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Uncertain Intimacies: App-based friendship among women

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Abstract

In the last few years, a new social phenomenon has been the making of friends through friendship apps. This is largely unexplored in research, with the potential to change the ways friendships are understood and formed. Women's experience of using friendship apps is explored by critically investigating Gidden's (1991) concept of the growth of pure relationships in late modernity, where relationships become free from external social structures. With the purpose of understanding how technological and social structures relate to friendship making today. The largest friendship app in Sweden GoFrendly which is only available for women was selected as a case to study. The material consists of 12 interviews with women who have experience using the app. By applying theories of pure relationships, algorithmic friendship, and platonic love, making friends through apps is understood as a process of emotional and practical friendship work. This includes being reflexive while navigating different uncertainties. By engaging in friend dating and self-disclosure to build intimacy a proliferation of pure relationships appears possible for women through friendship apps. However, the process also points to several forms of impurity, where gendered friendships increase and technology aids in creating artificial environments of homophily. In this way app friendships are anchored in several social structures rather than being free floating, and women mainly befriend those similar to themselves.

Keywords: Friendship apps, Friendship work, Pure relationship, Gendered friendship, Homophily

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Abstract

1. Introduction

Our lives are defined by our relationships with others. While sociologists have spent much time investigating how family and romantic relationships interact with our life, less focus has been given to our friendships (Allan, 2008). Still, it is a cornerstone in many people's lives. Friendship increases our well-being and happiness (Holt-Lunstad, 2016), and shapes our identity (Anthony & McCabe, 2015). Therefore, investigating conditions for making friends in society is also investigating the conditions for a good life, and what more important role can research have?

The relational composition of friendship varies depending on the social and technological structures of society. We live in a time of increasing social disembeddedness, with higher divorce rates, geographical mobility, and individualism, where friendship can be seen as an ideal relationship not anchored in economic or social institutions (Giddens, 1991, p. 89-99). In this way, late modernity makes way for what Giddens calls *pure relationships.* In pure relationships, friendship is based on the mutual satisfaction of the people involved. Where practices of intimacy and a reflexive self are of great importance to craft friendships without external forces.

The idea that our relationships, friendships included, are moving toward pure relationships has been critiqued. While friendships can seem voluntary and free-floating from social structures, research illuminates that class, race, and gender often lay foundations for which friendships we create, due to being limited to meeting people in the social setting we take part in (Adams & Allan, 1998; Allan, 2008; Davies, 2011). Gender specifically plays an important part in friendships, with friendships commonly being same-gendered (Baumgarte & Nelson, 2009). Women tend to practice intimacy to a higher degree than men in their friendships (Almquist et al., 2014; Oliker, 1998). Therefore, friendships in late modernity are still often gendered friendships, where women may have an easier chance to develop pure relationships than men due to gender norms.

Today, friendships are not only shaped by the people we interact with in the physical space. Due to a revolution of connectivity, the internet, and mobile phones, it is now possible to meet new friends that were previously impossible (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Making social networks less dependent on the structures of a specific community but rather technologically mediated. Where software and algorithms can play an active role in what new friendships are formed (Bucher, 2013). The development of technology such as dating apps

has led to changes in patterns of romantic intimacy, with an increasing uncertainty and risk of viewing others as products rather than persons (Bauman, 2003; Illouz, 2019). When apps are used to make friends, similar patterns may develop for non romantic intimacy. This is due to it becoming a more deliberate process of selection, therefore also requiring forms of friendship work to develop the relationship. Friendship work as an analytical concept encompasses the practical and emotional work of making friends. This is both related to using the technology of friendship app to seek out friends and present yourself as a friend, and also the emotional and reflexive process of evaluating and developing the relationship. Friendship is made through different emotions, making up a form of platonic love. These emotions may shift in their expression as friendships are shaped by technology. By applying Scheff's (2006) emotion concept of the three A:s, attraction, attunement, and attachment, which in different combinations can form connections to others, the process of intimacy in app-based friendship can be explored.

Technology, just as gender, is unquestionably a part of the conditions of friendships today. While research has focused on understanding online-only friendships as pure relationships (Henderson & Gilding, 2004), and women using phones for increased intimacy in their existing friendships (Green & Singleton, 2009), there has been little research investigating making friends through friendship apps. In Sweden, the largest friendship app GoFrendly is aimed only at women, deepening the gendered structure of friendship making. The app with over 175 000 users is a good case to study women's practice of making friends through technology today (GoFrendly, n.d.). With technologies such as GoFrendly, women have access to new friendships outside of their social circle. This could increase the possibility of pure relationships for women, but is simultaneously raising questions of technologies' role in friendships today.

1.1 Aim

This study aims to explore how women make friends through friendship apps, to understand how technological and social structures interact with friendship making. By studying app friendships, Giddens (1991) notion of pure relationship will be critically investigated, contributing to a discussion of the current state of friendship for women. The concept of friendship work will be applied to analyze emotional and practical processes of friendship making and navigating uncertainty on the app GoFrendly. With research showing how dating apps change structures of dating, there is a clear lack of research on how friendship apps may

change practices of friendship making and intimacy in today's society. Highlighting a need for this study to further understand the complexity and multimodality of friendships today.

1.2 Research questions

What forms of practical and emotional work are involved in the construction of new app-based friendships among women?

How are the uncertainties of this work managed and negotiated?

How are app-based friendships mediated by broader relations of gender, technology and society?

2. Previous research

2.1 Friendship in late modern society

Having high-quality friendships leads to numerous health benefits (Holt-Lunstad, 2016). Despite this, friendship as a specific research interest retrieved little attention from sociologists until the late 80s. When sociologists finally turned their heads toward friendship, the goal became to understand how the construction of friendship was related to larger societal structures (Adams & Allan, 1998). Illuminating that friendships often are created in situations in which we have little control. For example, we tend to become friends with people who are similar in terms of social class or level of education, and living close increases the chance of friendship (Allan, 2008). In this way, friendship is also embedded to some degree in society, even if it is less than family or marriage. Further, making new friends is often a process happening without a deliberate process of the people involved (Ahrne, 2014), making it an elusive relationship to study.

Late modern society is defined by its increasing individualization and disembeddedness, where people tend to move, change jobs, and divorce at a higher rate than ever before (Giddens, 1991). With this, the importance of friendship has been theorized to increase in many people's lives, since our freely chosen relationship becomes points of reference for our identity (Allan, 1998; Giddens, 1991). Friendship can even become a

replacement for family in some cases, as a form of chosen family providing support (Spencer & Pahl, 2006). This has been seen in friendship practices of lone mothers in Sweden (Alsarve, 2020). Using friendship for support traditionally belonging to family is not always easy. Friendship viewed in this too idealized form can hide many troubles that come with it, such as power imbalances between friends (Heaphy & Davies, 2012). Another danger of idealizing friendship as the ultimate voluntary relationship is that the responsibility of finding and maintaining friends also falls on the individual. Needing to craft their social support among much uncertainty. Falling out of friendship is therefore a process that can lead to much shame and guilt, and even an ontological uncertainty in who we are (Smart et al., 2012). This could encourage people to use technology to make new friends when life and relationships change, to aid in the process of understanding ourselves in an uncertain world.

