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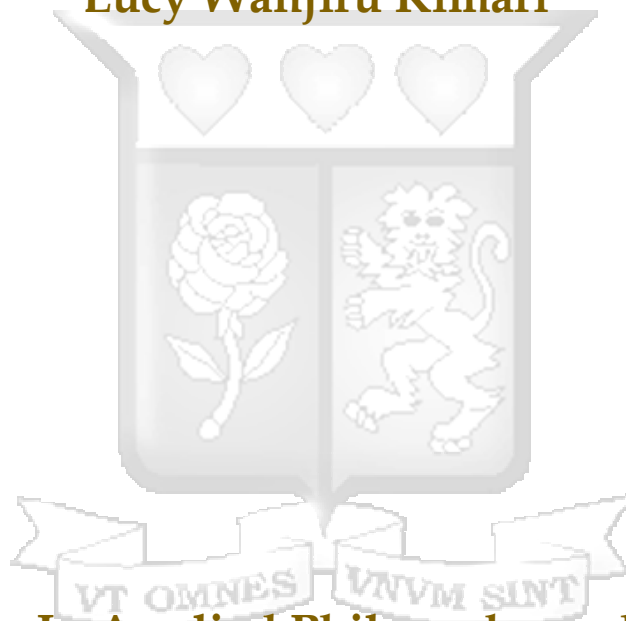
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Friendships Among Young Professionals During The COVID-19 Pandemic

Lucy Wanjiru Kimari

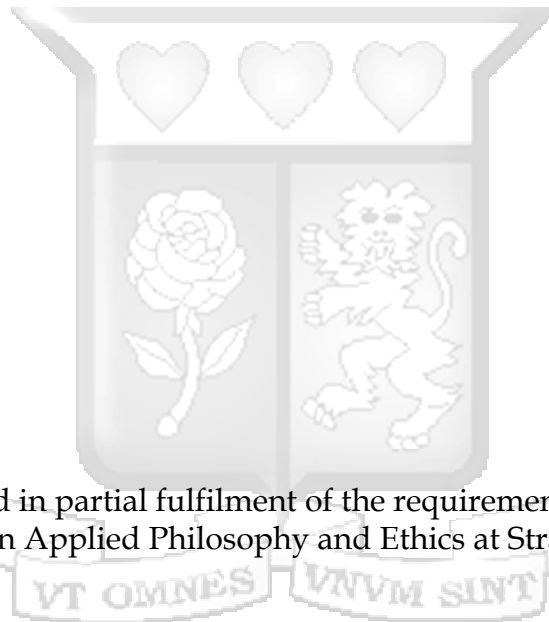


Masters In Applied Philosophy and Ethics

2022

**FRIENDSHIPS AMONG YOUNG PROFESSIONALS
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

LUCY WANJIRU KIMARI
051577



Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Masters in Applied Philosophy and Ethics at Strathmore University

School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Strathmore University Nairobi, Kenya
October 2022

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of 2020, the world changed with the vast spread of the COVID-19 virus. With it came many devastating effects some of which though not life threatening, were deemed debilitating to the flourishing of the human person. One of the effects, which this dissertation unpacked, was the state of isolation that many were left in and specifically, young professionals living alone and working from home while located in Nairobi City. The study sought to dig deeper into the social sphere of many young people by determining the perceptions young professionals' held on the need for friendship and the impact of these perceptions. The theoretical basis of the study was tied to man's need to belong as a fundamental social motive as elaborated by Baumeister & Leary in the *Belongingness theory* together with man's instinct for communion and relational nature as defined by Martin Buber's *Dialogical Personalism* theory.

The research study utilized a phenomenological methodology, best understood as a way to clarify concepts in terms of people's original intuitions by seeking meaning from young professionals' experiences and accounts of friendship during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were selected from a range of categories of work experience levels in the Finance field from early-career, associates to mid-career professionals while also taking into account those who lost their jobs during the pandemic. Purposive sampling was employed, utilizing the maximum variation sampling method with a sample size of twelve respondents and the use of in-depth interviews for data collection. The data was interpreted using a five-step method that included describing the phenomena experienced by the respondent, identifying the common themes, reflecting on the themes to determine the "what" of respondents conscious experience and the meaning this held for them. Lastly, intuition and reflection was used to abstract the essences or "why" young professionals experienced their friendships or lack thereof, in the manner that they did.

The study highlighted that the pandemic led to certain shifts around friendship among young professionals. Some of the notable highlights include the foundational importance of physical presence, the overriding value of quality versus quantity

when it came to friends and most importantly, the critical difference that intentionality, mutuality and reciprocity played in maintaining and deepening friendships especially in adverse circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key words: friendship, COVID-19, pandemic, young professionals, Nairobi, living alone, working from home, belonging, I-Thou, I-It, Martin Buber, Baumeister & Leary, phenomenology



DEFINITION OF TERMS

Friendship: a distinctively personal relationship that is grounded in a concern on the part of each friend for the welfare of the other, for the other's sake, and features traits such as mutual caring (love), intimacy and shared activity

Young professional: a person fitting the category of having the capacity and capabilities of working post undergraduate studies and/or a person who is working and falls within the age range of 25 - 40

Pandemic: In this study, this refers to the global COVID-19 pandemic that began in the later part of 2019. This study reviews the impact of the pandemic for the time period March 2020 – March 2021

Pre-pandemic: This refers to the period before the COVID-19 pandemic taken as a term of comparison between the two time periods

Flatten the curve: refers to preventing the spreading rate or quantity of COVID-19 infected persons from greatly intensifying or increasing within a short time

Transplants: a term popularly used in New York City to refer to people who have relocated to the city to live and work there for an uncertain amount of time despite being born and raised in a different geographical location

Other self: a phrase originating from Aristotle and used by Aquinas when referring to the way in which friends seek the good of the other with as much concern as they seek their own good

I-Thou: according to Martin Buber's philosophy the first designates a relation between subject and subject, a relation of reciprocity and mutuality

I-It: according to Martin Buber's philosophy this designates a relation between subject and object, involving some form of utility or control

Well-being: the good of the individual as dictated by their virtue or their exercise of virtue which both advances the good of others as well as advances the good of the individual

Dialogical personalism: personalism posits that the human person is the fundamental notion that gives meaning to all of reality and constitutes its supreme value. In Dialogical personalism, the main focus is the way in which and the attitude with which persons relate to all of reality hence the relational aspect is emphasized

Belongingness: relates to the need that persons have for interpersonal relationships and attachments

Phenomenology: the study of the structure of experiences, what is termed as "phenomena": things as they appear in our experience or the ways we experience things and hence the meaning things have in our experience

