is thus a call for research on the experiences of close male friendships in terms of their contribution to psychological well-being. The feminine manner of close friendships is characterised by personal communication which relates to confiding in a friend about feelings and personal problems. This kind of self-disclosure has been regarded as

uncharacteristic of the male friendship style as they may be perceived as being vulnerable by others. Seidler (2006) mentions that this vulnerability is hidden, as men feel they should handle their own emotions so as not to experience shameful judgment by others. Many theorists have suggested that men shy away from overt demonstrations of affection due to homophobia and the fear of being perceived as homosexual by others (Connell, 1995).

### ***2.4.3 Cross-sex Friendships***

White (2006) states that recent studies suggest that cross-sex friendships can offer significant and distinct advantages regarding how individuals view both themselves and members of the opposite sex. This author documents rich data on the importance of cross-sex friendships, particularly in the light of gender differences and dominant masculine discourses. It has been reported that many men attribute their perceptions of support and satisfaction in male-female friendships to the liberty they have to talk openly with their female friends (Mattis et al., 2001). An additional advantage may be in the form of access to insider perceptions on how members of the opposite sex think, feel, and behave and also provides opportunities to become sensitized to gender differences in communication techniques (White, 2006). Similarly, cross-sex friendships present an opportunity for men to explore and nurture a different friendship style that includes a level of emotional engagement and openness that is not readily available with their male friends (White, 2006). This aspect of cross-sex friendships is especially unique when compared to romantic relationships. As such, men may tend to feel more comfortable discussing intimate and personally meaningful issues with platonic female friends than with male friends (Mattis et al., 2001). However, according to Guerrero and Chavez (2005) cross-sex friendships can be complicated, with ambiguity about the potential of romantic or sexual nature of the relationship creating uncertainty. This is particularly applicable to heterosexual cross-sex friendships. Furthermore, promoting or discouraging movement toward romance is likely to be an important and sometimes difficult part of relational maintenance in cross-sex friendships, especially when cross-sex friends have different romantic intentions and experience uncertainty about the state of their relationship (Guerrero & Chavez, 2005).

#### ***2.4.4 Functionality of Male Friendships***

Within masculinity, material assistance is perceived and experienced as an important way to show caring within close male friendships (Wood & Inman, 1993). It may also be viewed as a way of showing support and a demonstration of affection. Harvey (1999) adds that a fundamental difference between male and female relationships is the dependence on verbal communication by women and the dependence on mutual, goal-directed activities by men. Accordingly, this brings to fore the long-standing dichotomy between expressiveness and instrumentality (Wood & Inman, 1993). Men usually demonstrate affection by doing things for people they care about, or through other indirect, non-verbal means (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Olivier, 2000). According to Seidler (2006), this kind of friendship may be considered instrumental, which is different from relational friendship, mostly described as a feminine form of friendship. Similarly, conventional hegemonic masculine forms of close friendships are limited to an activity focused friendship style, which may also be known as an “instrumental relationship” towards the other (Seidler, 2006, p. 117). This has led men to perceive talking about emotions as a limited way to be close, and when they do talk, it tends to be about impersonal topics (Du Plooy-Cilliers & Olivier, 2000). Bank (1995) argues that pairing ‘instrumentality’ with masculinity and ‘expressiveness’ with femininity overlooks the practical elements found within women’s friendship (as cited by Butera, 2008). As such these combinations may further estrange the possible similarities found between male and female close friendships.

#### ***2.4.5 Alternative Forms of Friendship***

There is evidence of emerging patterns of masculinity, different from traditional, hegemonic patterns of masculinity, which may allow for new patterns of friendship, such as “bromance” (Burbach, 2011). Bromance is a healthy secure friendship between two or more heterosexual men (Burbach, 2011). It is also described as an acknowledgement that men can have friendships that are so close that they love each other like brothers (Banks, 2010). The term bromance comes from a combination of “bros” (male friends or brothers) and romance (Burbach, 2011), and has mostly been used throughout popular culture and mass media. Bromance as an alternative form of masculine friendship which affords the men involved a sense of security and comfort when

relating in an emotional way (Burbach, 2011). Bromance seems to incorporate a type of brotherly love which appears to be a highly intimate level of close male friendships. This type of friendship also seems to be characteristic of male intimacy, without reference or comparison to female type friendships.

“Emo”, short for emotional, has introduced new ways which young men and women may express emotions in a way atypical of hegemonic masculinity without being judged (Emo Corner, 2008). The Emo culture allows for one to explore and choose one’s sexual orientation, without being confined to what is considered as the social norm (Emo Corner, 2008). According to Muraco (2005) when people from different social backgrounds come together, as in the case in friendships that cross categories of sexual orientation and sex, one might expect that these identities will impact the tone and interaction within the friendship. Furthermore within the context of friendship, sex and sexual orientation shape norms and expectations of behaviour (Muraco, 2005). However, when using the internet friendships are encouraged as many young people are open to connect with others who share the same views and interests about identity, among other matters. Most importantly, Emo means “being comfortable with oneself” (Emo Corner, 2008).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

The friendships that men form and share seem to fulfil and carry multiple meanings in their lives. During their developmental years young men are socialized within particular masculine norms regarding friendships. These norms guide and aspire to equip young men with tools they are able to employ when relating socially. However, there is a possibility that these norms may hinder young men from fully appreciating all aspects of friendship, which include a sense of vulnerability and open emotionality, as well as receiving and giving support. As Addis and Mahalik (2003) have noted, some masculine practices may have long-term physical and psychological effects, as a consequence of inexpressiveness. On the other hand, friendships afford young men the opportunity to socialize and form a bond which may mature over time as

the level of intimacy grows. From the current literature, it is unclear whether there are experiences which enhance the level of intimacy and friendship among male friends, other than shared interests and activities such as sport. What also seems to be absent in the literature is a depth in the friendships of young males in this particular stage of their lives.

While men have always had friendships, bromance (Burbach, 2011) amongst other forms of friendship has widened the variety of close male friendships. To the extent that these new concepts are popularised by mass media and popular culture, they seem to have an impact on social relations of men. These changes are part of what inspires the proposed research topic on the friendships of male university students. The study aims to investigate whether there are forms of male friendships that are not necessarily dictated by hegemonic ideas of masculine interrelationships.

In contemporary society, the transition from high school to university is being made by a number of young adults (Boute et al., 2007). According to Boute et al. (2007) first-year university students experience a wide range of problems that could contribute to poor university adjustment. Friends, particularly a best friend, may be one of the means that might counteract the challenges and stress associated with important life transitions because they are significant sources of social support (Tokuno as cited in Boute et al., 2007). Most studies which have been conducted on male university students centre on physical activities, such as sport, academic studies, as well the social life of the student. They very rarely tap the personal friendships of these students. The literature lacks research on the close friendships of male university students, especially in this transitional phase of their life which is not an effortless one for many. This gap is significant because of the crucial role that friendships play in the growth, development, and psychological adjustment of young adults in general and university students in particular (Wise & King, 2008). On the one hand university presents the opportunity for students to make new friends. But also, in the face of new demands, new developmental experiences and new stresses, existing friendships may become closer.

## *Chapter Three*

### **Research Method**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This study was concerned with young men's experience of friendship. The literature which has motivated the research study has revealed a gap with regard to the methodology that has been used in similar studies. The dominant method of research used to date was quantitative methods. For instance, a study by Bowman (2008) on self-disclosure among same-sex friendships does so using various scales and questionnaires, which do not seem to investigate young men's subjective experiences of friendship. This method is limited in exploring the close friendships of young men. Therefore, the current study has employed a qualitative framework in order to explore the close friendships of young males.

#### **3.2 Aims of the research**

The process of this study was guided by the following main objectives:

- What is the experience and meaning of friendships for young men?
- Do young men form friendships with both boys and girls?
- Do young men experience or provide emotional support to one another? Does the support young men give and experience deal with personal vulnerability?
- Are novel patterns of friendship emerging among young men?

The fourth aim mentioned above did not yield any novel patterns of friendship. This aim was abandoned during the stages of analysis as the participants did not demonstrate new friendship styles.

### **3.3 Research method**

Based on the aims of the study a qualitative approach seemed most appropriate. The selection of qualitative over quantitative methods optimized data collection, as qualitative methods are regarded as being more flexible. Use of a qualitative research design affords the researcher the opportunity to learn how the interviewees experience their friendships through their actions, intentions, beliefs and feelings (Smith, Harré & Van Langenhove, 1995). In-depth interviews were used and allowed for the interviewees to actively participate in the process of data collection. Qualitative research is especially appropriate to the study of those attitudes and behaviors best understood within their relevant context (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). As such, the research process took place within the university context where the young men spend most of their time with friends.

### **3.4 Validity and reliability of the study**

Research rigor is equally important in qualitative and quantitative research, but different methods are used to ensure rigor (Ulin, Robinson, Tolley & McNeil, 2002). By and large the most widely adopted criteria for a quantitative framework includes validity, reliability, objectivity, precision and generalizability (Ulin et al., 2002). These criteria are used to describe, predict and verify empirical relationships in relatively controlled settings (Ulin et al. 2002). Conversely, qualitative research which “aims to explore, discover and understand cannot use the same criteria to judge quality and outcomes” (Ulin et al., 2002, p. 31). Therefore, the current study was guided by the qualitative framework of trustworthiness which encompasses credible, dependable, confirmable and transferable qualities (Ulin et al., 2002). The paragraphs below will further elaborate on these qualitative elements of trustworthiness.