The increasing individualization affects how friendships are valued and practiced. Valuing friendship has higher health benefits in individualistic countries, and women across cultures experience greater well-being than men when valuing their friendships (Lu et al., 2021). Individualistic cultures also have high relational mobility, meaning having larger opportunities to choose and change relationships based on personal preference, compared to cultures where social relationships are more deeply anchored in traditions and institutions (Kito et al., 2017). This gives close relationships a higher level of intimacy in individualistic cultures, since more work is invested to keep and make new relationships when there is a risk of losing them if people are not satisfied. At the same time, individualistic societies may increase loneliness, with young people in the age of 16-24 experiencing more loneliness than middle-aged people (Barreto et al., 2021). Making young adulthood an even more important age to form new friendships. Yet there is little research on how people make friends as adults (Ahrne, 2014). Further, having a higher change in friends through life raises questions about the friendship quality over time, when commitment to long-term relationships becomes less common (Spencer & Pahl, 2006).

2.2 Friendship and gender

Friendship is a voluntary relationship that gives much freedom in who to befriend in late modernity. Still, same-gendered friendships are more common than other friendships (Gillespie et al., 2015; Reeder, 2016). When doing friendship, people therefore also perform gender. Forms of femininity and masculinity are expressed through friendships, where men more often than women have to navigate expressing intimacy in relation to homophobia

(Bank & Hansford, 2000). Women on the other hand tend to have higher levels of self-disclosure in friendships and benefit more from high-quality friendships (Almquist et al., 2014). Further, heteronormativity interacts with how friendships are practiced, where the couple norm often takes priority over friendship relationships (Cronin, 2015). Showing that while friendships often are valued, they are rarely prioritized in relation to romantic relationships as adults (Goedecke, 2018; Halberstam, 2005). This can increase the difficulty to create new friendships as adults, since it is not the norm to prioritize them.

Women appear to reevaluate the importance of friendship after breaking up from a couple structure to a larger extent than men, reforming ways of intimacy to a larger group of friends rather than be contained within a couple (Cronin, 2015). A mindset that increases the chance of reconnecting and building new friendships later in life for women. Women are also less lonely than men (Barreto et al., 2021). Further, young women have been seen to construct femininity through their usage of mobile phones with friends, creating spaces of intimacy through chats and phone calls to a larger extent than men (Green & Singleton, 2009). This raises the question of how technology interacts with making friends today for women, who seem more motivated to make new friends later in life and appear to be having an easier time expressing intimacy with friends through technology.

2.3 Technology and relationships

The process of individualization happened side by side with a technological transformation of society. Some scholars see the revolution of the mobile phone and internet leading to increased connectedness and possibilities of new relationships, improving our lives in many ways (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Others warn of digitalization leading to the commodification of the self (Bauman, 2003), with social media pushing for calculating friendships rather than building deep connections (Bakardjieva, 2014). No matter if one views technology as the key to better or worse relationships in our lives, it is clear that friendships today are a multimodal phenomenon. For example, Facebook as an infrastructure influences both which new connections are made through its algorithms, and how people present themselves through the settings of the platform to connect with others (Bucher, 2013). Further, friendships that are created through digital technology can shape certain practices in friendship-making. Participants in Standlee's (2019) study of friendship and online filtering highlighted the importance of analyzing potential friends through their social media

platforms. This was to ensure they did not become friends with someone who had too dissimilar views of their own. Conducting digital background checks of potential friends decreased uncertainty in the process of making friends, but risked an increasing focus on similarity in new friendships.

Making friends through friendship apps is less explored in research (Byron et al., 2021), despite their increasing popularity with sites such as Meetup or the dating app Bumbles friendship mode (Bumble, n.d.; Meetup, n.d.). The process of finding romantic partners online and through apps has been much more investigated in modern research (Ellison et al., 2006; Ward, 2017). App-dating can increase a sense of control and efficiency in the creation of new relationships, being able to choose among a large selection of potential partners (Hobbs et al., 2017). Simultaneously it makes users act within a new uncertainty of intimacy. Needing to navigate a world of strangers and build trust, a process that can be far from rational or efficient (Bandinelli & Gandini, 2022; Chan, 2018). Users of dating apps often move from different apps and mediums, such as chats or phone calls, before meeting face-to-face. Before moving to a different medium than the dating app there is almost no real sense of communicating with a person. This makes ghosting, which means to stop communicating to someone without any explanation, a common part of the app-dating culture (Bandinelli & Gandini, 2022).

Friendship apps are often configured with a similar structure as dating apps, with profiles and potential matches. Therefore it is reasonable to believe that some social patterns of dating apps are also reflected in the usage of friendship apps. In search of friends in a women-only friendship app such as GoFrendly, the app becomes a space where women can interact with each other without men being present. This may increase the possibility of feeling safe among strangers in comparison to dating apps, which are not experienced as a safe space for women (Gillet, 2021). Both similarities and differences are therefore expected in how women interact on friendship apps in comparison to what has been seen in app-dating research.

3. Theoretical perspectives

A mix of theoretical perspectives will be employed to capture the experience of women making friends through apps. Due to the exploratory nature of the study on a subject less researched, an openness to different perspectives has been maintained throughout the process. This includes perspectives from both sociology of friendship, emotionality, modernity theories, and algorithmic friendships.

3.1 Friendship

To analyze how women make friends it is necessary to define what friendship is, since the word may be widely used in everyday life. Many scholars have been trying to understand and categorize friendship, from Aristotle to Derrida (1997). This study will approach the concept of friendship in a way that is common in friendship research. A friend is someone you like and choose to spend time with, and friendship is up to the friends to construct according to their preference (Allan, 2008).

The variety of friendships can seem endless, since it is unique to the people involved. One way to understand friendship is as a spectrum, with increasing intensity and importance for the friends. Spencer and Pahl (2006, pp. 60-61) distinguish between *simple friendship* and *complex friendship.* Simple friendships can be friends who are associates, useful contacts, favor friends, or fun friends. These are types of friends you might do specific activities with, exchange information, or socialize with. Moving across the spectrum to the complex friendships we find types of friends such as helpmate, comforter, confidant, and soulmate. Common for the different complex friendships is that they require a higher level of trust and intimacy.

Friendship is not only about how it is organized but also who becomes friends with whom. It becomes even more important when investigating friendship-making on apps since it demands a deliberate choice in who to befriend. The most common force for all kinds of friendship to flourish has been *homophily,* meaning the love for similarity (McPherson et al., 2001). These similarities can be both social categories such as class, race, or gender, but also values such as political opinions. Homophily shapes friendships due to external circumstances of being more exposed to people similar to ourselves as we grow up (Davies, 2011), but it can also function as a voluntary force where people simply are drawn to similarities and choose to build a friendship (Ahrne, 2014). In app-based friendship homophily could even increase since the technology allows for filtering which in dating apps

has been seen to lead to a process of efficiency, where dissimilar people are excluded in the search to not waste time (Best & Delmege, 2012).