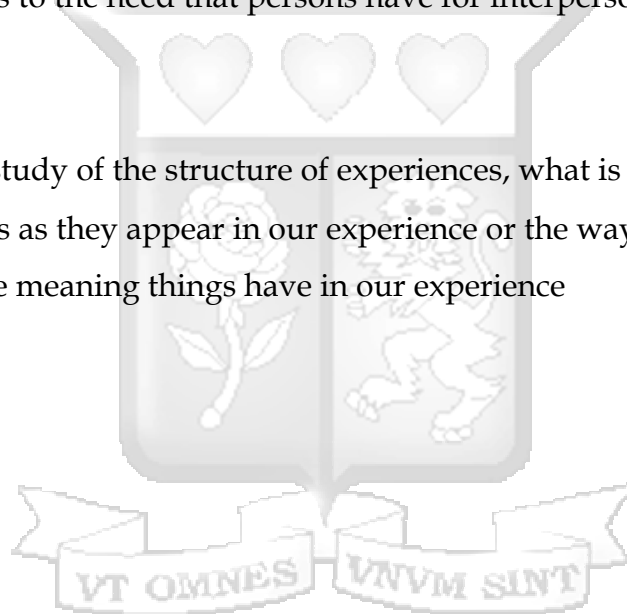


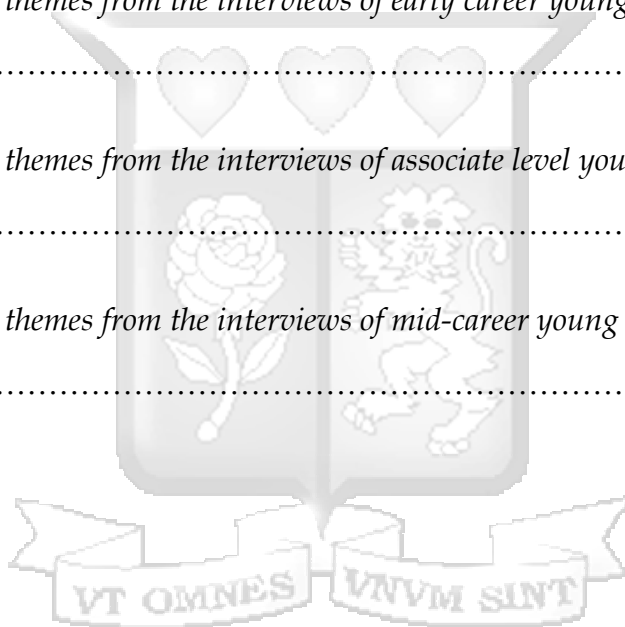
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to my family and friends and all those who in one way or another found the road less travelled quite difficult during the pandemic that began in the year 2020. Dum Spiro, Spero – While I breathe, I hope.

And to all those who have given me the irreplaceable gift of their friendship.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to God for granting me the health of body and mind, grace and courage as well the beauty of nature, music, film, literature, poetry, conversation as well as silence, that has been a source of comfort and joy in enabling me to conduct this research study. I would like to thank my dissertation supervisor – Dr Charles Sotz for his support and patience. I would also like to thank my family, close friends, classmates and willing research participants who have supported me through my Masters journey both in New York City and in Nairobi, where the thesis reached its conclusion.



Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research study. It contains the background that lays the foundation for the study, the objectives that will guide the study and the research questions as well as the scope and significance of the thesis.

1.2 Background to the dissertation

The topic of this thesis arose out of the occurrence of the corona virus pandemic in early March 2020 while the researcher was located in New York City (NYC). At the onset of the pandemic, NY was the hardest hit city in the United States in terms of virus victims and deaths, relative to the rest of the US population. As did happen in many parts of the world, this led to many decisions being taken globally to mitigate the spread of the virus, one of which included defining what was essential versus non-essential services. There were subsequent restrictions on human interaction such as social distancing and restricting movement as a way to mitigate the spread of the virus and hence “flatten the curve”. With this definition of essential versus non-essential, aspects that were core to the flourishing of human person were curtailed, aspects as basic as movement of persons between locations and hence the minimization of human interaction for the sake of the common good of health and well-being. Due to this, two key actions were taken that were decisive to the development of this topic. The first being that New York City inhabitants, many of whom are termed as “transplants”, that is, people who relocate to the city for work purposes but have no core family or roots in the city, left for their family homes or residences outside the city which was reported to be a mass exodus of about 5% of New York city inhabitants estimated at 420,000 people (Quealy, 2020). By December of 2020, New York City was the highest reported city with outbound relocation moves to other cities in the US at an alarming rate of 66.4% (Bahney, 2021). The second aspect was that another lot of people were left in the city as the state of the pandemic progressed.

The situation of the pandemic in Nairobi started out quite differently from New York. At its onset, most of Sub-Saharan Africa had some of the lowest infection rates globally. However, by the end of March 2020, the numbers began to rise in large part due to challenges in practicing social distancing and no restrictions were yet in place (Abuya, Austrian, Isaac, Kangwana, Mbushi, Muluve, et al., 2020). A ban on social gathering and nationwide curfews then followed causing the same situation in New York to be replicated in Nairobi regarding isolation and restricted movement (Abuya, Austrian, Kangwana, Mbushi, Mwangi, Muluve, et al., 2021). Though little has been documented about the impact of isolation before the pandemic as well as during the pandemic in Nairobi City, data reveals that the city contains a higher population of men over women living alone (Anglewicz, Bevilacqua, Byrne, Decker, Devoto, et al., 2021).

With this in mind, the researcher sought to determine what the social impact of a subset of young professionals who were working from home and living alone had on their perception of friendship, just as it had been triggered while in New York City. The study focuses on those who lived alone and found themselves in a situation that they had probably not pre-empted before the pandemic: one of a heightened lack of face-to-face or physical human interaction coupled both by restricted movement and interaction during the pandemic especially in its earlier stages given the curtailment of social interactions while being both voluntarily as well as involuntarily isolated. The former relates to one's choice to live alone and the latter one's mandate to be socially isolated as a health risk mandate. This phenomenon is differently experienced by people living alone and also working from home compared to people living with another person or persons, but also working from home, because of the nature of restricted travel and social gatherings.