#### ***3.4.1 Credibility***

According to Ulin et al. (2002) credibility in qualitative research refers to truth value, which centre’s on confidence in the truth of the findings and accurate understanding of the research



context. Similarly this may also be understood as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers (Silverman, 2000). Ulin et al. (2002) suggest that the researcher should consider the following: 1) whether the findings demonstrate a logical relationship, i.e., are they consistent in terms of the explanation they support; 2) whether the findings are grounded and supported by the narrative data. The use of rich text quotes or extracts from the data were used to give a fuller description of the theme as well as to provide evidence for the identified themes. Furthermore, Silverman (2000) discusses that the constant comparative method is an approach of analysis which ensures the validity of the research findings. As such, the current study was informed by this method of analysis in order to ensure its validity. The constant comparative method was one part of the analysis process which the researcher used to ensure consistency across the themes. It also allowed for more flexibility in the analysis process as the researcher could move back and forth across the themes.

### ***3.4.2 Dependability***

According to Ulin et al. (2002), the dependability of a study in terms of qualitative elements is about the ability to replicate the processes used to obtain these results, even though in different contexts they may be quite different. For qualitative researchers, the methodological parallel to reliability is whether the results are dependable, and the research process is consistent and executed with careful attention to the rules and conventions of qualitative methodology (Ulin et al., 2002). These are the elements which qualitative researchers need to be considerate of in order to ensure dependable results. As such, the current study was guided by what Ulin et al. (2002) have outlined as important guidelines to certify dependability of results. Firstly, researchers need to consider whether the research questions are clear and logically connected to the research purpose and design (Ulin et al., 2002). This was carefully attended to by doing a separate thematic analysis for each of the specific aims of the study. Secondly, the researcher needs to determine whether there are parallels across data source (Ulin et al., 2002). As there was only one data source in this study, viz. interviews, this could not be applied.

### ***3.4.3 Confirmability***

In terms of the qualitative approach, confirmability refers to the manner in which the data reflect as accurately as possible the perspectives and experiences of the participants (Ulin et al., 2002). According to Ulin et al. (2002), confirmability is about the researcher maintaining the distinction between personal values and those of the study participants. In order to maintain the confirmability of the study, these authors (Ulin et al., 2002) suggest that applying reflexivity guides the researcher in observing subjective influences on the research process. Reflexivity refers to the researcher's critical self awareness in relation to the unfolding research process (Ulin et al., 2002). Therefore, it was vital for the researcher to acknowledge that, as a female, she was attempting to gain a sense of understanding and meaning from the position of the other (Butera, 2006).

### ***3.4.4 Transferability***

The transferability of a qualitative study refers to the generalizability found in quantitative research. Ulin et al. (2002) recommend that it is important to determine whether the conclusions of a study are transferable to other contexts. Thus it is important for researchers to account for contextual factors when transferring data from a particular situation to another (Ulin et al. 2002). The results of the current study need to be interpreted and considered carefully as the sample studied reflects only the views and experiences of the friendships of young male university students. It was acknowledged that there are some very specific features to this sample which may prevent generalization to other samples. For example, many of the young men in this sample are a considerable distance from home and living in university residences, so that friends are more likely to become proxy family members.

### **3.4.5 Reflexivity**

According to Malterud (2001), “a researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (p. 483-484). Therefore, it was vital for the researcher to observe and self-examine herself in relation to the different elements of the research process. This was made possible by consulting and engaging with the supervisor at every step of the research process.

### **3.5 The research sample**

The sampling attempted to involve young men with the elements which contain the most characteristic, representative or typical attributes of this population (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delpont, 2004). The sampling also involved employing participants with differing experiences of the phenomenon so as to explore multiple dimensions of the social processes under study (Stark & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Purposive diversity was incorporated as this method allowed for a representation of a variety of masculinities. Purposive sampling selects participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research question (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). As such, the student population which the study focused on is young male undergraduate and postgraduate students between the ages of 18 and 25 years. This group of young men is made up of students who are either entering university or who are about to graduate. Therefore, it is likely that the level and depth of friendships experienced by these young men may vary, offering rich data across the different academic levels. Sample sizes mostly depend on resources and time available, as well as the study’s objectives (Mack et al., 2005). The students all studied at the university on a full-time basis. The sample of respondents was drawn through advertising the study to a few tutorial classes from the psychology undergraduate level as well as from other faculties. Those students who volunteered to participate in the study were requested to provide their contact details (email address or cellular phone number) in order for the researcher to contact them to schedule an interview session. Different clubs and societies across faculties were also considered in the sampling strategy. Students living in the campus residences were also approached as the turn out from the

advertising process was not satisfactory. The researcher got permission to gain entry into the male residence hall in order to obtain more participants. It was advised that the researcher approach the young men at the Junior Common Room, as they would most likely be relaxed and more open to spare some time for the interview to take place. The students living in the all-male university residence constitute half of the sample. The rest of the sample was day students, that is, those students who reside off campus, either with their families or in private communes. The table below includes the characteristics of the study sample:

**Table 1: Demographic details of research participants**

	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D	Participant E	Participant F	Participant G	Participant H	Participant I	Participant J
Age	21	19	24	23	24	23	21	18	20	24
First language	Shona	English	Shona	isiZulu	isiZulu	isiZulu	isiZulu	isiZulu	Xhosa	isiZulu
Degree of study	BComm Accounting	BComm Accounting	Political Science	BPsychology	Social Science	MSc Crop Science	BCommerce	BSc Agriculture	BA Political Science	MSc Biochemistry
Year of study	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	5 <sup>th</sup> Year	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	5 <sup>th</sup> Year

### 3.6 Data collection strategies

Interviewing participants allowed for a description of their experience of close male friendships, and also involved reflection on the description of these friendships (De Vos et al., 2004). A semi-structured interview schedule was used in order to gain a detailed description of the respondent's beliefs, perceptions and experience of close friendships (Smith et al., 1995). The semi-structured interview schedule (see interview schedule appendix A) is comprised of a set of questions which guide the interview rather than dictate the direction of the process (Smith et al., 1995). This method also afforded both the researcher and respondent much more flexibility than the conventional structured interview, questionnaire or survey (Smith et al., 1995). There were eleven interviews recorded, however, only ten interviews met sample requirements. This was as

one of the interviewees did not qualify according the age group requirement. The interviews took place on an individual basis. The venue of the interview was decided on mutually by the researcher and the respondent so that the location and safety of the process was not compromised. Five of the ten interviews were held on campus at the School of Psychology in an available psychotherapy office. The rest of the interviews were held at a Residential hall on campus as these interviewees were residents of the particular residential hall.

The students were invited to provide detailed descriptions on close friendships and the characteristics thereof and to reflect on their experience of close friendships (see interview schedule appendix A). The interview schedule was essentially designed to explore both the objective views and subjective experiences of friendship. The questions focused on the meanings and qualities of friendships. The questions also briefly explored whether young men make friends with young women and how they experience these friendships. Further, the questions explored the importance of care and support within male friendships.

With the permission of the participant, a voice recorder was used to record the interview sessions. The interviews lasted approximately between 30-60 minutes per interview session. According to Smith et al. (1995), tape-recording allows a much fuller record than notes taken during the interview. Recording the interview also affords the interviewer to concentrate on how the interview is proceeding and where to probe or highlight striking information (Smith et al., 1995). However, field notes were taken to ensure quality control. Listening to the tapes afterwards assisted in identifying gaps within the interview schedule, which were then improved upon in the subsequent interviews.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

Thematic analysis involves identifying and extracting all material relevant to the study from the interviewees, categorizing this material according to themes to be found within it, and then

producing an analytical account of how these themes interweave (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman, 2002). Similarly, thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and describing themes within the data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a theme captures an important aspect about the data in relation to the research question, and represents a patterned response or meaning across the data set. The importance of a theme is not necessarily dependant on quantifiable measures, but rather on whether the theme captures something important in relation to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These authors (Braun & Clarke, 2006) advise that in order to provide a rich description of the data set, the researcher needs to accurately reflect the content of the entire data set. As such, the process of analysis for the current study was informed by the guidelines offered by Braun and Clarke (2006). Furthermore, these guidelines were applied flexibly in order to fit the research question and data set as the analysis proved to be a recursive process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The guideline allowed the researcher to move back and forth across the different steps in order to ensure rigorous analysis of the data. The following paragraphs are a summary of the step-by-step process of analysis which was used.