The process of making friends is not only some rationalized choice between suiting potential friends but an emotional process of relationship making. Friendship-making can therefore be understood through the emotions of platonic love. Scheff (2006) names three main emotions which make different forms of love in different combinations, called the three A:s. These are *attraction, attunement,* and *attachment.* Attraction for Scheff (2006) is sexual attraction, which he does not include in the friendship equation. Attunement is a central part of non-erotic love which fuels friendships. It means to balance one's viewpoint with the other person, understanding each other equally or being on the same wavelength. Attachment is the feeling of missing the other when they are not there, something that occurs in some deeper friendships, but not all. The combination between attachment and attunement makes up the base of platonic love according to Scheff (2006). Attachment and attraction are physical responses, while attunement is a more psychological and emotional response based on sharing an identity and understanding.

Ahrne (2014) describes attunement as a kit that brings people together in the early stages of friendship, and is non-negotiable for the relationship to function. While Scheff (2006) believes attunement can be developed over time, Ahrne (2014) believes it simply has to be there for the friendship to develop from the start. Another way to understand the emotionality of friendship would be to not disregard attraction as a solely sexual emotion. If attraction can be applied in a platonic setting of friendship, it can be seen as the force that brings strangers together. A curiosity of another due fueled by similarities or attractive friendship traits. Platonic attraction could be important especially when the friendship starts on friendship apps with very little information about the other, since you cannot yet really know the other person's viewpoint enough to feel attunement. The attunement can then be something that grows over time through communication. If that is the case attunement can truly be an understanding, which is difficult to achieve without any prior relationship or context. Following the emotionality of making friends, attachment becomes a possible point of reference where the friendship is established. However, attachment is not a necessary part of all friendships, but rather the more complex ones involving deeper emotions. In some friendships, attunement is enough to feel that the connection between the friends is binding them together. To analyze the gendered friendship practice of making new friends through friendship apps, homophily, and the three As will be applied to understand how and with whom the friendship develops from scratch.

3.2 Pure relationship

Even before the technological development of apps for finding partners and friends, there were discussions of new ways of performing intimacy in late modernity. Such as Giddens' (1991, p. 87) concept of *pure relationship*. The pure relationship is an ideal type of voluntary relationship and is becoming a way for romantic and platonic relationships to organize themselves. In a pure relationship, the people involved actively choose each other among a variety of possibilities, rather than based on external social conditions. Proximity and some social or economical factors can still be involved in the relationship. However, due to the disembeddedness of social life where the individual is expected to create their own life course based on their preference, relationships tend to be ordered around the satisfaction it can provide to the people involved before structures of tradition. Friendships are therefore in late modernity are more often ordered as a pure relationship than before and become an ideal type of relationship (Giddens, 1991).

If friendships are becoming more like pure relationships, how is a pure relationship done in practice? According to Giddens (1991), a pure relationship in practice means that the people involved continuously need to evaluate their relationship to see if it is worth keeping. The pure relationship is therefore reflexively organized, where the individual reflects on who they are and what they need in a relationship. At the heart of a pure relationship is intimacy, which involves self-disclosure, which means sharing who you are with someone else. Intimacy also needs a balance between autonomy and sharing feelings, to avoid the closeness to turn into dependence (Giddens, 1991, p. 95). To perform intimacy with each other trust is necessary. In pure relationships trust needs to be worked at, since there is nothing to take for granted from the beginning. Trust is built by both being trusting and trustworthy, to learn who the other person is and how they respond in different situations. Finally, commitment is important in pure relationships according to Giddens (1991) since it replaces the external anchors which used to keep people together. Commitment needs to come from both parties to work and involves taking the risk of losing other opportunities in order to keep investing in the current relationship. Something that can be challenging in a society with many choices.

The pure relationship as a general trend of ordering our romantic and platonic relationship has been criticized since it was introduced. Jamieson (1999) discusses how gender inequalities inhibit pure relationships in heterosexual couples, due to the unbalanced power dynamics often present in these relationships. According to Jamieson (1999) same-gendered romantic relationships may be more prone to equal relationships. However,

they also need to construct their relationship within a society with much hostility, which could hinder the voluntary nature of the pure relationship. The critique against friendship being ordered as a pure relationship without institutional ties has also appeared in the sociology of friendship. Friendship research has been focused on showing how friendship is structured in society in relation to both gender and class, putting it into a societal context rather than something that freely floats outside of it (Adams & Allan, 1998; Allan, 2008).

3.3 Gendered friendship and friendship work

Friendship as a practice is gendered, with same-gender preferences in friendship being most common (Baumgarte & Nelson, 2009). Therefore any possible movement toward pure relationships also needs to be understood in relation to gender. Oliker (1998) explains how the modernization of friendship, with increasing intimacy and self-disclosure, also happens with the transformation of women's role in society. Oliker argues that women, especially middle-class women, became the most active practitioners of intimacy. With gender inequalities creating barriers within marital relationships for women in the 20s century, the closeness of same-gendered friends made up for the lack of intimacy in their heterosexual relationships. Further women as consumers had a rich material of literature, media, and therapeutic advice aimed towards them often dedicated to intimacy. These factors together with research showing that women in same-gendered friendships are more focused on self-disclosure and intimacy than men (Bank & Hansford, 2000; Fehr, 2004), made women in same-gendered friendships the leaders of intimacy throughout the 20s century.

Research on cross-gendered friendships and male friendships reveals structures that hinder possible development of pure relationships in comparison to female friendships. For example, even with a transformation of society where different genders interact in social arenas more than before, it has not led to a cultural transformation where men and women are expected to become friends (Blatterer, 2018). This appears to be due to the heteronormative ideals which hinder the imagination of cross-gendered friendships. For same-gendered male friendships, there can be an issue to develop a pure relationship with intimacy and self-disclosure due to norms of masculinity (Goedecke, 2018). While both men and women value conversation in friendships, men often want a shared activity to feel comfortable talking about sensitive topics (Greif, 2008). Fearing that too much intimacy could be interpreted as an expression of homosexuality. In this way, homophobia can make intimacy in the form of self-disclosure, much more difficult to navigate for straight men (Bank &

Hansford, 2000). It is important to note that in Sweden today masculinities are unstable and changing. Many men construct their friendship in ways that include a higher level of intimacy (Goedecke, 2018). Still, even men wanting to perform other forms of masculinity express being limited in their intimacy in friendships in comparison to women due to gender expectations (Goedecke, 2018).

Pure relationships disembeddedness from social structures such as gender can clearly be criticized as seen above. However, looking at women's friendships specifically, a movement toward pure relationships appears more promising than in other friendships, due to their history of practicing intimacy in friendships to a higher degree than men (Greif, 2008; Oliker, 1998), which is necessary for pure relationships to develop. Therefore, practices of pure relationships will be analyzed in the women's experience of making friends through friendship apps. The more abstract ideals of pure relationship will be understood through the practice of *Friendship work,* a term coming from the data material of the women's experience of making friends this way. While the participants often highlighted that making friends through apps was a process that required much more work than other friendships, the term friendship work will be used as an analytical tool to describe the different necessary steps to make friends via app. Friendship work involves both practical processes of making an app profile to present yourself as a friend, navigating the selection process of other profiles and the emotional uncertainty of friend dating, and finally reflexivity where participants evaluate which potential friends they want to develop further. The practices of friendship work are necessary due to meeting someone outside of a social context bringing them together. By looking at practices of friendship work, pure relationships will be critically analyzed. To understand the possible development of pure relationships between women, the technological revolution since Giddens (1991) coined the phrase needs to be discussed.