It has become quite evident that though measures taken by governments to introduce self-isolation and social distancing help reduce the risk of infection during the pandemic, these measures also lead to social isolation and a lack of social connectedness (Aktipis, Ayers, Beltran, Cronk, Todd & Van Horn, 2021). Buber's dialogical personalism primarily looks into this in his "I/Thou" and "I/It"

relationships theory on subject-to-subject relations vis-a-vis subject-to-object relations respectively. In it he posits that man needs his fellow man in order to be fully alive (Blenkinsop, 2006). Baumeister & Leary also look at the same ideas of social encounters by proposing that that man even under adverse circumstances, has a basic desire to form social attachments (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As more research crops up during the pandemic focusing on the impact of loneliness attributable to the Covid-19 pandemic, what seems to be clear is that physical activity has been highlighted as a determinant of developing meaningful friendships (Fischer, Lippke & Ratz, 2021). What remains undetermined at the present moment is young people's reaction to fulfil, mitigate or forfeit this need, given the novelty of the pandemic experience. The study thus seeks to narrow down young professionals living alone and working from home, and how this impacts their current perceptions and compares to their past perceptions pre-pandemic with regards to the need for friends.

In defining the personal transcendentals, Polo's hierarchy puts co-existence as the lowest of the four transcendentals against personal freedom, personal knowledge and personal love. The nature of co-existence presupposes that man does indeed need others in order to be more of who he is meant to be as well as to be more human (Polo, 2015). What then can we suppose is the impact on the personhood of individuals who at such a time as this are faced with a challenge of co-existence and its impact on personal love as well?

In Ethics, Aquinas, defines friendship as constituting four key aspects: well-wishing, mutuality, communion and communication. It is the last two of these that light up the study undertaken here. Within communion or *communicatio* in Latin, Aquinas considers that this leads an individual to consider the friend as his "other self" and further explains that humans need someone else for whom to do good. In the aspect of "communication", Aquinas deepens the definition of friendship by stating that there needs to be an aspect of commonality and a sustained communication with another person (Lenow, 2011). This leads to a further investigation in this study of the impact of living alone during a time of the pandemic on people's perceptions of

friendships given the restrictions on movement, in-person and physical social activity during the pandemic with a focus on those living alone and working from home.

1.3 Problem Statement

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, loneliness and social isolation were so prevalent that it was taken up as a behavioral epidemic in many Western countries though little is documented on the subject within African contexts. Many claim that this epidemic worsened with the extended period of the negative social effects of Covid-19 (Ikedu, Hwang, Peisah, Rabheru & Reichman, 2020). The concern is that due to this isolation, young professionals' perception of the need for friendships may have shifted. The pandemic provided circumstances exposing young professionals to more time alone and lower participation in social groups, both high risk factors for loneliness (Holt-Lunstad, 2017). Investigating what this shift in perceptions of friendships among young professionals in Nairobi will help highlight its effects on people's ability to experience or live fully the nature of I-Thou relations and determine the social need to belong as well as young professionals' drive, if present, to form and maintain positive and significant interpersonal relationships.

The study focuses on Finance young professionals living alone and working from home in Nairobi. The study thus seeks to address the following problem statement: To investigate the perception young professionals hold on the need for friendships during the Covid-19 Pandemic in light of Baumeister & Leary's belongingness theory and the effects of these perceptions as brought out by Buber's "I-Thou" and "I-It" relationships theory.

1.4 Research Objectives

- i. To determine the perceptions young professionals' hold on the need for friendship during the global Covid-19 pandemic in Nairobi City in light of Baumeister & Leary's belongingness theory

- ii. To explore the effects that perceptions of friendship during the Covid-19 pandemic among young professionals in Nairobi has in view of Buber's "I/Thou" - "I/It" relationships theory

1.5 Research Questions

- i. What are the perceptions young professionals hold on the need for friendships during the global Covid-19 pandemic in Nairobi City in light of Baumeister & Leary's belongingness theory?
- ii. How may Buber's "I-Thou"- "I-It" relationships theory be used to analyse young professionals' perceptions of friendship during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nairobi?

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study shall be carried out among Finance young professionals in Nairobi City. The research will focus on those young professionals who live alone and also work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study impacts various facets of life socially, economically and personally.

The findings may inform different stakeholders who directly deal with young professionals about the need for friendships and its humanizing effects both socially and even economically in relation to work output.

Given that previous research on the topic had not focused on young professionals from an African setting, the findings will build on the body of research and supplement studies on the topic from Western and Eastern settings.

It will also be useful in influencing policy around the future of the work environment and how the social relations of young professionals impact their productivity at work.

The study also benefits the young professionals who participate in the research as it requires them to reflect on the impact of their own perceptions of friendships have on how they relate to others as well as how much of a priority friendships are in their own lives.



Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter contains an in-depth review of the literature around man's social nature, the meaning of friendship, the impact of isolation, the cultural shifts and impact of living alone among various sub-sets of the population, the place of culture in influencing behaviour and the meaning of happiness. These themes assist in bringing out a better understanding of man's deepest desires when it comes to his encounters with another against the backdrop of a pandemic that leads to these same ideas being stirred and reflected on by young professional respondents with the circumstance of living alone and working from home.

The chapter concludes by diving into the theoretical framework that underpins the study.

2.2 Man: The social animal

The English poet and scholar John Donne has been widely quoted for the line "no man is an island" (Donne, 1642). Despite the current state of the world in a pandemic and man socially isolated from his fellow man, there could be no truer statement than Donne's for a time such as this. In his book, *Becoming Human*, Jean Vanier emphasised that to become human implies two core realities: to be someone who has cultivated one's gifts but also and perhaps more importantly for this study, *to be open to others* (Vanier, 1998). Baumeister & Leary (1995) posit that much of what man does he does in the service of belongingness. Vanier further describes this need of being open to others in the "becoming human" process in relation to loneliness, in what he terms as a faint dis-ease or inner dissatisfaction and restlessness that is countered when people feel loved and have a sense of belonging and begins to be eradicated when people enter into relationships as the eradication of loneliness is not something that happens automatically. Vanier further explains that to be human means to remain connected to our humanness and our reality – connectedness brings with it security (Vanier, 1998).

In his characteristics of friendship, Aquinas points out that charity in friendship cannot exist without well-wishing, mutuality, communion and communication. By well-wishing, man must go against his selfish tendencies and seek the good of another rather than towards the needs of an inanimate object. With regards to mutuality, it would be impossible for friendship to develop without mutuality existing, an aspect that the 4th century philosopher, Augustine supports when he says that *"We love to the point that the human conscience feels guilty if we do not love the person who is loving us, and if that love is not returned – without demanding any physical response other than the marks of affectionate good will"* (Augustine, 354-430, Book IV, Chap. 9). For communion, Aquinas considers that a man takes his friend as his other self, expressing it thus: *"When a man loves another with the love of friendship, he wills good to him, just as he wills good to himself; wherefore, he apprehends him as his other self, in so far, to wit, as he wills good to him as to himself. Hence a friend is called a man's other self"* (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 9.9.4) supported once more by Augustine who took a friend as half of one's soul. Aquinas postulated that in order for man to do good, he needs the fellowship of friends (Lenow, 2011) for friendship brings out the best in a person through the forgetfulness of self. Friendship is itself a result of virtue – the goodness in a person allows them to love another and as friends discover the goodness in each other as the relationship grows, for friendship demands union (Farrell, 1940). The last characteristic on communication encompasses the other three traits in that friendship cannot be forged without communication and as the academic David Gallagher put it, the moral life is essentially a matter of relationships among persons (Lenow, 2011).