### ***3.7.1 Phase 1: Familiarising oneself with the data***

It is important to be familiar with all aspects of the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is achieved through immersing oneself in the data, which usually involves repeated reading of the data in an active way such as searching for meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the researcher repeatedly read through the transcripts it was important to take notes as this formed the foundation for continued analysis. At a minimum the transcription of verbal data requires a rigorous and thorough account of all utterances which retains the information in a way which is true to its original form (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To ensure the originality of the transcripts, the researcher checked the transcripts back against the original audio recording for accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### ***3.7.2 Phase 2: Generating initial codes***

This phase of analysis relied on the notes taken during the familiarization with the data as the initial codes will stem from that process. A code identifies a feature of the data and refers to the most basic element of the raw data that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon being studied (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is recommended that the researcher consider the following key advice: (a) the researcher needs to code for as many potential themes as possible as these may be useful later in the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this stage the researcher made further notes on possible themes in order to keep record of the coding process. (b) Codes should include extracts of data inclusively, i.e., keeping some of the surrounding data to avoid losing the context of the particular code (Braun & Clarke, 2006). (c) It is possible to code individual extracts of data in as many themes as they fit into (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was therefore important for the researcher to be aware of themes that overlap so as to avoid repetition. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that it is essential to retain accounts within the data that depart from the dominant themes in the analysis, so as to provide a fuller description.

### ***3.7.3 Phase 3: Searching for themes***

This phase begins when all the data have been initially coded and assembled, and lists of different codes have been identified across the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase the researcher focused on grouping together various codes into possible themes as well as the supporting extracts. It proved to be quite helpful for the researcher to use visual representations such as tables or mind-maps (Braun & Clarke, 2006), to organize the different codes into themes.

### ***3.7.4 Phase 4: Reviewing themes***

During this phase it will become apparent to the researcher that some potential themes are not supported by the data, while others might collapse into each other and form one theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher together with guidance from her supervisor managed to decide on which themes would remain and which would be separated or discarded. This stage was

important in creating a foundation from which to continue and also to form coherent pattern of the themes.

### ***3.7.5 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes***

At this point of the analysis process the themes which will be presented for analysis should be defined and refined in order to determine what aspect of the data each theme captures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done through reviewing the data extracts gathered for each theme, and organizing them into a coherent and internally consistent account (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout this phase the researcher was continuously guided by the supervisor to maintain a coherent account of the themes. The researcher was careful not to merely string together extracts, but rather, fit the themes in relation to the research questions so as to ensure that there is not too much overlap between themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### ***3.7.6 Phase 6: Producing the report***

This stage involves the final analysis and write-up of the results. It is important that the analysis provides a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell, within and across the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher carefully attended to demonstrate rich text extracts as evidence of themes and also to support the validity of the analysis. The discussion of the results not only described the different elements of the results but also referred to current literature in order to support arguments.

## **3.8 Ethical considerations**

Ethics in research are guided by four key principles. These principles include not doing harm to participants, beneficence, respect for autonomy and justice. The following is a description of ethics according to De Vos et al. (2004) which were considered during the research process:



### ***3.8.1 Harm to experimental subjects or respondents***

The respondents were thoroughly informed beforehand about the potential impact of the study. Such information offered the respondents the opportunity to withdraw from the investigation whenever they so wish. Caution was taken to identify any individuals who proved to be vulnerable during the research process. The participants were informed that they would be referred to a psychotherapist if deemed appropriate. They were also offered the opportunity to debrief with the researcher if and when they needed to.

### ***3.8.2 Informed consent***

Accurate and clear information was offered to the volunteers so that they would fully comprehend the investigation and consequently be able to make a voluntary, informed decision about their possible participation. Emphasis was placed on the participants being legally and psychologically competent to give consent and of their awareness to be at liberty to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were requested to complete a form indicating their consent to be a part of the research process of the current study (Appendix B).

### ***3.8.3 Violation of privacy***

Privacy implies the element of personal privacy, while confidentiality suggests the handling of information in a confidential manner. The study uses pseudonyms when referring to data gathered from the interviews with the participants.

### ***3.8.4 Release or publication of the findings***

This current written report aspires to be accurate, objective, clear and contain all essential information. Participants will be informed about the findings in an objective manner without offering too many details or harm to the principle of confidentiality.

## *Chapter Four*

### **Research Findings**

#### **4.1 The experience/meaning of friendships**

##### *4.1.1 Is friendship important to young men and how?*

Overall, the interviews show that friendship is regarded as a necessary experience. Friendship has the potential to provide guidance, share “memories” and forms the “central element” of life. Friends share experiences which are memorable and influential. Furthermore, friendship is a central element in the development of individuals. Guidance as one of the important elements of friendship seems to provide a kind of assistance whenever friends may need it. The following quote demonstrates how friends offer essential guidance.

*“Well I think it’s important in the sense that you need people around you to guide you because you can’t exist by yourself... you can’t exist by yourself so you need friends, your camaraderie if I may say; people you have things in common with to tell you what is right what is wrong or especially boredom, you would be bored if you are all by yourself. So I think friends are essential in our lives because you definitely can’t see but they can, so they assist us here and there sometimes or, we just need them”. (Participant E, aged 24)*

The participant suggests that friendship offers guidance in distinguishing between what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. He also implies that friendship is essential as friends guide you where you can’t see for yourself. Friendships also provide camaraderie which seems to suggest a companionship with those you have much in common with.

Friendships of young men seem to afford them the opportunity to share parts of themselves which otherwise would not be revealed in other relationships. The following quote illustrates how sharing most aspects of your life with friends can be meaningful and important.

*“Ja friendship is important in many ways because... I mean ja, those are the people that you share most of your life with them, experience experiences, lots of things... I mean good things, bad things, all sorts of things and memories. Most of the memories you have in your life are about your friends and the stuff you do together whether you’re in high school together, you are studying together or ja... all sorts of things I mean it all links back to your friends and actually they shape who you are at that particular point in your life...” (Participant J, aged 25)*

This quote suggests that friendship is primarily about sharing a range of life experiences with others, and these experiences of sharing become the core of life’s memories. In fact the quote goes further to suggest that friends not only share life experiences, but also have the effect of shaping one at different stages of life. This is further demonstrated in the quote below.

The interviews reveal that an important aspect of friendship is being able to talk/share confidential information with friends. Friendships seem to offer young men the space to talk about their “feelings”/“personal problems” and also feel “free” to share. Being able to talk about feelings and their personal problems to friends suggests that there’s a level of openness among young male friends. Furthermore, the freedom of sharing one’s personal issues encourages closeness in these friendships. In referring to the importance of friendship, the participant says the following:

*“For me I think it is important in some ways and in some other ways it is not important. For example, it helps one talk about his feelings that one cannot share with the other people, the parents... He is like free to talk to friends, some issues for example that makes it hard to talk to parents, especially with us as Blacks because of our culture there are some issues we cannot share with our parents that’s easier to talk to a friend, ja”. (Participant H, aged 19).*

This quote not only reveals the importance of “talking”/sharing personal issues within friendship but it also gives some clues as to some of the reasons why talking to a friend is distinctive. The

participant says that there are some personal issues which one can only talk to friends about. Included in the people he cannot talk to are his “parents”. This quote goes further in identifying possible cultural reasons why friendship is important, viz. that culture places a taboo on certain issues being spoken about to anyone other than friends. In this sense friends become a very distinct social group to whom certain self-disclosures can be made. Again the quote suggests that male friendships have a very distinctive quality and role in the lives of young men, as they become the only people with whom certain things can be shared or to whom they can be disclosed.

Furthermore, when sharing personal information/self-disclosing to a friend, participants suggest that it is like revealing another side of you to them. Sharing personal information includes revealing “flops” or issues “beyond surface area stuff”. Telling a friend about your “flops” implies that you are comfortable enough to let your disappointment/failures known to your friend. Furthermore, self-disclosing beyond the “surface area”/superficial level seems to promote a degree of openness in the friendship. The next quote demonstrates how sharing disappointments in friendship is a way of revealing another side of oneself.

*“It means somebody who I can talk about my flops with you know; stuff that’s if you tell to normal people they will kind of look at you differently you know and think of you differently. But if you tell it to your friend it’s just another side of you that you reveal to your friend but they will never look at you differently you are still their friend.” (Participant F, aged 24)*

In this quote the participant highlights how important it is for him to be able to share his “flops”/disappointments with a friend. He suggests that there is a clear difference between telling “normal people” and telling a friend. Firstly, telling someone who is not a friend may bring about judgment upon him. Conversely, the participant implies that telling a friend means having someone who will relate in a non-judgmental manner and still accept you as their friend. The following quote illustrates how friendships are able to move beyond superficial relation.

*“...friendship means I give you the ability to look into my life and take out the best out of me and I give you the ability to associate with me and know things about me which most individuals*

*don't know besides the point of interest that we connected with. Friendship means I am able to tell you things about and you to tell me things which are beyond surface area stuff and I'm able to tell you things which are beyond surface area stuff, some you wouldn't like and some you would like you know, so that is what I would say is friendships.” (Participant G, aged 22)*

In this quote the participant demonstrates the meaning of friendship through giving a friend the ability to know things about him. In so doing, he seems to imply that this ability is also meant for the friend to contribute positively to his life (“*look into my life and take out the best out of me*”). Furthermore, he is willing to share with his friend what most people do not know about him. The participant suggests that there should be a mutual level of sharing personal information which goes “beyond surface area stuff”. This seems to imply a certain level of depth or intimacy in self-disclosing. In addition the participant acknowledges that his friend holds the capacity to like some of the things he shares and also have his view about the information.