3.4 Networked individuals and algorithmic friendship

To say that social life has been transformed by the technological development of the late 20th and early 21st century is hardly an overstatement. Three major changes can be seen to contribute to a new form of social order. These are the expansion of social networks, the internet, and the mobile revolution (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). The technology enabling people to reach out to anyone at any time changes the way new relationships can be formed and maintained. This means that people are fulfilling their social needs as *networked individuals*, using diverse networks through technology rather than relying on smaller

communities (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). This makes today's friendships technologically mediated and multimodal, taking place over many platforms and technologies. The concept of networked individuals is similar to the pure relationship, as it is about choosing other people based on individual preferences rather than due to external social structures. However, the networked individual further highlights the role technology has in this social transformation. The networked individual also navigates the web of networks for more purposes besides intimacy. For example, by finding aid in specific situations such as coping with illness or increasing their social capital to improve their work life (Rainie & Wellman, 2012). In this study the concept is foremost applicable in the blurring of offline and online relationships and the diversity of social contacts from many different networks rather than one community.

Friendships created through friendship apps give opportunities to find people outside of your established social circle, allowing for a possible disembeddedness. But the relationship is now instead re-embedded in the digital structures of the platform, which can affect who and how you meet. Friendships made through friendship apps can be understood as *algorithmic friendships* (Bucher, 2013). Algorithmic friendship is a way of understanding how the software of platforms become actors in social life and interact with how users of different platforms relate to others and themselves. The freedom the internet gives in making new friends may also come with new restrictions from heterogeneous elements since software and algorithms can influence who to befriend and who to not.

With heterogeneous elements becoming a larger part of our social life through social media and with companies making large profits from the concept of friendship, there are risks of friendship and intimacy becoming threatened by economic interests. Turning into something artificial for the sake of the platforms and not for the users. For example, the structure of platforms can turn our friendship into products, where contacts with friends overlap with commercial messages. Pushing friendships toward an increasing rationalization and even dehumanization, (Bakardjieva, 2014). This means that even though people have an increasing number of friends on social media, these friendships may be qualitatively poor and unable to provide support in time of need. Where friendship becomes a symbol of status to show others rather than relationships to nurture. However, users can learn how to operate in a commercially driven structure by understanding and moving through different platforms, ensuring intimacy and friendship are protected in algorithmic friendships (Chambers, 2017). The cultural background also plays into how platforms are structured. Showing that while algorithmic friendship can accelerate some trends of sociality, the platforms may not be the

sole cause of changes in friendship making (Chambers, 2017). Therefore it is important to investigate how GoFrendly's structure interacts with the users in an algorithm friendship, enabling or hindering certain actions, while also not underestimating the agency of the users and their ability to adapt to the structures of the platform to reach their goals.

4. Method

4.1 Methodology

Wanting to explore a phenomenon with little existing research, such as making friends via friendship apps, a qualitative investigation is preferred. Since it can provide richness in data, flexibility in research design, and provide an arena for in-depth interpretation and analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Due to the limited research, abductive reasoning is applied in the study, which will enable the process of moving between theory and data collection several times. Allowing for both grounding in theoretical perspectives and closeness to the experience of the participants (Bryman, 2016).

Interviews allow the researcher to capture the experience of individuals of a certain social phenomenon (Seidman, 2006). While friendship-making could in theory be studied by observation, it would be very time-consuming since the process can take many months, making interviews a more practical choice. When choosing to conduct interviews it is also of importance to reflect on what role the researcher has in the process. In this study, Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) metaphor of the researcher as a traveler instead of a miner comes to use. Adhering to a constructionist approach where knowledge is not something given to the researcher by the participant through mining. Rather the stories of the participants develop in the interpretation of the traveler, leading the participant on a journey together. The constructionist perspective also highlights the importance of reflexivity from the researcher throughout the research process, since the researcher becomes a co-creator of the knowledge produced with the participants.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow for the freedom of the unexpected while making sure that the aim of the study would not be forgotten. An interview guide was created inspired by previous research on friendship-making and meeting people via apps[1]. In the interviews an active listening style was utilized as described by Seidman (2006). This means fully concentrating on what the participants are saying and to ensure not to interrupt,

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[1] See appendix A for interview guide

while simultaneously asking for clarification when needed and for the participant to expand on a topic when having a feeling that there is more to the story. This can be viewed as a form of exploration technique that gives rich data material beyond the questions of the interview guide. This was especially important due to the novelty of meeting friends through friendship apps, which meant that unexpected themes could arise outside of the scope of the planned questions.

4.2 Sampling and data collection

Wanting to explore how women make new friends through technology, the largest friendship app in Sweden for women, GoFrendly, was selected as the platform to study. Focusing on one specific app has its limitations, since it may be difficult to generalize to meeting friends through friendship apps on a larger scale. However, since it is the largest app in Sweden with this purpose it may set a norm for the phenomenon in a wider sense. Similar to how the most popular dating app Tinder can influence app dating at large (Iqbal, 2022), with swiping becoming a widespread cultural phenomenon outside of the app. When analyzing a socio-technical structure such as friendship-making on an app, it is important to study the specific platform features. Since each platform is made of different software and features which become actors in the social network (Dijck, 2013). Therefore the platform GoFrendly is described in more detail in the next section.

The study wishes to explore the experience of individuals of a phenomenon. Hence a purposeful non-probability sampling was selected, to ensure that the participants hold certain experiences or characteristics which are intended to be explored in the study (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Besides using and having met people through the app, there were some further criteria to participate in the study. Firstly to be in the age of 20-30 years old. This age selection was chosen to ensure they were adults looking for friends, while also being in a similar generation and therefore having some shared experience of smartphone technology developing during their lifetime.

Participants were recruited mainly through posts on GoFrendlys event pages, with a few found via Facebook groups aimed at making friends and other social media channels of the researcher. The aim to find most participants through the app itself was motivated by Hamilton and Bower's (2006) suggestion of finding online participants at the most appropriate site. 12 women were recruited between the ages of 20-31, with one being slightly older than the sampling criteria but allowed to participate since it was very close to the limit.

In qualitative research, samples are often smaller than in quantitative studies to ensure the material of the interviews can be analyzed in great detail (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). During the interviews similar themes and answers re-occurred, giving confidence that the 12 interviews reached a form of theoretical saturation. Where additional data collection would not deem to enrich the material further.

The participants mainly lived in the three largest urban areas of Sweden, except for a few living in other cities. Making the study limited to an urban experience of friendship making for women. The participants had different life situations in form of occupation and relational status, no one had children. The amount of experience of the app differed among the participants. Some had only met one or two people, to others who had met over 20 people and had been in contact with more than 50. Having a wide range of experiences and attitudes toward the app ensured the material to not become too narrow. To make the participants as comfortable as possible during the interviews they could choose between a zoom interview or a face-to-face interview at a local place if living in the Gothenburg area. Nine of the interviews took place over zoom and three took place in a local café or library. The interviews lasted between 30 and 65 minutes, with an average of 45 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Swedish while being recorded, and then later transcribed. The participants also shared screenshots of their profiles with the researcher, to aid in the analysis of discussions regarding their profiles during the interviews.