One notable philosopher who touched on the centrality of relationships vis-à-vis the view of man as a singular atom in society was Martin Buber. His work began a philosophical shift away from objectivity as the only way of understanding reality, emphasizing relationality and dialogue over empiricism and objectivity, taking the latter as a secondary way of relating to the world and taking the primary way as first dependent on a relation to an "un-objectifiable Other". Buber distinguished relationships as "I-It" and "I-You/Thou". The focus of this study looks into the

higher relation that man is called to – “I-Thou” relations - which takes the view that the other person, say a friend, is not a thing among things as would be in “I-It” relationships that are one-way, but requires a two-way relation based on dialogue. Buber proposes that when we relate to others, we can abstract the other person’s hair colour, his speech or even his goodness, but this doesn’t essentially define who the other person is, what is required for a genuine relation is to encounter the other person with mutual awareness, what Buber refers to as *presentness* and this is possible for as long as meeting and relation exist, persisting where relational space is created by encounter. For Buber, relationships require aspects of dialogue and mutuality which are necessary in the formation and sustenance of friendships. The basis of this study focused on friendships and has the “I-Thou” relations at its core for it is these kinds of relationships that gives meaning to life and make man fully human (Crabtree, Miller, Scott, Scott & Stange, 2009). Buber’s ideas on relationship provide a vision of mutuality that assist in healing the sickness that exists in relationships that could be caused by external as well as internal circumstances. In a state of isolation that the world now faces, Buber’s ideas resound in a world now filled with a disappearance of personal life, but which dearly needs a turning or rather a returning of one person to the other for the fate of man in these times depends to a great deal on the rehallowing of existence. The most fundamental characteristic of our lives according to Buber, is the innateness of the longing for relation, the impulse toward the other, the “*inborn Thou*”, characterised by intimacy, closeness, harmony and oneness in order to develop authentic relations and thus allowing the coming to be of community. Recovering personal meaning in the modern era depends to a large extent on the involvement with the things and beings in the world and not by withdrawing from them for the fully personal life is always life in community (Berry, 1985).

2.3 Friendship as virtue

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (Book VIII-IX) delved into the topic of friendship which he firstly considered not only a virtue but also an indispensable requirement of life, for though he considered liking an emotion, he took friendship as a fixed disposition. He saw that it was a natural affinity that existed universally

between men and that it could not be applied to inanimate objects as they are unable to return affection. He considered “loving” to be an active experience whereas “being loved” was a passive one and friendship stood in the active participatory aspect. Aristotle saw friendship as characterized by goodwill amongst the parties, the awareness of this goodwill and a desire for one of the three goods: utility, pleasure or the good, the latter being the highest desire for friendship for it is those who wish the good of their friends for their friend's sake who are friends in the fullest sense since they love each other for themselves and not accidentally. Friendships based on utility and pleasure he deemed would not last as they expired upon the attainment of the object or pleasure desired. He thus took true friendship as one where a person wished and promoted by action, the real or apparent good of another for that other's sake, wished the preservation of his friend for his friend's sake, frequented the other's society and shared in the friend's joys and sorrows in addition to desiring the same things as one's friend (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 8.6)

In the aspect of distance between friends, Aristotle noted that separation was a not a cause for the dissolution of a friendship, but he recognized that it did prevent its active exercise and that if prolonged, would cause the friendship to be forgotten for nothing defines friendship better than when the parties seek each other's company. In dealing with the association of friends, Aristotle took the view that when it came to the quantity of one's friends, a limited number was preferable, this being defined as the largest number one was able to constantly associate with, for the society of friends with each other is the most desirable thing there is. In determining if friends are a necessity for happiness, Aristotle advanced that it would be out of order to attribute to a happy man all good things and leave out friends for it is the mark of a friend to give than to receive benefits and the former is a function of the good and virtuous man thus friends are needed as the object of one's beneficence. The Aristotelian view of friendship and happiness also stems from the fact that there is no supremely happy man who is a recluse for man is by nature a social being, designed to live with others (Aristotle, Politics, 1.1253a).

2.4 Friends: Man's other self

Friendship is an intrinsic value of human life (Paine, 1969). It has been defined by scholars such as Wright and Hays as a relationship involving voluntary or unconstrained interaction in which participants respond to one another personally and which helps facilitate socio-emotional goals of the participants involving varying degrees of companionship, intimacy, affection and mutual assistance and develops typically through intimate face-to-face interactions (Chan & Cheng, 2004). Friendship leads to the validation of both the self and the other and fosters the development of interpersonal sensitivity and love (Smollar & Youniss, 1982) and has been ranked among the things that matter most to children, adolescents and adults (Hartup & Stevens, 1999). Baumeister and Leary's 1995 belongingness hypothesis suggests that humans have a fundamental, pervasive and universal need to form and maintain at least some degree of interpersonal relationships with other humans and has been said to have survival benefits for man (Badger & Watt, 2009).

Belongingness has strong effects on emotional patterns and cognitive processes where the contrary, i.e., a lack of attachments leads to ill effects on health and well-being hence why it can be observed that people resist the dissolution of existing bonds. In their theory on belongingness, Baumeister & Leary note that the need to belong is met by two key actions: the need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people but also that these interactions must occur within the context of a temporarily stable, enduring environment of affective concern. Earlier researchers such as Weiss (1973) and Shaver & Buhrmester (1983) found that feelings of loneliness could be advanced by insufficient social contact termed as "social loneliness" as well as a lack of meaningful and emotional relatedness termed as "emotional loneliness" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In a study looking at the relationship between social relationships and health, House and Landis (1988) found that among people with low quantity as well as low quality of friends, there was an increased risk of death. This idea was affirmed by the Treatment Specialist Institute (2020) showing that disadvantaged social circumstances were associated with increased health risks. Social support or any relationships that maintained or sustained the organism by providing adaptive

behaviour or neuroendocrine responses in the face of stress or other health hazards provided a simple theory of how and why social relationships affected health (House & Landis, 1988).