The interviews reveal that in some respects friendship may be as important as having family to some young men, and that friendships are regarded as having the same level of value. Friendships as part of family afford young men the opportunity to share most parts of their lives. The following quote captures how this young man perceives the importance of friendship.

*“I think it's very important because I mean you agreed you need like close family bonds to talk about your problems, talk about your achievements but also to have friends to share the good times with and also if you've got problems to speak to your friends about it as well”. (Participant B, aged 19).*

The participant compares friendship to the familial relationship, suggesting that the friendship is “like a close family bond”. He also suggests that relationships with friends serve similar functions to relationships with family, such as talking about “problems” or “sharing the good times”.

The participants also reported on some negative aspects of friendship. An issue which was noted was “peer pressure” which is linked to how friends can negatively influence one another.

The next quote highlights elements such as peer pressure which were considered to be negative elements of friendship by a few of the participants.

*“In some cases it is bad because of peer pressure, you know friends who can just influence you to do bad things, ja in a way it is bad... In some cases like if you’re involved in crime, your whole group will do crime or rape, house break-ins, etc., etc. Because they are your friends and even if you don’t want to be involved in crime that they are doing because I know that it’s bad, but because I’m a friend of theirs I’m involved in that group of friends I have to do it because we are friends.” (Participant H, aged 19)*

In this quote the participant suggests that male friendships can have the effect of exerting pressure on one another to undertake behaviours that are morally unacceptable. He implies that associating with friends who do crime would inevitably implicate him unwillingly. The participant suggests that because friendship means standing by your friends, boys may sometimes even have to do “bad” things as an expression of the loyalty that is expected in friendships.

#### **4.1.2 What is the nature of friendship?**

One of the findings to emerge was that friendship instilled a sense of belonging or being part of an inner social group. This sense of belonging was expressed in terms such as “clan” or “brotherhood”. Being part of a clan of friends seems to be about knowing that your friends will always care for you. Brotherhood as a sense of belonging suggests a family-like quality. The following quotes will illustrate the importance of belonging within friendship.

*“I think first of all being part of a clan for any young person is very important. Being sort of known I’m friends with this and that person is important to most people to, if it’s not wrong to generalize. But I think being known that this and so person is your friend also gives you sort of*

*comfort wherever you are even if you are away from home, you're at school, you're out and about its, it's very important". (Participant A, aged 21)*

To this participant "being part of a clan" is important as it provides a familial connection/bond. Knowing that a particular person is a friend seems to bring about a security associated with a feeling of belonging together especially in instances when one is "away from home" or "at school". The next quotation further elaborates belonging as important in friendships.

*"...to young men its brotherhood, belonging to a certain group or a certain culture which you form with those friends of yours, your brothers, your passé, your crew, your partners if I may put it that way... it's just, you feel like you belong somewhere if you're with friends". (Participant E, aged 24)*

This participant uses various terms to describe this sense of belonging associated with friendship. The use of the term "brotherhood" and "your brothers" suggests a family-like quality which is experienced in friendships. The terms "culture", "crew" and "partners" equally conveys a sense of belonging to an inner or exclusive social group, even if less intimate than family.

The participants suggest that "understanding" each other within friendship has the potential to draw friends closer together. Revealing their personal lives to one another seems to enhance the understanding shared in friendships. The following quote demonstrates the meaning of understanding in friendships.

*"I think on a personal view friendship means... to have a deep understanding, to have a deep understanding to, into someone's personal life. Ja like my friends they do know everything about me and also I do know their problems they're facing... and, and they feel confident in telling me their problem". ( Participant C, aged 23)*

In this quote it seems that the participant regards friendship as a relationship in which one knows the other "personally" or intimately. The use of the word "deep" implies that friendship has a quality which separates it from other relationships, which by implication are more superficial.

The quote is striking in its description of friendship as a relationship in which one knows “everything about me”. The quote also reveals a quality of safety or security in friendships which makes it possible to “confidently” share problems with the other.

The different kinds of friendships reported vary in category and level of intimacy. The categories reported were friends who are “acquaintances” and those who are “real friends”. Acquaintances were mostly described as people who one would be familiar with and relate to on a “shallow” basis. The real friends are those who “know a bit about you” and who you would “share a life with”. It also appears that the level of intimacy shared is connected to how close one is with the particular friend. In the next quote the participant distinguishes between casual friendships and real friends.

*“yeah, there are many different types of friendship, I think as a lot of people would say are acquaintances. People who you know, who you greet with a smile and say hi how is it going, and sort of relate to them in a very shallow way; for example: How was your day? How are the studies going? ...whereas I think your more personal, your real friends are people who know a bit about you, know the deeper side of you, know what you are going through in that point in time.” (Participant A, aged 21)*

In this quote the participant describes that he engages acquaintances in a polite and friendly manner yet also relates to them “in a very shallow way”. This includes enquiring about the general well-being of the acquaintance. However, with his real friends he would be more “personal” towards them. He suggests that his friends know the “deeper side” of him, which implies an intimate relation. Furthermore, his real friends know whatever he is going through, which implies that he confides in them. Having real friends implies that one has to maintain the friendship; the following quote is an indication of this.

*“yes definitely. I like try and be friends with everybody like I mean where I come from in Scottburgh, it’s quite a small town so I kind of know everybody and I try to be friends with all of them but I’m not as good friends with some as the others like some I’ll just, you know I’ll greet*



*when I see them I'll say 'howzit?', but then other one's you know I'll invite over to my house, I'll go to their house, I'll get hold of them and say 'hey let's make a plan'.*” (Participant B, aged 19)

In this quote the participant reports that he is friends with most people in his community but indicates that he is “good friends” with only a few of them. The participant invites his friends to visit his home and he would visit theirs as well. It seems as though he maintains his friendships through arranging “plans” to meet with them and spend time together. This maintenance of his friendships seems to distinguish his good friends from the friends he has in the community. The following quote demonstrates a genuine friend.

*“I think for me there's only one type of friend, the others are only people that you know, for me a friend is somebody as I've explained before, somebody you really share a life with; somebody who's interested in you and just because of who you are not because of what you have and somebody interested in that...”* (Participant F, aged 24)

Contrary to the two participants above, this participant reports that only one kind of friend exists. He explains that a friend is somebody he can “share a life with”. He also mentions that the friendship would be with somebody who is interested in him. Furthermore, he suggests that the friend would have to accept him for who he is and not what he has, which implies an unconditional friendship.

Amongst the number of different friendships the participants have reported, friends from university and those from home were also portrayed as being different. The friends made at “varsity/school” were formed through meeting at lecture halls or an exchange of academic support. The “home” friends are those participants are likely to share “confidential” issues with. There is also indication that there is a different level of understanding between these two groups of friends as the participants relate differently to them. However, it is suggested that they may share similarities.

*“... there are your friends which you meet in varsity, you meet them here and like they fulfill your purpose academic wise and the friends you have back home and the interaction you have with friends from varsity and friends from back home, there's a difference you know because*

*there's this level of understanding that you establish as a person so you have to learn to relate because they are not the same people. They may have similar characteristics which attract you to them that's why you have friends at home and here as well but they differ, I mean your engagement with them. Like for an example I can say my friends here are a bit classy, little outgoing, love parties but back home they just relax, just relax more; smoke weed, that's it."*(Participant E, aged 24)

In this quote the participant suggests that the varsity friends and the home friends are “not the same people”. Therefore the two groups of friends would require him to relate differently. However he mentions that the different friends may share similar attributes which is the basis for their connection as friends. In addition, he makes a distinction between the lifestyles of the two groups of friends. Firstly, his varsity friends appear to be “classy”, “outgoing” and “love parties”. Conversely his home friends are more “relaxed” and smoke “weed”, which does not add much variation to their lifestyle. Nonetheless, he is able to maintain both sets of friendships.

The next quote shows how sharing different activities can encourage varying levels of sharing parts of their personal lives.

*“You see there are these friends, umm, I will make an example with here at school; I have friends that I actually met during my lectures... so those are the friends who are only there, they are there for whatever we do, which is based on school work... but when I go home I meet people which I played soccer with you see, so that's the other friendship which is totally different from the one at school, the other one is all about soccer, girlfriends and everything.... And even the things that we share are totally different, and there are people you can share your confidential with you see, you can share all your secrets with you see but umm, for example if I met you in the lecture room I don't know much about you...”* (Participant I, aged 21)

The participant associates his university friends with “school work” and his home friends with playing “soccer”. This seems to be linked to what will later be discussed as “doing things” together. The difference between these friendships seems to be in what he shares with each. Relating to the varsity friends on an academic level does not seem to create the opportunity to share/engage in their more personal lives. On the other hand, playing soccer with his home

friends appears to allow them the liberty to talk about “girlfriends” and “everything” else. Furthermore, he suggests that sharing confidential information or “secrets” would need to be with someone he knows fairly well.

Friendships created and sustained through activities shared seem to deviate from “real friends” which were reported earlier. There is an indication that there are different friends for specific activities or contexts. These activities include sports such as “rugby” or they “ask out girls together”. There is a suggestion that there are also different types/levels of friendships within these various contexts. Furthermore, it is suggested that friends who “do things together” are not necessarily “best friends”.