4.3 Friendship apps - the case of GoFrendly

To be able to analyze how women's friendships are made through friendship apps, the selected app GoFrendly is presented in a bit more detail, to see how the technological functions may interact in the process. The user has a profile consisting of different parts. The first part is a chosen picture and short description of the person in terms of name, location, age, relationship, and child status. The user can further choose several categories to describe themselves, such as being "new in town", "student", or "on parental leave". The categories are both descriptive of a person's current life situation but also mention personality traits such as being "A dreamer" or "a party person". After this, the user can choose three alternatives for things they like to do with potential friends. These range from "cultural activities" and "working out" to simply "long talks". Below these categories is the option for free text. Finally, there is an option to add ten hashtags that can be freely chosen to express the user's personality.

To find friends the user can go to a page called matches and decide if any filters should be used. The filter functions are extensive, starting with selecting geographical proximity, ranging from 1 to 100 kilometers, and an age span. The user then decides if they wish to find friends that are in a relationship or single, and have or do not have children. The two last parts of the filtering mirror the profile, namely choosing some of the suggested activities to meet over and find friends with a certain life situation, or interest. Matches will appear based on the filters, and the user can browse through profiles to make contact. The option to leave filters out is available. Besides the functions of profiles and matches, there is also a page for activities in your local area, and a page for groups based on interest that the user can join or create themselves. The users do not have any public friend list like most other social media but can save other profiles privately so they can write to them later.

4.4 Method of data analysis

After the interviews were transcribed they were coded and analyzed with the aid of the software NVivo. The first step was primary coding close to the original text, summarizing large sections into smaller pieces of code corresponding to the words of the participant for each interview. This was done to ensure no phenomenon would be missed, based on any bias in what the material was thought to illuminate beforehand. After this the interviews were structured to collect all responses to each question, to sort and code the data into larger codes. This process was inspired by Seidman's (2006) description of analyzing thematic connections. With a specific focus on not locking in on fixed categories too early, but work with the material several times to see what comes up as unexpected. With the abductive process this meant both codes related to already known theories such as pure relationship, and codes emerging directly from the interviews such as the concept of friendship work and clicking. This allowed for new theories of the emotionality of friendship to become a part of the study later in the process.

Finally, the codes were sorted into overarching themes, following the chronology of making friends through friendship apps. Throughout the whole process research memos were utilized, a diary-style note writing by the researcher. Including thoughts of how the interview went directly after each interview, how initial coding felt, and ideas for analysis. This allowed for the reflexivity of the researcher's role throughout the study.

4.5 Ethical considerations

When responding to the event put up on GoFrendly or other social media, the potential participants were provided an information form[2]. This form was formulated to adhere to the ethical standards of good research practice by The Swedish Research Council (2017). This meant that the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and that it is voluntary to participate. Further information regarding how their data would be stored was provided, such as the transcripts and screenshots from the app. The transcripts were anonymized with a code and kept on a password-protected computer. When sharing results from the study the participants' identities are protected by using a pseudonym. The participants gave consent to participate in written form and confirmed verbally that they allowed the interview to be recorded when the interview was conducted.

It is always important to reflect on any potential role of power we may have as a researcher in relation to the participants. In this study I shared many traits with the participants, such as a similar age range and gender. In this way I could be easier to relate to and increase comfortability for the participants. Still, similarities between researcher and interview should not be overstated since it can lead to missing new perspectives from the participants, thinking that the researcher understands without explaining more in-depth (Seidman, 2006). Therefore, it was crucial to ask for clarification whenever uncertainty arose about what the participants meant during the interviews.

5. Analysis

To provide an analysis of how women are creating new friendships with the aid of a friendship app and see how friendship work is practiced, themes are presented in chronological order of the process. Moving through four parts of friendship making. *Individuals reaching out* focuses on the motivation to seek new same-gender friends in late modernity. *Profiling yourself as a friend* investigates the deliberate selection processes of potential friends and how it interacts with the functions of the app. Thirdly *Uncertain intimacy* explores the uncertainty of friend dating and the practices needed to build a friendship without an immediate social context. Finally, *App-based friendship established* puts app-based friendships into a larger context of friendship making.

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[2] See appendix B for the information form

5.1 Individuals reaching out

Making friends through apps starts with the motivation of doing so. A common reason for wanting or needing new friends was a large change in the participants' life. Several of the women had changed cities they lived in more than once in their adulthood. Living highly individualistic lives with much movement in their social relationships, making finding new friends more important. As participant Siv puts it:

> *I have not been at the same place so much as an adult. So it has been difficult to find girlfriends in a natural way. So I just. I got the recommendation to try GoFrendly from a friend and I thought I'd give it a try, and started friend dating.*

The motivation for using the app could both be to feel less lonely, but also to find specific friends they did not encounter in their current social situation. For example, many said they wanted closer friendships, someone who they could talk to and who understood them. Reflecting on the need for intimacy, focused on sharing who they are. Some of the women also wanted friendship centered around sharing certain activities or hobbies, requiring less intimacy. The majority of the participants found making friends as an adult more difficult than earlier in life for three reasons: Others not having time for more friends, lack of social context to meet new friends, and having higher demands on who to be friends with. Highlighting that a friendship-oriented life becomes more difficult in adulthood when it is not commonly prioritized in society. With people changing jobs and moving more often these arenas may become harder to make friends, giving rise to the need for new digital places to meet others.

By not being satisfied with only making friends with people through their surroundings but reaching outside to find compatible friends, the women act as networked individuals. Using technology to achieve their social goals and navigate several loose networks rather than a single social community. Still, the motivation for the app was mainly to feel understood, and in this sense share intimacy, rather than any strategic befriending to increase social status or receive benefits in working life or similar, as seen in networked individuals by Rainie and Wellman (2012). An explanation for this could be in the structure of the app, where there are currently no functions of showing how many friends one has on the platform or connecting it directly to other social networks. This does not encourage

networking in the more strategic sense but focuses on building relationships based on shared interest and activities rather than friends in common.

5.1.2 Digital space of same-gendered friendships

The friendship the women searched for ranged from simple to complex*,* with a focus on emotional closeness but also someone who you share a certain interest with. Due to the specific limitation of the app, this also meant only female friends. This creates a digital space of same-gendered friendship practices. Many of the participants thought this was a relief. They were mainly searching for same-gendered friendships and had some experience of men behaving problematically on other apps. Therefore several thought GoFrendly would feel much different if men were allowed. Not feeling as safe or clear in its intention to only find friends. Louise had tried to find friends through other platforms, but had run into the problem of men not respecting her wishes:

> *All other apps or pages where men also were present did not respect that I was*
> *there looking for friendship. But they came with shameful suggestions or*
> *wanted to date or sleep with me. I tried other apps first and put all the settings*
> *on friendship, but yeah, the men did not respect it. So I logged out and just no,*
> *it was women I was looking for.*

This shows that there are still challenges for women and men to become friends, with many preferring same-gendered friendships. Becoming an example of how technology develops within an already existing cultural norm of same-gendered friendship. However, the exclusion of other genders was also thought to be unfair towards men and non-binary people by several participants. Especially by those identifying within the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Having the experience of new friendships being difficult to come by as an adult, many wanted the opportunity to be available for all. Why something similar did not exist for men was thought by some participants to be due to women being more proactive in their friendships. Other participants knew men who would be interested in a similar app but did not know where to turn.