General well-being and happiness have been found to depend to a great degree on the presence of close social ties in one's life and has been found in research as one of the most objective factors that show a substantial correlation with subjective well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Studies show that friends are better at providing leisure activities, developing and maintaining personal meaning and self-identity as well as short term help and emotional support than other social partners and this companionship is crucial for well-being which buffers the effects of minor stressors. The relational regulation theory hypothesises that ordinary conversations and companionship are closely and positively linked with well-being (Charles, Fingerman, Huo, Gleason, Neff & Ng, 2021) than conversations about how to cope with stress as regulation is primarily relational stemming from the fact that people and social interactions that regulate recipients are more often of personal preference (Lakey & Orehek, 2011). Baumeister & Leary (1995) affirmed this in their study on belongingness in finding that emotions helped regulate behaviour that enabled people to form and maintain social bonds and that external threats such as would be the case with the pandemic, increased the tendency to form strong bonds even when there was no rational consideration of practical or material advantage (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Similar studies conducted on the animal species found that animals prefer to spend time with animals in whose presence they have experienced high brain oxytocin and endogenous opioid activities in the past, suggesting that friendships may be mediated by similar neurochemical systems as it is has been proved that contact with friends during stressful events down regulates sympathetic and neuroendocrine responses to stress and facilitates recovery from physiological effects of acute stress (Adolphs et al., 2002).

Social ties, being multifaceted, have been found to affect both physical and psychological well-being. Some of the psychological ways in which this happens is in the provision of behavioural guidance, purpose and meaning to the other person

in that knowing who we are to others also provides purpose and meaning in life which aids against anxiety and despair creating a positive effect on well-being. Companionship as well provides people with positive affect which abates loneliness (Thoits, 2011). Studies on the same have found that prosocial or voluntary activities work on the same principle of providing people with positive affect and a greater sense of social satisfaction on the days when they occurred (DeLongis, Klaiber, Sin & Wen, 2021) hence the more one is surrounded by good friends the more of an environment of positive affect they are immersed in. In her broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, Fredrickson developed the idea that positive emotions not only signal well-being but also produce optimal functioning by broadening the mindset and promoting the tendencies to explore, create, play and savour life circumstances and thus help the individual to build emotional, social, intellectual and physical resources in the moment and which can later be drawn on in the future for coping with stressful situations. According to Fredrickson, positive emotions help in building resilience and flourishing of the human person (Gerson, 2018).

In their research on *the changing landscape of friendships in the pandemic*, Aktipis, Ayers, Beltran, Cronk, Todd & Van Horn (2021), found that the lack of in person interaction was positively correlated to a decline in the quality of friendships. They postulated that this occurred due to a challenge on what they termed as “risk-transfer” – the exchange of risk from one individual to another done by way of pooling where one party agrees to take on some of the other party’s risk in exchange for their willingness to take on some of one’s own risk, increasing the likelihood that parties to the risk pooling agreement would suffer losses but decrease the severity of the loss (Aktipis, Cronk, de Aguiar, 2011). In friendship, Aktipis et al defined this as the transfer of risks from one individual to another as one of the ways in which friends helped each other deal with the uncertainties of the pandemic (Aktipis, Ayers, Beltran, Cronk, Todd & Van Horn, 2021). Research affirms this with conclusions such as the fact that meaningful social interactions are inversely associated with loneliness and evidence has been found that poor social interaction quality as well has been found to be one of the strongest predictors of loneliness (Fischer, Lippke & Ratz, 2021). It for this reason that the study conducted in this

dissertation looks at why friendships and physical interaction is necessary at a time such as the pandemic.

2.5 Remaining human: Inhuman circumstances

Do humans really need physical interaction in order to be considered to be flourishing? Aristotle early on noted that “*man is a social animal, and he who lives without society is a beast or God*” (Aristotle, Politics, 1. 1253a2). How then can we posit his survival and even further his ability to flourish as a human being with the restrictions present at the time of the pandemic? In his model for Buddhist human resource development, Watthanabut (2017) notes that man’s social nature impels him to live in society and affirms that one cannot develop as he was intended to when in isolation. He goes on to attribute that human beings develop certain qualities precisely because they interact with other human beings and the bonds from these relationships facilitate other needs as well. Watthanabut goes on to point out that even at the beginning of life this nature is seen between the embryo and its mother – though the relationship may be physical for the embryo with the mother in the case of survival, it is however a more mental and emotional need for the mother, demonstrating that no man is in a position to break the shackles of mutual dependence (Watthanabut, 2017). Infants in custodial care who lack human contact have also been found not to thrive and eventually succumb to death (Holt-Lunstad, 2017). Hence it becomes clear why isolation from society is regarded a punishment and a form of torture as the instinct for some form of social life is innate in man. Though it may not be philosophically correct to state that man is not born human, but he does have a need to become more human rather than less and being social has a lot to do with that (Watthanabut, 2017).

The social reconnection hypothesis theorizes that with regards to motivation, deprivation and goal attainment, when the satisfaction for an important drive is thwarted, humans like other species, often seek alternatives ways to satisfy that drive. During the pandemic and with isolation as well as restricted movement, what most people who live alone are deprived of is social connection and may thus be experiencing a strong desire to form bonds with other people so as to satisfy that

need. Baumeister, DeWall, Maner & Schaller (2007), while studying whether social exclusion motivates interpersonal reconnection compare the aspects of the social reconnection hypothesis to a hungry person whose efforts to find food are thwarted and who out of desperation looks elsewhere even more vigorously in order to survive. Baumeister et al posit that social exclusion does increase the need to form social bonds evidenced by participants in their study expressing a greater interest to make new friends, work with others, form more positive impressions of novel social targets and assign greater rewards to new interaction partners. The German philosopher Schopenhauer affirmed this in his conclusion that the desire for positive relationships is one of the most fundamental and universal of human needs (Schopenhauer, 1851).