*“There are different kinds of friends in the context of which I would have just said before like there’s a friends for rugby and then there’s friends for other things and other things; umm there’s friends where guys would associate with friends as in we go and ask out girls together and, in that context there are different types of friends. And maybe there is a context called best friends? But it’s not used with the guys’ friendships, it’s not used, it’s just like we are just friends you know, because we do things together, that’s all... I would say there’s nothing such as a best friend in the guy zone, so there’s just one word, “friend” and I think culture also comes in because as a Zulu guy there’s no word for best friend.” (Participant G, aged 22)*

In this quote the participant demonstrates that friendships are formed through association in different activities. In other words, these friendships appear to be created through common/shared interests. The participant reports that having a “best friend” is not found in “guys’ friendships”. This seems to imply that having a best friend is reserved for female/girls’ friendships. In addition, male friendships are characterized by “doing things” together. Furthermore, the “guy zone” seems to imply a hegemonic masculine aspect to the type of friends mentioned earlier.

The participants give an account of the qualities which they value in friends such as “good listener”, empathy, “advice” giving and “trust”. But some participants also give an example of the negative effects of the absence of the good qualities which may result in betrayal. It is reported that a friend needs to be a good listener, which seems to imply that the young men have the need to be heard and understood by their friends. It is also reported that a friend needs to be someone who will not “put you down” or discourage you. A friend who has a good/positive influence also seems to be important. Furthermore, values such as “honesty” and trust seem to be important in maintaining a good friendship.

In the quote below the participant demonstrates and elaborates on the qualities of a good friend.

*“I think someone who’s a very good listener, someone who can listen to you and sort of re...not really relate but understand where you’re coming from. One of the most important factors personally is someone who doesn’t hold you back and if you say this someone won’t put you down. I think a friendship is someone who can, who’s always happy with whatever you say, of course here and there he’ll give his opinion on what he has to say on my acting... Yeah I think what makes a good friend is the influence he has on you as well. I think if your friend, he understands and wants the best for you, so I think he would try to influence you in the most positive way possible... if you’re going through any trouble or if he hears anything about you, he’s going to defend you not there to sort of go back on you. Honesty, honesty is very important, not lying to your friends because that’s how most friendships go down the drain. Truth umm, I guess truth and honesty are the same thing. Trust, trust is very important, I think trusting each other will make the friendship more, have a better foundation because its built on trust and you know that if anything in particular happens, whereas there’s a problem arises you can actually know that your friend will actually go straight because you trust him.” (Participant A, aged 21)*

In this quote the participant seems to imply that having a friend who listens to him may encourage the friend to “relate” and form an understanding of whatever situation he is experiencing. The participant seems to imply that they should share an empathic understanding towards one another. He finds that it is important that a friend should not discourage but rather, offer advice about his behavior. The participant suggests that the kind of “influence” a friend has determines whether he is a good friend. Furthermore, he suggests that a good friend “wants the

*best for you*” and would have a positive influence over you. He implies that a friend is someone that would be protective over you and not betray you if ever faced with problems. The participant reports qualities such as honesty and trust are important in a good friend. Firstly, he suggests that the absence of honesty in a friendship may result in the relationship going “*down the drain*”. In other words he is explicitly implying that the friendship would be wasted if honesty was not maintained. Secondly, sharing trust in a friendship not only builds and strengthens the relationship but also ensures that the friend will help whenever a problem arises. The above elements of a good friend are suggested to form the foundation for a good friendship.

## **4.2 Do young men form friendships with both boys and girls?**

### ***4.2.1 What is the difference between friendships with boys and girls?***

In having friendships with both boys and girls, some participants report that friendships with girls do not have the same level of closeness as with boys. Firstly, participants find it difficult to share personal issues with girls as they do with boys. They suggest that it is more comfortable to confide in their male friends. Secondly, they report having a stronger “bond” with their male friends. This implies that there is a certain kind of connection that is shared among these young men and their same-sex friends.

The following quote shows how the participant is closer to his male friends and chooses them when he needs to confide personal information.

*“yes I do have different friends, I do have some female friends and some male friends and the difference between the two types is that I’m mostly comfortable with male friends, those are the ones I can easily talk to without interference and without hesitation... and female friends I sometimes get difficulties in talking to them with some other personal issues” (Participant C, aged 23)*

In this quote the participant describes that he feels most at ease when he is with his male friends. He also mentions that he is able to effortlessly talk to them without hesitating, which implies

dependability on them to confide. Conversely, the participant seems to have difficulties in sharing “personal issues” with his female friends. This highlights that there are possibly different levels of self-disclosure to different friends, and that male friendships ironically are the one context where the most personal disclosures can be made. The quote below demonstrates the kind of “bond”/connection the participant shares with his same-sex friends.

*“I do have friends which are both boys and girls, as much as with girls you know it’s not that tight you know in a sense. The difference with... I would say with guys the bond is even much more stronger, the relationship is much more stronger for me between the boys and between the girls. I don’t know what’s really lacking with the girls to make the relationship as strong as the boys but maybe it’s just that I’m a boy you know it’s easier to relate to the boys in that sense you know... and as I’ve said I’m very much a competitive person and a person who likes games and stuff you know and I can play those all night sometimes you know so... girls are not really up for that kind of competition.” (Participant F, aged 24)*

This quote illustrates the level of intimacy which is found within same-sex male friendships. The participant describes that there is a “bond” which exists in his same-sex friendships, and reports that this bond is much stronger than the one he shares with his female friends. He explains that it is much “easier” to relate to his male friends as they are of the same sex. This seems to be somehow related to the difficulty the above participant has in sharing personal information with his girl friends. Furthermore, he suggests that his “competitive” nature engages better with other boys than with girls, who apparently do not necessarily like competitive activities.

There are participants who view girl friends as potential romantic interest. This is not uncommon when one considers the dynamics of cross-sex friendships. The young men report that friendships with girls do not exist as they are “meant to be in love”. According to the participants friendships with girls are intended to reach “another level.” This seems to imply that they anticipate forming a romantic relationship with the girl when starting a friendship with her. Furthermore, when a young man is seen with a girl they may be viewed as lovers in certain cultures.

The next quote shows the participant's beliefs about boy/girl friendships.

*"...what I've heard or what I've seen there are friends which are boys and girls but my view of that just doesn't exist 'cause man and woman are meant to be in love not just friends, that's my personal view. I don't think they could ever be truly friends 'cause guys most of the time have ulterior motives with the girls so no... I don't think girls and boys can ever be friends but boys and boys, yeah."* (Participant E, aged 24)

The participant reports that he is aware that other young men form friendships with girls; however, he does not share this belief. He suggests that man and woman are meant to be involved in much more than a platonic relationship. Furthermore, he suggests that boys and girls cannot be "truly friends" as boys hold ulterior motives when forming friendships with girls. In addition, the participant regards boys' same-sex friendships as more acceptable.

The quote below further elaborates on the views of boy/girl friendships.

*"I would say mainly when we associate with girls, not that's it's me but it's mainly for furthering the relationship to another level... umm, it would be rare for a guy... most guys don't have girlfriends, umm girls who are friends in which they associate in those kinds of ways... they can have friends which are girls, it's not difficult it's because we are also shallow but once it gets a little bit to wherever, it usually moves to the next level, it doesn't stay like friends it goes to my girl whose a friend; because of, mainly because we view girls as people we going to have as a girlfriend, not as anything else. So there's no, okay according to the theory there's no such thing as a girl who's a friend for a guy."* (Participant G, aged 22)

This participant seems to share similar views with what the participant reported above. He reports that associating with girls is intended for furthering the relationship to "another level." He also mentions that it would be "rare" for a guy to maintain a platonic friendship with a girl. The participant implies that friendships with girls are shallow and mostly progress to a level of romance. Furthermore, according to him girls are mainly considered as potential lovers and not as friends.

#### 4.2.2 *What is the difference between the friendships of boys and girls?*

In addition to being interested in whether there is a difference between the friendships that boys share with other boys, the research also attempted to explore whether there is a difference in the experience of friendship shared by boys and that shared by girls. The findings suggest that there are clear distinctions between the friendships of boys and those of girls. The participants suggest that girls cannot do the same activities as boys can since they have different “personalities” and boys have “habits” which are manly. The participants suggest that boys enjoy engaging in lively activities with their friends while girls prefer to engage in conversation (“sensitive/social-like” behaviours). There also appear to be differences in what boys and girls talk about. The participants report that there are certain issues they can talk “in-depth” about to girls and boys respectively. It appears that boys prefer talking about sport related topics.

The next quotation illustrates how gender socialization influences friendships between boys and girls.

*“...the difference is gender, that’s the major difference. Why would I say the difference is gender? There are some things where guys can do but girls you can’t do with them, umm... though there are some girls who are crazy enough to do everything a guy can do but you find that for the sake of just being guys or for the sake of just being boys or men there is a lot in terms of our personalities, our habits that are just manly that you find you can only find them in men but you can’t find them in girls; so the friendships that are by like with girls you create those kind of friendships because you know with girls there are sensitive things you can do with them that you can’t do with guys; and then with guys there is a lot percentage that you do in your lifetime with them than girls so the difference there is gender I would say.” (Participant D, aged 24)*

The participant demonstrates that although some girls can perform some masculine roles/activities does not imply that they are the same as boys. He suggests that there is something distinctive about being a boy/man that makes their personalities and behavior different to girls. The importance of activity in the friendships of boys seems to come through very clearly in the above extract in the phrases “guys can do” and “but girls you cannot do with them”.