     The safety of being in a same-gendered friendship space was a benefit that most wanted to keep. Even if some women could consider becoming friends with other genders through other apps. When GoFrendly is the largest friendship app in Sweden, it also expands

further gender differences in how new friendships are formed and maintained. Strengthening the norm of same-gendered friendship being more common than cross-gendered friendships in society. Providing women with a safe platform to build friendships without previous social connections.

5.2 Profiling yourself as a friend

Due to the structure of the app GoFrendly, to find new friends you need to first make a profile of yourself. This is the first practical step of friendship work. To use technology to present yourself as a potential friend and share what you are looking for. The participants often chose a picture where they looked friendly and like themselves in their everyday life, presenting in a trustworthy manner. A necessary component to make pure relationships, as there are no other social connections that may confirm who they are. The participants put the most effort into describing themselves in the profile text. A common strategy was to describe themselves in a way that made sure they avoided certain people or avoided meeting someone they had nothing in common with.

> Amanda: *I more felt it was important to not highlight certain things. As I am not a person who enjoys working out. I can become pretty annoyed at people who talk much about working out. And that is just not who I am*

The strategy of being honest with who you are could sometimes come in conflict with not wanting to scare people away, and present a more general positive version of yourself. Emma reflects on the balance between being personal to be able to find friends while also not pushing people away by being too personal:

> *Actually I would want to be more personal than I am but I believe it scares people away.*

She elaborates when asked why it would scare people:

> *Because I think about myself and if I read a text where someone would write: Hi I have lots of problems in my relationships or feel really alone or I don't*

> *have a job or similar. I think I would feel that god no I do not have the energy*
> *for this.*

This tension reflects an ideal through the profiles and some uncertainty when building intimacy this way. Where the ideal friend seems fun and lighthearted, while simultaneously being personal and therefore seeming trustworthy. When starting a pure relationship intimacy is also balanced by not being overly personal, since it can lead to co-dependence according to Giddens (1991). However here codependency does not seem to be the issue, but to initially scare people away by being too open and therefore being an undesirable friend. Due to people not seeking friends with too many issues. Showing that self-disclosure as a form of intimacy needs to happen from both sides for it to be a functioning tool in building friendship.

5.2.1 Who to choose, who to not?

The participants had made friends in the past by meeting in school, at activities, or through mutual friends, where they had a limited number of social encounters. Making the process of who to befriend less deliberate, and something that just happened. However, meeting friends through an app demands some rationality in deciding who to meet, becoming a part of the friendship work necessary to move forward. There are many people on the app and they cannot become friends with them all. Some participants had experiences of meeting new friends through the event function in the app which made who they met less controlled. Still, most had met their friends through looking at other profiles, making the selection process of who to befriend crucial.

To lessen the selection filters can be applied through the app, limiting whose profile you are exposed to. These filters include age, location, life situations, and interests of profiles you wish to see. The participants mainly used age and location as a selection strategy in the first stage of filtering. Most wished to meet friends of their own age or in a range of circa ten years, who lived nearby. In this way, the app functions create an artificial environment of homophily, which the women hoped would improve their chances of finding a good match and reduce uncertainty. Becoming a form of algorithmic friendship where the selection technology further enhances similarities of some chosen traits such as age. As Ronja puts it:

> *I already have friends who are younger and older. But it still feels that if you*
> *are searching for a profile and can select these things, or filter out, then the*
> *ideal for me is to find people my age if I can choose.*

The second step of selection happened when browsing other profiles, where the main focus was who *not* to befriend. Having a hobby they could not relate to was enough sometimes to feel that this was not someone they wished to befriend. In the selection process the women become more aware of what they want as individuals from the other potential friend, and what they do not want. Practicing the self-reflexivity of pure relationships. Emma explains what she avoids when looking for new friends:

> *If it is someone who has written that they like to play video games, then I have not reached out, because that is not my thing.* She continues further: *Or for example if I see a profile that seems very right, but the person prefers being at home before being out on the town. Then I would swipe away that person. Because I do not prefer either, I like both. And I want that in my friendships, I want us to be able to do both and like both the same amount.*

By having excluded those who were too different, the potential friends the women wanted to reach out to were those who displayed similarities and positivity. Some reflected on the fact that they had other friends in their life who were not as similar, and still had great friendships with. Making them question if being too narrow in who they wished to meet could make them miss potential friends. However, they often did not see any viable alternative strategy in the selection process on the app. This raises the question of how free floating and pure these relationships are. Despite the potential to meet someone you would not normally meet, the practice of app friendship seems to enhance the chance of meeting someone who is similar in many aspects.

5.3 Uncertain intimacies

5.3.1 Friend dating - Platonic attraction

After the process of presenting yourself and navigating other potential friends, the next step of friendship work is to initiate contact. Which exposes uncertainties in the process. For example, many did not respond to the initiative of the participants. This led to much frustration and confusion. Some participants felt hurt by not getting replies or others making what appeared as a half-hearted effort in making friends. Since the purpose of the app was to reduce uncertainty that others wanted and had time for new friendships in comparison with

people they met in other social contexts, rejection hit even harder. Making some even take breaks from the app to avoid frustration. The participants thought the low response rate could both be due to inactive members, but also a form of pre-emptive ghosting, where people did not respond at all if they did not find them interesting. Siv says:

> *A lot of people forget that they have the app and do not get any notifications.*
> *There are a lot of people I write to that do not respond. At the same time I*
> *think that in someone else's inbox I am that person that sees the message but*
> *does not respond. Because I feel like we won't click, so I do not need to*
> *respond to the first message.*

The participants do not always recognize each other as people through the app until further contact is made. This behavior may increase a form of dehumanization of friendship, revealing a darker side of making friends through technology. When contact is made with a potential friend, the process of getting to know each other begins. This stage can be understood as *friend dating*, a term some of the participants themselves used. Almost everyone thought it was most sensible to quickly set up a date, and not chat for too long. While rationality has been a driving force in who to select based on similarity, now another force comes to play, the emotionality of friendship. Here Scheff's (2006) three A:s of love becomes relevant to understand the process of becoming friends. A perfect match on paper could be something else when meeting in person. Emma shares an experience of this:

> *Just because you experience chemistry when writing it does not mean it is*
> *there in real life. Before I have become quite disappointed. Because I had*
> *really believed that I would click with this person because the writing has*
> *gone so well. She uses the same emojis as me, writes in the same way and uses*
> *the same words. We will click. Then you meet and no click at all. We have*
> *nothing to talk about.*