2.6 Physically-distanced vs Socially-distanced

Social isolation is the objective physical separation from others and exists in the absence of social relationships (Boyd, Cudjoe, Roth, Szanton, Wolff & Thorpe, 2020). It has also been defined as the disengagement from social ties, institution connections or community participation. The risks associated with social isolation have been associated with mortality hazard ratios similar to that of smoking. This stems from the notion that healthy social relationships promote healthy behaviours, increase self-efficacy and even regulate biological mechanisms such as decreasing allostatic load, expressed as the wear and tear on the body which accumulates as an individual is exposed to repeated or chronic stress. In a study looking into how social isolation predicted mortality compared to traditional clinical risk factors, researchers found that isolated individuals increased expression of genes related to proinflammatory cytokine signaling and prostaglandin synthesis which assist in the normal functioning of many different tissues, and also led to the under expression of genes related to antiviral resistance, antibody production and lymphocyte function that are responsible for initiating immune responses when foreign invaders enter the body (Adler, Balmes, Jutte, Pantell, Rehkopf & Syme, 2013). 70 independent studies including over 3.4 million participants indicated that each risk factor with regards to social isolation, loneliness and living alone have a significant effect on risk mortality which far exceeds the risk linked to obesity. Living alone, being unmarried, a lack of

participation in social groups having few friends and strained relationships among adults have not only been highlighted as risks for premature mortality but also an increased risk for loneliness (Holt-Lunstad, 2017). When the risks of mortality were quantified, it was attributed that social isolation drove 29% of the risk, loneliness accounted for 26% while living alone accounted for a significant percentage of 32% (Baker, Harris, Holt-Lunstad, Smith & Stephenson, 2015). It is thus clear why a lack of social connection has been seen to result in devastating consequences for psychological well-being seen through aspects such as loneliness, guilt, jealousy, depression and anxiety, higher incidences of psychopathology and reduced immune functioning. Other studies have found that the effects of social exclusion resemble those of physical pain (Baumeister, DeWall, Maner & Schaller, 2007). Berntson, Cacioppo & Hawkley (2003) posit that as objective social isolation increases, loneliness prevails as there is a lower likelihood that intimate and social needs are met. Clay (2020) in trying to differentiate between social isolation and loneliness advanced the definition of the two as social isolation being an objective lack of social contact while loneliness is a subjective feeling of being lonely and one can be alone without feeling lonely. However, the question arises whether being alone on one's own terms can be likened to being alone because of external circumstances that one is not in control of.

Social connections have been found to be more necessary in today's era where more and more people live alone especially in relation to securing people's health and emotional well-being. Cases that contradict this have been highlighted postulating that living alone is not synonymous with feeling lonely as observed in countries in Scandinavia where a large fraction of the population lives alone (Ospina, 2019) while also reported to have some of the world's highest happiness indices (Greve, Martela, Rothstein & Saari, 2020). Kepic and White (2020), looking into the relationship between friendships and life satisfaction, found that more frequent visits with friends were attributable to higher life satisfaction. These aspects on the need for social connection go beyond recent times. Studies conducted by Myerhoff in 1980 that focused on older Russian Jewish immigrants living in California found that even for those who had left their original homeland and extended family behind in Russia

and had no or had lost their family in the United States, their survival in their new location was pegged on them developing close social relationships with non-relatives thus creating “synthetic families”. The quality rather than the quantity of these relationships was more predictive of favourable outcomes when it came to mortality, physical and mental health (Antonucci, Ajrouch & Birditt, 2014).

In the case for substituting face to face or physical interaction with computer-mediated communication, Christie, Short & William developed the social presence theory that stipulates that social presence is experienced when an individual’s feelings that other people are engaging in personal communication and interaction where the degree of social presence depends on the number of channels or codes available within the communication medium. Computer-mediated communication was ranked as low in social presence due to the limited exchange of nonverbal cues (Chan & Cheng, 2004) while other studies also showed that loneliness was positively correlated with time spent online in chat rooms and generally with increased duration of online usage (Parija & Shukla, 2014). Phone contact was also associated with higher levels of negative effect among people who lived alone but not among those who lived with others while daily contact with friends was found to improve well-being reinforcing the need for social partners in one’s life, providing evidence of the unique benefits to positive emotional well-being and technologically mediated communication (Birditt, Britt, Charles, Colera, Fingerman, Ng & Zhang, 2021). In a cross-sectional study on the meaning of friendships among young individuals before and during the pandemic, Fischer, Lippke & Ratz (2021) found that though young people expressed the need for a real connection, it was not met by staying in touch via use of smartphones whether this was by phone call or video chat as the intimacy related to this medium was quite low relative to face-to-face interactions creating a challenge for the parties to communicate the same feelings as they would in person and hence drastically reducing the meaning conveyed in conversations. In the work setting itself, in-person collaboration was found to foster creativity and innovation as it created the essential environment required for new ideas, and kept people motivated and focused (Gorlick, 2020). This lack of social context cues and its low social presence made close relationships such as friendships difficult to form and maintain online as physical availability and frequency of exposure was considered

crucial for relationship development (Chan & Cheng, 2004) given that meaning conveyed between persons is more often than not conveyed, not in words, but in non-verbal behaviour (Miller, 2020).

In a study looking into the relationship between modes of contact and different types of social relationships, where social contact was taken as an objective measure of social isolation, it was determined that the probability of having depressive tendencies increased as the frequency of in person contact decreased and that having as few as two friends was associated with better psychological well-being (Andrea, Choi, Dobscha, Newsom, Teo, Valenstein & Zivin, 2015).

Ortiz-Ospina (2019), distinguishes loneliness as a subjective feeling that is distinct from objective physical isolation while Snell (2017), argued that social aloneness or being in solitude was also very different from the notions surrounding subjective and temperamental feelings of loneliness positing that lone living was almost always the strongest variable explaining loneliness. Snell (2017) further concluded that it may also be true that lonely people live alone or that living alone makes people lonely. Parija & Shukla (2014) defined loneliness as the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is deficient in some important way either qualitatively or quantitatively. A study looking into the relationship between isolation and loneliness, Coyle and Dugan in a longitudinal study in the US between 2006-2008 found that contrary to other studies, loneliness and social isolation were not highly correlated at the individual level but what it correlated with was the prevalence of people living alone concluding that many people did in fact feel lonely without physical isolation and that many who were physically isolated do not feel lonely (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). However, other studies suggest the contrary, expressing that people who live alone have lower satisfaction with their relationships and a lower need to belong than those who lived with others further advancing that social and emotional loneliness were correlated to life satisfaction (Parija & Shukla, 2014).

The challenge brought on by loneliness doesn't merely stem from the absence of social contacts but rather the discrepancy between one's desired and perceived quality of social relationships. The evolutionary theory of loneliness posits that this discrepancy acts as an alarm to motivate the individual to reconnect with others (Aschwanden, Lee, Luchetti, Sesker, Strickhouser, Sutin & Terracciano, 2020) as also demonstrated by the social reconnection hypothesis.