Furthermore, the participant seems to suggest that these differences in the friendships of boys and girls arise from innate differences, “you can only find them in men”.

The participants suggest that what makes a good friendship is the manner in which boys and girls relate. It is suggested that boys and girls have particular attributes which they use to interact in friendships. The participants suggest that girls use their “heart” when relating in close friendships. They suggest that the way girls think and feel about their friends is strongly influenced by their emotionality. It is also reported that girls experience more closeness or intimacy in their friendships. Equally, the participants suggest that boys are “rational” when relating within their friendships. It is suggested that when relating to friends boys prefer to use logical reasoning instead of emotional expressiveness. They also suggest that boys are likely to have “masculine” tendencies when relating to friends, which are in contrast to feminine ways of relating. The use of these tendencies seems to imply that boys do not necessarily show feelings/emotion in their friendships as compared to girls.

Participant D aged 24 illustrates the comparisons of how boys and girls relate in their friendships.

*“I think so but with girls I see there is more disappointments with girls, because with girls now I would say they use the more heart more than the reasoning part of themselves. That means they use the heart, it’s all about how they feel towards their friendship more than how they think about them that means the rational part of them the reasoning part of their friendship its more limited than the imagination of the heart and the way it feels towards a person but with guys we analyze everything, with small-small things guys are more affected or their affections are with small things that their friends do and you find that situations they make us come closer; that will make our friendship grow bigger and very powerful... so the more reasoning part of ourselves play an important role but on the other girls side you find that hey it’s another thing because it’s more about they feel in a certain situation so the difference it’s quite significant and it’s not really that much the same the friendship of guys or the friendship of girls.” (Participant D, aged 24)*

In this quote this young man explains the differences between the friendships of boys and girls in terms of the stereotype of innate differences of girls and boys: girls are emotional while boys are rational. Firstly he describes that within their friendships girls are guided by their feelings and emotions. He captures this notion by mentioning that girls use the *“imagination of the heart”*. On the other hand, the quote reveals that boys carefully consider their behaviour when relating to friends. Boys seem to be rational about their friendships, and in this manner thoughtful of what brings them closer as friends.

The assumption that girls are more emotional is also found in the comments that girls are more physically and emotionally expressive than boys. This is well demonstrated in the following extract.

*“Intimacy... I don't think so, ja maybe a little bit, there could be but it's strong for girls than it is for guys; guys tend to be masculine sometimes they don't show their feelings so you can't really be emotional all the time, you can't be hugging and kissing as guys but for women it's considered normal. Boy's I mean, if I could rate it's very low as compared to girls.” (Participant E, aged 24)*

The participant suggests that boys do not express their closeness in friendships in the manner that girls would. The quote reveals that intimacy shared by male friends has its masculine qualities. He explains through implying that boys cannot express their feelings through *“hugging and kissing”*, which is how girls would typically relate.

### **4.3 Do young men experience or provide emotional support to one another?**

The young men describe emotional support as one part of friendship in which young men listen to each other and offer mutual guidance when necessary. Emotional support also seems to be about providing “comfort” to the other in times of stress, difficulty or hardship. Participants agree that sharing stories with friends is an important way of seeking support and obtaining advice.

The quote below demonstrates the importance of friends listening to each other and being receptive of the friends' experiences.

*“Just listening to someone, I think it’s probably cliché to say that but I think it’s really true. Comfort and support I think... listening to some say things and what’s going through their lives and what’s going through their mind at the moment is very important so they can just get it off their chest.” (Participant A, aged 21)*

The participant suggests that it is important to be aware of any indication which may suggest that friends need support. It may be about the experiences which they have had or thoughts which they may have. He also reveals that it is vital to provide friends the opportunity to talk about issues so as to “*get it off their chest*”.

The next quote demonstrates the emotional support given by friends during time of difficulty.

*“It depends... like I mean it’s someone you can say you can come up with like really I mean a story that you think that really broke your heart and they’d laugh at it and, but not laugh at it because they think you’re being stupid or they just really don’t care but it’s just like people who really understand you huh; like they won’t take that story serious, they’d laugh at the story; they would laugh but then give you advice after that or maybe be sympathetic or something but I guess it’s just those type of things. It’s like the person that if you had done something really wrong and who would not be shy to say I think you did something wrong and not because they trying to protect your friendship but they would just give it to you straight because they are your friends...” (Participant J, aged 25)*

This quote gives some insight into the nature of support shared by friends, and how friends are able to understand and empathize when someone is experiencing a distressing situation. His initial description of laughing at friends who share their difficulty gives the impression of a lack of care or an attitude of mockery, until he goes on to say that their ability to laugh is a sign that they really care. In this way he describes that this understanding may also be about friends sharing good humour over the experience. Furthermore, friends candidly point out to one another what they did wrong; “*because they are your friends...*” implying that such direct talk is a form of care and support.

The interviews also show that providing material support to friends is an important way of demonstrating care. The participants report that “tangible” support is about providing a friend with accommodation or assisting them with money. It is also reported that demonstrating this kind of care and support is a “reciprocal duty” whereby the friends know that the care and support they offer would be reciprocated. Whenever friends provide support it is reciprocated by the other availing themselves to do the same. This implies that the young men are able to rely on each other materially in times when they need support.

The following quote demonstrates the importance of young men supporting and caring for one another.

*“The support they normally offer to each other or give to each other or help each other with, you’ll find that umm they offer you a place to stay when you don’t have any where to stay; you’re broke, they can say “okay man you are on my budget let’s do this” ... the support there you’ll find that with guys its more tangible and its very, very important because we sacrifice much for each other when we are friends as young men... I wouldn’t mind to spare a little bit to say okay here and there do this and this, buy this for yourself; because I know one day it might be me and as guys we will never drop each other, that’s one thing I have noticed with my friends...”*  
(Participant D, aged 24)

This quote movingly demonstrates how friends take on the responsibility of supporting another friend who may need assistance. Providing a friend with material support is regarded as an important “sacrifice” which friends are willing to make as a gesture of friendship. This offers insight into the extent of support that young men assume in order to show care towards their friends. Furthermore, the participant suggests that when the need arises for friends to reciprocate support, they will “never drop each other”. The quote also demonstrates that for young men tangible material support is an important aspect of friendship. The statement “for guys it is more tangible” suggests that this is in contrast with girls/women, for whom expressions of support are less tangible.

The quote below further shows the importance of reciprocating support.

*“I think it’s implied, you just see it, you don’t have to do something, you just know that’s its there. I don’t have to ask for something, if I’m going through something right now you know it’s like a reciprocal duty between us as guys that I won’t ask for this, if I’m in need you will provide... if I’m in need of money or something and I call him “look my boy I’m kind of stuck here, could you please sort me out”. I wouldn’t tell him to lend me money, just sort me out. He will give me the money; he won’t expect payment ‘cause we boys, we brothers, that’s all it is.”*  
(Participant E, aged 24)

This quote reveals that young men implicitly assume and understand that friendship is about mutual material support. Young men are attuned to one another’s needs so that “*I don’t have to ask for something*”, implying that friends will automatically know this. The participant suggests that friends have a particular understanding of the importance of reciprocating support whenever it is needed. He suggests that supporting a friend is not offered with the expectation of returning what was given but rather the confidence of knowing that friends can rely on one another. Furthermore, the support seems to derive from a sense of brotherhood which in turn influences a brotherly bond amongst these friends.

The young men seem to suggest that material support is an extension of emotional support. On the other hand, tangible material support is mostly valued for its practical purpose as this kind of support occurs when it is most needed. Both emotional and material support seems to encourage closeness within the young men’s friendships. Furthermore, within their friendships, the young men are able to negotiate which kind of support they can offer their friends.

#### ***4.3.1 Does the support young men give and receive deal with vulnerability?***

Despite the common and assumed expressions of material support just described, the findings suggest that young men “don’t share” their difficulties on a personal or emotional level, which may prevent them from receiving support of an emotional kind from others. Together with the findings about material support, this may suggest that young men have great difficulty dealing with emotional issues, and therefore prefer to give and receive concrete, practical support. The quote below suggests that there is a barrier to men revealing personal issues and receiving

emotional support. It also demonstrates the possible meanings behind young men not revealing intimate information within friendships.

*“...ja, eish... I mean men have got ego so... support comes to those who are willing to be supported. There’s, we’ve got our own pride, there’s many things we don’t share with our fellow brothers so when we don’t share those things... it’s not as if we don’t want to, it’s just that we don’t want to share those things because of the shallow relationship we have, so they don’t really help because a person can handle things forever and not tell anyone. And to them also inside if they share too much it’s more like it’s a sign of weakness or some sort of thing, maybe I don’t know but it shows with the relationships that we have that there’s things that we don’t share.” (Participant G, aged 22)*

In this quote the participant suggests that support is a precarious matter when negotiated in male friendships: on the one hand young men apparently do want emotional support from one another, although this is stated rather tentatively as, “*it’s not as if we don’t want to*”; on the other hand, young men are very guarded about expressing such needs. This young man reveals that any sharing of personal needs may be interpreted as a sign of weakness, and he demonstrates how vulnerability may be hidden by young men not being able to share issues or ask for support. He mentions that the “ego” or pride of young men may cause men to reject support, or may hinder men from sharing or disclosing personal matters. The quote brings to fore the possible effects of young men sharing intimate information within friendships. Furthermore, the quote suggests that emotional support may be difficult because young men may have shallow relationships which seem to lack the intimacy experienced when friends openly share with one another.