During friend dating one thing is more important than any other. To *click,* as seen here above both by Siv not responding if she doesn't feel the click in the profile or by Emma needing the click to be confirmed when meeting in person. To click was described to feel a connection, to have a natural flow of conversation. Further, it was something that happened outside of their control, making it in a sense an involuntary emotion. Therefore the click can be seen as a

form of platonic attraction, necessary as an emotional response to guide them in who to choose and keep befriending. Attraction is more suitable than attunement in this stage. Since attunement is not a physical reaction, but an intellectual emotion that happens when understanding is reached between two people. The click appears to happen much too soon for that to be possible since they do not know each other yet. Ronja describes clicking this way:

> *That there is a chemistry or. It is difficult to explain, it is just a feeling for the most part. Either you click or you don't.*

If the click does not happen quite fast, it becomes a strong indicator that the friendship lacks potential. This meant for several participants that they did not wish to continue to build on the friendship. Ronja continues:

> *Often it happens directly, I usually do not give people a second chance honestly* (Ronja laughs). *We click or we do not, there is nothing. It is a yes or no for me.*

Some reflected on the fact that other friendships in their life had taken a much slower start, growing into very close friendships without this initial platonic attraction. However, in app-based friendships it felt necessary to quickly find common ground since there were no external factors keeping them together. Therefore platonic attraction becomes very important in the early stages of friendships, for the women to be willing to invest in the relationship. Similarities worked as a way to be motivated to test the platonic attraction in person. However, there also seems to be something beyond similarities needed for the attraction to be felt when meeting. Something less clear and tangible than only common interest. For some of the women this was related to how they experienced the other in the physical space, such as the feeling of a handshake, tone of voice or level of energy in interaction. The consequences of this appear to be that slow growing friendships are less common in app friendships.

5.3.2 Intimacy practices to become friends

If attraction happens in the form of a click, friend dating can be transformed into friendship by several forms of friendship work. This is analyzed through important components of a pure relationship with reflexivity, trust and intimacy in forms of self disclosure. Where reflexivity is especially important early on, needing to evaluate if you want to continue to

meet, and in that case make an effort to ensure the relationship moves forward. It is not possible to simply coast along. Elin describes the process:

> *What it takes is that you have to be on top of it to make sure you meet, because it won't just happen. It is not as natural as friends you have known for a long time, that you know are there and will be in touch sooner or later. But now you have to prioritize it for it to develop. So you have to give it time, give it time and see if you can become friends.*

The friendship work is a multimodal experience taking place both in person and through several digital platforms. By spending time in activities and in conversation with each other, attunement can be built, where you increasingly understand each other's viewpoints. Trust becomes a necessary step here, starting to know how the other person reacts in different situations. Trust is built by making and sticking to plans with the other. Explained here by Emma:

> *We went to Stockholm together. She gave me as much as I have her. I wrote to her, she wrote to me: Hi should we meet up. She came with suggestions, I came with suggestions. They happened. No one canceled.*

Practicing self-disclosure was a crucial part for the friendship to grow. If it was not reciprocated it hindered attunement to develop. Fading the initial attraction and putting the possible friendship to a halt. Emma elaborates further on the same person she met through the app:

> *We wanted the same things. However she had some difficulty accessing her emotions. So we never talked about emotions. And that did not work for me. Therefore we are not friends today. Because I could not come further in my relationship with her.*

In cases like these where attunement did not develop, most participants dropped the friendship by stopping initiating contact. A process that could cause some stress since there are few social protocols for ending a potential friendship. Some also explained they did not wish to continue the relationship, which could lead to hurt feelings. Making some participants

question if ghosting or honesty was the best alternative to end contact, to avoid hurting the feelings of others. Still, in many cases the friendship work was an effort worth making regardless of the risks of failure, since it for many had led to new significant friendships in their life.

5.4 App-based friendship established

When is someone your friend? It differed in how long it took for the participants to consider someone from the app a friend. According to Giddens (1991) a friend is a committed person, and he argues that commitment is a crucial part of pure relationships. However, with some app friendships being more of a simple type of friendship, focused on a specific activity, it is difficult to say how much commitment is necessary to view the other as a friend. Still, without some form of commitment, the friendship made through the app constantly risks dissolving. Commitment can be hard to achieve when there are always new possible friends on friendship apps and when other things in life take priority. Some participants felt that a lack of commitment from others made it difficult to make successful connections through the app. But what is commitment in friendship? To commit to a friendship can be the act of acknowledging that they are in fact friends. Bella describes knowing if someone is their friend:

> *I am a person, I make friends quickly. But for the other person it might be that*
> *we are just getting to know each other. So often I wait until they say that I am*
> *their friend, and then I say yes you are too. I wait for the other person to say*
> *it, then it is more official.*

The commitment to the friendship could also be more easily practiced by an emotional response of attachment, where you miss the other when you are not spending time together. However, attachment just as commitment may not be necessary for all friendships but rather depends on their level of complexity. Some had made friends via GoFrendly who they saw only as fun friends they shared activities with, without any deeper feelings of attachments. Others had met some of their closest friends through their app, forming complex friendships with emotions of both platonic attraction, attunement, and attachment, and commitment as a base of the friendship. When the friendship is established, there is also less active friendship work of reflexivity taking place, where the women evaluate if the friendship should continue.

Rather they socialize with some level of commitment to the continuation of the relationship. At this stage, the friendships are not different from other forms of friendship made outside of friendship apps, since friendship is a complex and multiple phenomenon and app friendships simply add to the complexity. Even though the process to make friends this way involved uncertainty and some frustration, it was an empowering experience for many as it had led to established friendships. Making the participants feel that they had more ways of making friends if they would need it in the future.

6. Conclusion

Returning to the questions this study aimed to answer, with the first being what forms of practical and emotional work are involved in the construction of new app-based friendships among women, there are many forms of friendship work being necessary to become friends through apps. In this work several of the practices of pure relationships by Giddens (1991) could be seen, such as the importance of reflexivity, trust and self-disclosure. Reflexivity became a part of the process early to understand what sort of friendship they were looking for, and evaluating if a friend-date was successful. Trust was practiced as being trustworthy on the profile, and also by making and sticking to plans with the others. Self-disclosure as a form of intimacy was important to get to know each other more deeply and find attunement. In these aspects the friendship work done in app friendships seem to show the promise of a proliferation of pure relationships among women, since they are free to choose who to befriend and do it for their mutual benefit. Further, the participants acted as networked individuals in their navigation of technology to find friendships outside of their everyday social circle, creating solutions to feelings of loneliness. However, there were also many uncertainties in the process, highlighting nuances of app friendships that are less than pure. This leads to the second research question of how the uncertainties of this work are managed and negotiated.

The app is supposed to be a safe space by only allowing women and by knowing that members want and have time for new friends. Still, there was uncertainty in the form of ghosting and pre-emptive ghosting experienced by the participants. This created a sense of rejection and also stress when not wanting to continue a friendship and being unsure how to end it. These experiences point towards a possible dehumanization in friendships through apps, where the potential friends are quickly evaluated in what they can give the individual, and dropped if their expectations are not met. This development has been theorized in

relation to friendship through social media (Bakardjieva, 2014), and seen in app-dating (Illouz, 2019). The uncertainties of meeting strangers were navigated by strategies looking for similarity, where most tried to find potential friends with as much in common as possible. This was done both through the filter technology of the app, creating an artificial environment of homophily, and through the rationality applied by participants in who to write to. An ironic consequence as the app in theory allows women to meet friends different from themselves as they reach people outside of their everyday social circle. It is important to note the limitation of the study of young women in urban settings, in other age groups and location the number of active users on the app may be less which could decrease the possibility to filter based on similarities.