In light of the covid-19 pandemic, social distancing and what has been termed as "stay-at-home" orders may be considered essential to containing the outbreak despite growing concerns on the mental health of vulnerable groups such as those who live alone. Studies that have dominantly focused on the topic have related this vulnerable group to older adults sidelining another part of the population that is young adults, who are themselves not immune to loneliness. Some studies suggest that the loneliness pandemic is highest among young adults. Studies conducted to determine the impact of these socially restricting measures show that there could be dangerous unintended consequences where loneliness increases in response to the restrictive mandates especially among individuals who live alone as they do not have persons to easily regulate the negative emotionality that comes with "stay-at-home" and quarantine orders. As brought out earlier, it is the feeling of connection rather than the quantity of one's social contacts that promotes better health outcomes (Aschwanden, Lee, Luchetti, Sesker, Strickhouser, Sutin & Terracciano, 2020). It is also notable that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, loneliness and social isolation were so prevalent across the US, Europe and China that it was taken up as a behavioral epidemic and was worsened by the state of the pandemic (Ikedu, Hwang, Peisah, Rabheru & Reichman, 2020) as long periods of isolation have detrimental effects on well-being (Bagguley, Bash, Caan, Leigh-Hunt, Turnbull, Turner, 2017). Emile Durkheim's social integration and social cohesion theory highlights some of the negative effects of limited activity by advancing the idea that diverse social roles and activities in one's life promote extensive knowledge, social networks, and a sense of purpose which are important for well-being and which those who live alone lose out on more while restrictive measures are still in place (Almeida, Charles, Koffer, Lee, Ram & Sprague, 2018). Julianne Holt-Lunstand, Professor of Psychology

& Neuroscience at Brigham Young University who studied the long-term health effects of social connection, in an analysis of the scientific literature on the topic of social isolation determined that chronic social isolation increased the risk of mortality by 29%. She also determined that a simple remedy such as having a friend present could reduce a person's cardiovascular response to stress (Miller, 2020). Stress has been identified as one of the main consequences of social isolation and emerging evidence indicates that the adverse psychological impacts associated with isolation are not just restricted to the time of isolation but can be observed in later months and years after one leaves the state of social disconnection (Alexandre Menezes da Silva, Bezerra, Eduardo Menezes da Silva & Soares, 2020). Social isolation leads to social disconnection which is one cause of stress in many individuals during the time of the pandemic. The loss of connectivity has been considered one of the most 'painful' experiences that people endure, a phenomenon termed as "social pain". In a study looking into the pain of social disconnection, Eisenberger (2011) found that experiences of social pain i.e., the painful feelings associated with actual or perceived social disconnection, rely on some of the neurobiological substrates that are linked to physical pain. This has led to conclusions affirming that the threats to social connection are just as detrimental to survival as are threats to physical safety even with additional evidence that the presence and reception of physical social support eases the likelihood of social harm as well as physical harm. The pain thus caused by the effects of social isolation should not just be termed as "psychological" harm but in fact be also considered and taken as "real" pain to people in such vulnerable groups (Eisenberger, 2011). Clinicians and researchers have in the past been encouraged to give as much attention to the development and maintenance of psychological well-being in the face of circumstances such as the pandemic as they do to the etiology and treatment of psychiatric symptoms (Folkman & Greer, 2000). One factor that may also be adding to the stress of social isolation and its effects is the element of personal choice attributable to the circumstances of the pandemic. In a study conducted regarding working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, a company offered 1000 of its employees the chance to work from home out of which half volunteered to take up the offer. After nine months, those who had taken up the work-from-home mandate

were asked if they would prefer to continue working from home or return to the office and half of the population requested to return to the office despite their commute to work being more than 40 minutes each direction. It was thus taken that given the option, employees chose to work in a social environment, and this helped reduce the build-up of a mental health crisis (Gorlick, 2020).

In reviewing the differences in how the younger and older adults have been able to cope during the COVID-19 pandemic, Bruin (2020), found that older adults were associated with less negative responses to the crisis than young adults. This was attributed to the fact that older adults engaged in strategies that mitigated the elicitation of negative emotions more easily than younger adults such as choosing and engaging in activities that reduced stress which were linked to the perspective that time left to live was growing shorter (socioemotional selectivity theory) as well as their own experience and self-knowledge.

2.7 Living alone and working alone – circumstances of the pandemic

In a study on the Anatomy of Loneliness, Bernston, Cacioppo & Hawkley (2003) determined that by the early 21st century, the proportion of people living alone in the US had increased by 20% and 20 years into the same century, Ospina (2019) found that the share of adults living alone in the US had doubled within the last 50 years. A 2010 US Census in Midtown Manhattan in New York City found that single person households otherwise termed as “solitaries” accounted for 94% of the population whose age range was between 18-34 years and which had grown by 10 times than in 1950 to a number of about 5 million across this fast-growing group of solitaries, while 35-64-year-old solitaries accounted for over 15 million of the population (Snell, 2017). Other studies also found that the male gender was also highly likely to be dominant in this population (Boyd, Cudjoe, Roth, Szanton, Wolff & Thorpe, 2020) which was attributed to the fact that women have a more collectivist orientation while men hold a more individualistic orientation shown by the fact that under stress, women’s affiliation with others and their giving and seeking help is substantial relative to men, as a way to cope with stress (Adolphs, Carter, Davidson, McClintock, McEwen, Meaney, Taylor, Schatcer, Sternberg & Suomi, 2002). Long

term studies on the trends in living alone also found that young men and women who were not married and currently working were more likely to live alone than those not working (Choi & Park, 2005) while other studies looking into the changing landscape of friendships in the pandemic called out the most vulnerable and most negatively affected group specifically as comprising of males and younger people (Aktipis, Ayers, Beltran, Cronk, Todd & Van Horn, 2021). As living arrangements influence the kinds of social relationships that people build, living alone creates a risk factor for solitaries and is often considered a proxy measure for social isolation (Boyd, Cudjoe, Roth, Szanton, Wolff & Thorpe, 2020). The astounding rise in living alone has been considered one of the most significant social changes of the modern world (Klinenberg, 2016) and the number of single occupancy households worldwide is now greater than ever in recorded history (Holt-Lunstad, 2017).