## *Chapter Five*

### **Discussion of Results**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This study on the friendships of young men aimed to explore how male university students perceive close friendships. The study examined the experiences or meanings of friendships for young men. The study also investigated whether young men form friends with both boys and girls, and it sought to explore how they experience or provide emotional support to one another.

#### **5.2 The experience/meaning of friendship**

One aim of the study was concerned with exploring the importance and nature of friendship according to the young men. It was found that the young men attach importance to the manner in which friends guide each other. The life experiences which friends share have also been found to be a meaningful aspect of friendships. Friendship seems to provide them with the ability to talk to each other about their feelings and to self-disclose about issues which may be concerning. The young men commonly recognize that friends are able to become as close as family through the experiences shared and the growth of the friendship. It has also been identified that as much as friendships are important and meaningful, friends may tend to influence each other negatively at times.

The young men have described the nature of friendship as encompassing various elements. They agree that friendship has a way of encouraging a sense of belonging. The young men described that there are different kinds of friends with whom various levels of closeness are shared. The university experience seems to afford these young men the opportunity to form and develop new

friendships apart from their existing friendships. In addition the nature of friendships among young men seems to be about individuals identifying with and valuing certain characteristics which their friends have.

It seems likely that guidance from friends may influence development and growth within friendships. The young men report that “you need people around to guide you” (Participant E, aged 24). According to Zarbatany et al. (2004) friendships are especially important during the early developmental stages. In addition human beings are always in a stage of development which makes friendships an important aspect during one’s lifetime. Being able to share life experiences enables friends to learn from one another and influence each other and allow the friendship to grow.

Brooks (2007) suggests that researchers have rarely explored how men do feel or experience intimacy and emotionality in their relationships with other men. However much has been studied on how young men demonstrate their feelings and emotions when among their peers (Oransky & Merecek, 2009). Therefore, in the view of these studies it has become evident that for young men, expression of emotion is regulated according acceptable peer group norms. This differs to what these young men have reported as friendships being the “central element” of life’s experience. Friendships allow these men to reveal parts of them which may not necessarily be revealed in any other relationships. They also afford these young men the openness to share emotions and discuss issues which may be of concern. It has been expressed that peers are very important when there is no direct communication with parents about certain personal issues. This is highlighted by one of the young men who suggest that culture does not afford young men to talk to parents about emotions.

It is reported that by and large studies indicate that female same-sex friendships experience more personal disclosure than do males. However, according to Guerrero and Chavez (2005) self-disclosure appears to be one of the important elements associated with emotional closeness and relational satisfaction in friendships, irrespective of gender differences. As such, the young men



commonly agree that being able to talk to friends about feelings and emotions encourages a sense of openness within friendships. The young men also suggest that their male friendships have a distinctive role in their lives as these friends are the ones with whom certain issues can be shared or to whom they can be disclosed. The findings of this study reveal that having a friend to confide in means that your friend is able to relate in a non-judgmental manner and continue to accept you for who you are. Furthermore, the study has identified that certain cultures may place a taboo on discussing certain issues with elders, making friends the only people to turn to when needing to talk.

It is reported that friendship is able to offer a kind of belonging and even a sense of brotherhood. The young men suggest that friends may sometimes be as important as family. While Butera (2008) describes mateship as a relationship where toughness, independence and resilience are the norm, the young men in the present study describe friendship differently, experiencing friendship as a kind of brotherhood, where friends are always there to care for one another. This aspect of friendship implies that male friends share dependability where they can rely on each other for emotional care and support. Mateship has meanings which are distinct when used in the Australian context (Butera, 2008). Therefore, it is important to consider the contexts where meanings of friendships are experienced as the meanings of closeness may differ. Most of the young men in this study live away from their family and friends, thus being away from home and entering university seem to distance them from their primary support system. It seems likely that forming new friendships and relationships with people with varying backgrounds and experiences allow the young men to reveal more of themselves in order to form new emotional bonds.

The way in which the views and experiences of friendship were elicited from the participants suggests that they had the liberty to discuss and determine their different meanings of friendship. The young men report that there are different types of relationships with varying degrees of closeness, and they categorise the friends they have as either acquaintances or 'real' friends.

According to the young men in this study they are able to have different kinds of friends in parallel, such as those who they maintain a personal relationship with or relate to in a shallow manner. This particular distinction between different types of friends has not been reported in previous studies. The findings of the present study also reveal that friends are also categorised as those from 'home' or those who were met at university. Zarbatany et al. (2004) suggest that a 'shared history' amongst friends reflects the availability of mutual past experiences that led to feelings of closeness. In accordance with this suggestion, the young men maintain that personal or intimate experiences are shared with the home friends as they feel more at liberty with friends they have known for a period of time. On the other hand, the university experience allows the young men to continue forming new friendships of a different kind.

### 5.3 Friendships with boys and girls

The findings reveal that one of the differences between the friendships with boys compared to friendships with girls is that girls are not interested in the same social activities as boys, making friendships with girls less likely. Boys spend time competing with one another and engaging in games or sporting activity. This is an aspect of men's friendships which a number of studies have reported on. Grief (2006) endorses these findings, reporting that for some men engaging in activities is a form of bonding.

The findings reveal that friendships with girls are also not as close as with boys, and the young men report that the bond shared with male friends is much stronger than with female friends. This stands in contrast to the findings of previous studies. Mattis et al. (2001) suggest that men are inclined to feel more comfortable sharing intimate information with female friends than male friends, and are able to talk more openly with female friends. In contrast, the participants in the present study report otherwise. In addition, the young men imply that the ability to talk to and relate more easily with male friends encourages a strong bond in male same-sex friendships.

In this study young men seem to primarily view girl friends as potential lovers rather than friends. Equally, the findings reveal that cross-sex friendships may involve the precarious negotiation of keeping the friendship platonic versus forming a romantic relationship. For the young men, friendships with girls are intended as a basis from which they are able to pursue their romantic intentions. According to Guerrero and Chavez (2005) cross-sex friendships present with the ambiguity about the potential of romantic or sexual nature of the relationship creating uncertainty.

Comparing the friendships boys have among themselves with the friendships of girls, the findings reveal perceived differences in how the young men view the way boys and girls relate in their friendships. Participants describe their friendships with other young men as engaging in a “manly” manner. This manner of relating seems to be about engaging in activities such as sport, which Grief (2006) describes as a form of male bonding. The young men report that engaging in enjoyable energetic activities is a unique element only found in male friendships. Similarly, Curry (1991) suggests that friendships of men are grounded in activities which give them a means to bond. Participants suggest that “doing things” together with friends is one of the important factors in the growth of close male friendships. The participants also portray boys as rational and controlled in their friendships, whereas girls are portrayed as emotionally and physically expressive. The young men seem to compare these friendship styles while not necessarily prescribing which is better in maintaining closeness in friendships. This idea is best expressed by participant D who mentions that when interacting, girls use “the imagination of the heart and the way it feels towards a person”. On the other hand, the young men suggest that boys carefully consider their behaviour when relating to their friends rather than being too spontaneous. In addition, the findings reveal that boys do not easily demonstrate emotions through affectionate physical behaviour such as hugging or kissing. According to Connell (1995) one probable explanation could be that men avoid overt expressions of affection due to homophobia and the fear of being perceived as homosexual by others. Despite this, the findings of the present study clearly demonstrate that young men do form close and supportive bonds in their friendships with their own distinctive manner of demonstrating affection.

#### 5.4 Emotional and material support in friendship

One aim of the present study was to explore whether support is an important part of the friendships of young men. The findings reveal that both emotional and material support is an important part of the friendships of the participants. Emotional support is about being able to listen to friends and allow them to talk about their issues and confide in friends. Support amongst friends is also about providing material support to each other and reciprocating this tangible support. The participants report that material support has the potential to create closeness among young men.

Material support was mentioned by both the students in campus residence and the day students. It may appear that material support was strongly mentioned by the resident students as they experience more of a communal living arrangement through sharing rooms and common areas, amongst other facilities. They seem to have thus learnt to share and negotiate material support with those they share space with and most importantly those with whom friendships have developed.

As important as emotional support is, the participants suggest that this is a somewhat difficult issue when negotiated in male friendships. While the young men may need and value emotional support they find difficulty in expressing such needs directly. By comparison, the findings show that young men easily provide and expect concrete, material support, and are more at ease with giving and receiving this support.

According to Seidler (2006) material support may be considered as instrumental support, which is a traditional masculine form of friendship. He suggests that this manner of support is different from emotional support which he proposes is relational and seen as mostly feminine (Seidler, 2006). The findings of this study demonstrate that the young men are able to share their emotional experiences in their friendships. This stands in contrast to the findings of Wester et al.