Another way of navigating uncertainty was emotional work of platonic attraction, attunement and sometimes attachment. Where platonic attraction, referred to as a click, often became a deal breaker in wanting to meet a potential friend again. Even though similarities increased the chance of wanting to meet, it did not guarantee a platonic attraction when meeting in person. Highlighting that app friendships may be giving increased importance to a fast emotional connection between people, rather than slow building friendships. Platonic attraction did not always lead to attunement or attachment, but when it did, different forms of friendships could be established despite the uncertainties of meeting through an app. When established, the app friendships were similar to other friendships, with commitment becoming more important than reflexivity. Therefore also possibly decreasing the purity of the relationship as they become more taken for granted than during the friend making process.

How uncertainties are navigated shows that the consequences of friendships created through apps reveals something more than relationships unattached from social structures. Relating to the third research question of how app-based friendships are mediated by broader relations of gender, technology and society. Seeing how homophily becomes a strategy to reduce uncertainty, it points to new app friendships being clearly anchored in social structures. Wanting friends of the same age and gender who have lived a life similar to themselves. This is in line with previous research warning for increasing similarities in friendships due to social media (Standlee, 2019). The increased homophily is possible due to app friendships being technologically mediated, where functions of the app become an actor influencing who meets who. Further, gendered friendships increase rather than decrease, showing how norms of gender and technology develop together as seen in other research (Chambers, 2017). Raising the question of what happens to men's possibilities of making new friends as adults, as they are lonelier than women (Barreto et al., 2021), which future

research should investigate further. The participants with LGBTQ+ experience were the most skeptical of same-gendered friendship apps in this study. Their experience in making friends through apps should also be researched in the future to understand how norms of gender and sexuality may influence the usage of friendship technology.

Together these results point to an increase of possibilities for women to make friends outside of their immediate social circle. Where they practice trust and intimacy to build a friendship from scratch, ending the relationship if it does not feel beneficial, much in line with how pure relationships should work. However, they are still impure and entangled with the social and technological structures of our time. In this way app friendships may increase the growth of pure relationships for women in *how* they are made, while with *whom* they are made with remains impure. Finally, the women's experience with friendship apps was mostly an empowering experience of a safe space to find new friends as adults. In a society where friendship is not always prioritized, it gives hope that with more diverse technology like this making friends can become easier, increasing the wellbeing and happiness for those who dare to do the (friendship) work.

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Appendix A. Interview guide

The guide has been translated from Swedish into English

Part 1. Making friends as an adult

Can you tell me how your life situation was when you decided to try GoFrendly?

What kinds of friends were you hoping to find?

How many have you been in contact with through the app?

How many have you met?

Have you previously gotten to know new friends through other digital platforms, such as social media or similar?
- (if yes) in which way?

What do you do with the people you have contacted through friendship apps to get to know them?

Has the pandemic affected how you do to make friends?
- (if yes) how?

What role do friends play in your life?

What is important in a friendship for you?

How long would you say it takes for you to see someone as a friend?

How do you think it is to make new friends as an adult?

How did you make friends before you got the app?

In which way are people you've gotten to know from digital platforms similar or dissimilar other friendships?

Can you describe the process of getting to know the person you know best from a digital platform?

Have you ever met a potential friend from an app where you felt you did not want to continue the friendship?

What do you think matters if you want to continue to meet someone you've gotten to know digitally?

Part 2. self-presentation on the app

Now I thought that we should talk a little bit about your profile, please go to it on your phone.

Can you tell me why you chose this profile picture?

What role do you think the picture has to describe yourself on the app?

Choosing the free text and categories, was there anything in particular you wanted to highlight about yourself?

How personal did you wish to be in your presentation?

Now I would like to talk to you about how you use matches, please go to that page on the app.

When you are looking for new friends, what do you look for?

What information do you think is important that others share about themselves?

Do you use the filter functions?
- (if yes) what filters are useful? why?

Do you use any other way to get to know people via the app, like events or groups?
- (if yes) what is your experience of that?

How do you feel about GoFrendly being only for women?

Part 3. Social connections and digital platforms

Have you used other apps to meet people to date?

Would you say that is similar or different to meeting friends through apps?

In general, what do you think is good about using apps to meet new friends?

Is there anything you think is less good about using apps to meet new friends?

Besides GoFrendly, do you use other platforms to keep in touch with the people you have met there?
- (if yes) which, and when do you switch platforms?

When getting to know a new person, how much happens digitally and how much happens face-to-face?

When you are already friends, how much of the relationship happens digitally, and how much happens face-to-face?

Do you have anything you wish to add to your experience of making friends via friendship apps?

Appendix B. Information form

The information form has been translated from Swedish into English

Information to participants regarding participation in the Master thesis Making Friends. The thesis is written by Freja Wessman, supervised by Mark Elam, Professor at the Department of Sociology and Work Science at Gothenburg University.

What is the project and why do you wish for me to participate?

The project Making Friends is about understanding how women are making friends with help of friendship apps and digital platforms. This is interesting because technology has given us new possibilities in how we make friends. How women use apps to make friends is not researched. It can give society a better understanding of how social relationships are made in a time when the pandemic has limited our places of interactions. I am contacting you because I am interested in your experiences of using friendship apps to make friends.

How does the study work?

The study collects data through interviews and screenshots of the participants' GoFrendly profiles. If you wish to participate you will be interviewed either digitally through Zoom or at a location in Gothenburg. The interview lasts around 45-60 minutes.

Your name and personal information are confidential and will not be used in any text the study may lead to. Instead, a fictive name will be used. Unauthorized people will not have any access to your personal information. I would like to record the interview to have the possibility to listen and transcribe it afterward. The interview file will be kept on a password-protected computer and your name will not be on these files, only a number protecting your identity.

I would also like to save screenshots of your GoFrendly profile. These will be anonymized meaning that name or personal information are covered. The pictures will not be published in the study but only aid me in the analysis together with the interviews.

If you change your mind about participating you can terminate your participation by contacting me until the first of April.

What happens with my personal information?

The material in the form of interviews and screenshots will be used to write a master thesis, and it may be used in future similar studies. The information will be kept safe and only be available to relevant researchers. Your answers are anonymized so unauthorized people cannot gain access. In the final result excerpts from some interviews will be quoted. The result could possibly be published in some report or academic journal in the future. The material will be deleted when related research projects are finished.

How do I get information about the study?

The results will be published in a Master thesis by Gothenburg university which will be finished in June 2022. The participants can also get access to the final paper through email of the researcher if interested.

Participation is voluntary

Participation is voluntary and consent is given verbally or written via email. You have the possibility to ask questions and the project before you participate. If you regret your participation you can terminate your participation during the interview and you do not need to give any reason why you wish to end the participation. You also have the right to ask for personal information to be deleted after participating.