(2007) who report that the inherent masculine norms place restriction on emotional expression. In contrast, however, Butera's (2008) findings from her study reveal that the provision of emotional support is in fact more important to young men than practical support. In addition, the young men in Butera's (2008) study are allowing themselves to show vulnerability and communicate deeper feelings, hopes and fears within their friendships. Similarly, according to the participants in this study, providing a friend with emotional support is about availing yourself to them, listening, and giving them the opportunity to "get it off their chest" (Participant A, aged 21).

While the participants have reported on the importance of both instrumental and relational support, seeking and providing relational/emotional support may be experienced with some difficulty. Seidler (1994) suggests that it is likely for men to feel that sharing emotional difficulties will lead to rejection and possible abandonment by others. According to the participants, if young men "share too much it's more like a sign of weakness" (Participant G, aged 22). This is an indication that the young men may be hiding their vulnerabilities for fear of being portrayed as being weak by their peers. This may in turn lead to young men becoming locked within themselves, wanting to seek support but feeling unable to do so (Seidler, 1994). Butera (2008) concludes that while it appears that emotional expressiveness is becoming more normative in young men's friendships, the more instrumental or practical modes of relating are still very dominant.

## *Chapter Six*

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **6.1 Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore how young men make meaning of their friendship experience. The study also aimed at finding out the differences in friendships formed with other males as opposed to females. The young men describe their friendships as being unique by comparison with other relationships. Being able to share parts of oneself emerges as an important aspect of male friendships, which encourage openness in communicating emotional experiences. The findings reveal that the expression of emotion includes sharing vulnerabilities, which Seidler (2006) indicates is not easy for young men. The young men also seem to experience emotional support and dependability on one another. These findings stand in contrast to the findings of other studies which report that men avoid seeking out or extending emotional support or experiencing emotional closeness (Oransky & Merecek, 2009; Seidler, 1994).

While the university experience has allowed the young men to form new friendships they continue to maintain closeness with their home friends. Friendships with girls seem to present the young men with the ambiguity of either maintaining a platonic relationship or pursuing romantic interests. This is supported by Guerrero and Chavez (2005) who found that cross-sex friendships may present with sexual intentions leading to uncertainty about friendship as such.

While the young men indicate that they do not easily express emotions through physical means, such as kissing or hugging, it is demonstrated that they have a distinctive manner of showing care and support. The findings demonstrate that relational and instrumental support are both important in the friendships of young men. However, the young men also mention that emotional support may tend to be a precarious matter in their friendships and may be interpreted by others as a sign of weakness.

The findings regarding the way in which the young men seek out and provide emotional care and support to one another also stand in contrast to what dominant modes of masculinity and gender discourse state about emotions and men, which are usually characterized as tough, independent and unemotional. The young men are able to provide the kind of support, whether it is relational or instrumental, which would be in the best interest of their friend. They seem to be attuned to how friends communicate difficulty and can thus respond in an appropriate manner which would best provide support. This further reinforces the reciprocal nature of friendship.

## **6.2 Limitations of the Research**

Silverman (2000) advises that when using interviews as a means for data collection, the mistake is to treat the verbal formulation of the participants as an appropriate substitute for the observation of actual behavior. This may result in the gap between beliefs and action and between what people say and what they actually do (Silverman, 2000). The results of this study also need to be interpreted with caution as the participants were interviewed on both their views of friendship as well as their actual experience of friendship. At times their views about friendship may have coloured their reports of their actual experience of friendship.

The sample for this particular study was drawn only from a university environment. This may represent a very particular group of young men with a rather distinctive experience of friendship. Young men in other social contexts may report very different experiences of friendship.

This study only interviewed young men individually. Further research in this area could consider using focus groups as a strategy for collecting data. This method might offer further insight into how young men choose to report and enact their experiences of friendships in the presence of peers. The method could also aim to explore whether how the responses obtained in individual in-depth interviews compare to focus groups, allowing different faces of friendship to be seen.

### **6.3 Implications of the Findings**

This study has investigated young men's experience of friendship and offers insight into the ideas which they hold about the way friendships ought to be. The findings uniquely demonstrate the importance of mutual care and support in their friendships, in contrast to much previous research which points in a different direction. These findings have important implications for the socialization of boys and young men in various contexts, suggesting that a failure to take this need for emotional support seriously is to overlook some of their core needs. A number of NGOs and other organizations are currently working towards the transformation of masculinity in South Africa and other countries. The findings of this study suggest that boys' need for friendships which allow for emotional care and support should be recognized by these organizations and incorporated into their training programmes.



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***Appendix A***  
**Interview schedule**

**Demographic details**

Name & surname :

Male / Female :

Date of birth :

Home town :

Degree of study :

Ethnicity :

The close relationships or friendships of young men. Main themes.

- How would you define a close friendship?
- What are the characteristics of young male-male friendship?
- How would you describe female-female friendship?
- How would you describe your close friendship?
- How do young men see friendship as meaning in their lives?
- How open do you suppose male-male friendships are?
- What are the emotions associated with male friendships?
- When and how do you request or provide emotional support from other young men?
- If and how do you reveal vulnerability to one another?

**Introduction**

I am interested in your view about the friendships of young men, as well as your personal experience of friendship.

First, I would like to ask you your views on friendship.

- Is friendship NB to YM? In what way?
- What does friendship mean to YM?
- Are there different kinds of friends? Please explain with examples.
- Do YM form friendships with boys and girls? What is the difference?
- What is the difference between friends and acquaintances?

- Do boys or YM form different friends to girls?
- What makes “a good friend”?
- Do friends make a difference to the life of YM?
- Do friends play an important role in supporting YM? How so? Give me some examples.
- Do YM demonstrate their care and support for one another? How so? Give me some examples.
- Do you think YM form as good friendships as YW?

Second, I would like to ask you about your experience of friendship.

- Is friendship NB to YOU? In what way?
- What does friendship mean to YOU?
- Do you have different kinds of friends? Please explain with examples.
- Do you have friends who are both boys and girls? What is the difference?
- What is the difference between your friends and acquaintances?
- Can you think of your 3 best friends, and just tell me their first names.
  - How did they become friends to you?
  - What makes them special friends?
  - What makes them different as friends?
- Do these friends make a difference to your life?
- Do your friends play an important role in supporting you? How so? Give me some examples.
- Do you support them? How so?
- Do you demonstrate care and support for one another? How so? Give me some examples.
- What have been the most important experiences of your friendship with these 3 people?
- Do you feel satisfied with your friendships? Do you ever wish that they were different?

## *Appendix B*

School of Psychology

School of Psychology

P/Bag X01 Scottsville

PIETERMARITZBURG, 3209

South Africa

Phone: +27 33 2605371



Date: 16 March 2009

RE: Consent to participate in the research study

Dear: Participant

I am currently a Clinical Psychology Masters student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg campus). As part of the degree requirements I am conducting a research study that will explore (investigate) the close friendships of young men. This research study is supervised by Prof. G. C. Lindegger, a professor in the School of Psychology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I have presented you with this letter as you have been selected as a potential participant in the study; and I would like to attain your written informed consent to participate in the study.

Participation in the study will require you to take part in an interview and focus group. A focus group is a discussion interview which includes a group of participants discussing issues related to the study. The interview will be recorded so that it can be accurately transcribed and analysed at a later stage. The aim of the interview is for me to gain insight into your experiences of close friendships. Every care will be taken to ensure that the study inflicts no harm upon you. The researcher will protect your identity and confidentiality will be respected and your identity will remain confidential throughout the study. However, although participants in focus groups are

encouraged to respect the confidentiality of others' disclosures, this cannot be guaranteed so you are advised to be cautious about making disclosures about sensitive issues. Upon the completion of the study the findings will be made available to you and will be written and presented as a research study.

If at any point in the research process, for example, the interview or afterwards when the data is collected, or even during the analysis, you wish to no longer be a participant then you can withdraw from the study. You can leave the study by informing me either verbally or in writing. If you withdraw from the study you will not be punished and you are not forced to participate. If you consent to participation in the study it must be of your own free will and desire to do so. If you have any questions about anything that has been said about the study or written in this letter please ask us. It is extremely important that you understand everything you have been told before you give your consent to participate in the study.

If you would like (or require) further information about any aspect (part of) the research study please do not hesitate to contact either myself, Desireé Rautenheimer or my supervisor Prof. G. C. Lindegger.

Contact details: Name: Desireé Rautenheimer

Cell : 082 369 3065

Name: Prof. G. C. Lindegger

Cell : 033 260 5335

Thank you kindly for your time if you do wish to participate in the study please read and sign the paragraph below.

Informed consent:



-If you do not wish to participate in the study please do not sign this form.

-If you do wish to participate in the study please sign the form but note that signing the form does not mean that you have to do anything you do not wish to do and that you can leave the study whenever you want to, if you want to.

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

I (the participant) understand the information given to me and agree to participate in an interview. I am aware that my identity will remain confidential throughout the study. I agree to keep the discussions within the focus group as confidential. I also agree to the interview being audio recorded for the purpose of obtaining precise transcription of the discussions and to ensure an accurate analysis of the discussion.

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

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