Snell (2017) and Holt-Lunstad (2017) looking into the rise of living alone in western households and specifically within US adult population, described the phenomenon as “historically unprecedented and accentuating over time” and considered that it had led to what is now termed as the “epidemic on loneliness” or a “loneliness time-bomb”. Putnam argued that a lack of social integration and support in the US as well as loneliness made up for one the country’s most serious public health challenges (Snell, 2017). Recent measures as early as 2015 by the World Health Organisation to list “social support networks” as a determinant of health and the UK’s Minister of Health’s mandate to call out loneliness as a health priority showcase the importance that has been placed on tackling the loneliness epidemic (Holt-Lunstad, Robles & Sbarra, 2017). Research conducted by Abell & Steptoe (2019) on the complications between mortality and living alone, revealed that people who lived alone were more likely to report social isolation - deemed as an objective indicator of social connectivity - and loneliness - taken as the subjective experience of a lack of companionship - hence why living alone is still considered a psychosocial risk factor and a strong predictor of loneliness (Baumert, Kandler, Meisinger & Löwell, 2007). Social isolation is extremely difficult for the human person even when approached from an evolutionary perspective as most of man’s fundamental motives are inherently social such as affiliating with others or strengthening relationships hence

why friendships help curb against the feelings of isolation and loneliness and even scientifically being correlated positively with faster recovery, increased well-being and protection against both mental and physical illnesses (Aktipis, Ayers, Beltran, Cronk, , Todd & Van Horn, 2021).

A subjective and objective measure of the impact of social isolation has been pegged to looking at loneliness in individuals in isolation which has also been attributed to the risk of mortality. A six-year study on the relationship between social isolation and mortality risk determined that 30% of isolated individuals were at risk of mortality. A study conducted as early as 1979 by Lynch found that US mortality rates were highest among the category of people fitting the profile of being divorced, widowed or single than for married individuals (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), this category also being the profile of those most likely to be living alone. In the recent past, the absence of social ties was actually taken up as a public health issue comparable to high-risk health problems such as smoking, alcohol consumption, lack of physical activity and obesity (Camilo, Lima, Marques & Muiños, 2017). Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam who popularised the term “social capital” in the late 1990s defined it as the wide variety of benefits that flow from trust, reciprocity, information and cooperation associated with social networks (Putnam, 2020). Though social capital is not tangible, it exists in the relations among persons just as physical capital and human capital facilitate activity that is productive, so does social capital (Coleman, 1988). He advanced in his theory that social networks have value as the collective value of the people we know (social networks) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other. Putnam calls out friendship as one key aspect that fosters and deepens social networks (Putnam, 2020). Putnam also distinguishes two types of social relationships: bonding and bridging. The former relates to reciprocal relationships amongst similar others that is characterised by intimate and supportive types of connectedness that root identities of persons which are common among family and friends while bridging social capital refers to more casual relationships amongst dissimilar people that go across group boundaries, giving people access to information outside their close networks and enables the building of communalities that are important for shared identities

(Camilo, Lima, Marques & Muiños, 2017). One could say that for young professionals living alone and working from home, there is a material loss in bonding relationships with friends as well as bridging relationships with colleagues. Research suggests that people who were not living as part of a couple were significantly more likely to report experiencing loneliness than those living as part of a couple placing people who live alone at more risk of feeling lonelier often. The same research conducted by Evans & Pyle (2018) found that those who met up with family and friends were less likely to report feelings of loneliness, placing people who did not see their friends and family at least once a month or never at 84% more likely to be lonely than those who met up with family and friends daily. In determining what a true sense of belongingness (among friends) would look like, Baumeister & Leary (1995) found that having relationships with only partial (physical) interaction led to an incomplete satisfaction of the need to belong. In relationships where people had not had interactions, studies led to the same conclusions – people with such like bonds treated them as desirable and valuable but suffered over the lack of direct contact with the other person(s). Such a case was presented in the scenario of persons confined to prisons. Though prisoners did indeed have people that they cared for such as family and friends on the outside, interactions with them were sorely restricted and yet data on prison life showed that prisoners treasured and held dearly to these ties and suffered much over the lack of interaction. The perceived threat of losing a strong bond was shown to be a source of suffering. A study conducted in 1984 by Gerstel and Gross similar to that of the case of prisoners facing external boundaries to interaction, looking into the relationship among commuter couples found the same results - partners valued the bonds they had, but suffered greatly over the loss of their interactions to the point that participants in the study voiced the unsatisfactory nature of frequent long-distance phone calls however common they had become. Phone conversations were deemed necessary for sharing information and dealing with practical matters but were lacking in fulfilling the need for pleasant social interactions and the enjoyment of one another's company (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

In a study looking at the association between online and face to face friendships and health, it was determined that taking an active role in community life and interacting with other people over online meetings increased one's awareness of social norms, provided opportunities for social comparisons that built up self-esteem positively thus preventing what was been termed by Uchino (2004) as social loneliness (Camilo, Lima, Marques & Muiños,2017).

2.8 Considering culture

Culture is taken as what marks out a people distinctively from other human societies and entails a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people, including its social norms and values, understood as the beliefs held about what is right and wrong as well as important in life. Unlike material culture that refers to visible tactile objects, non-material culture is abstract and has a deeper influence on the lives of the people in that particular culture and defines their identity. African cultures, for example are identified as having strong kinship ties that are held at a premium, an aspect that distinguishes them from Western cultures (Idang, 2015). Culture can also be understood as a social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses and material expressions which over time express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of a life held in common and is more often than not caught, rather than taught (Ikechukwu, Umunya & Ogbo, 2019).

Metz (2014) in reviewing the differences between Western and African culture distinguished that Western education focused on fostering individual agency and prized properties that were internal to a human being making no essential reference to anyone but the individual whereas the African view was more centered on taking pains to support the society at large and relating communally with others. This view of contrasting the individualist versus the communalist value orientations has been the dominant framework of studying culture where North American societies were taken to value personal autonomy while African societies were dominated by interpersonal connection. It is these constructions of self - interdependent in African settings and independent in North American settings (Adams, Adonu & Anderson, 2004) - that influence the experience of friendship, where it can be said that those in

North American settings have the challenge of atomistic independence that is disadvantaged towards companionship (Adams & Plaut, 2003). Klinenberg (2016) goes on to support the influence of environment and culture in his review of social isolation, loneliness and living alone as public health risks noting that social isolation doesn't depend on who you are but where you live as certain social environments foster social isolation while others promote local contact and mutual support. Different cultures manifest variability in goals, motives, values and behaviours and these are then associated with how differently one pursues and attains well-being and social integration. We are easily shaped by the social, cultural and environmental forces that surround us and these easily determine how we function in our everyday life (Exposito, Moya, Orzeck & Rokach, 2001). Despite this, the self-determination theory argues that people from all cultures share basic psychological needs such as relatedness which is the feature necessary in forming friendships. The distinction in cultural practices was first advanced by Triandis (1997) and Triandis and Gelfand (1998) who came up with four types of cultural behaviours and norms encompassing two dimensions: the horizontal-vertical dimension and the individualism-collectivism dimension. The former refers to the practices and norms supporting equality and interchangeability among people as opposed to hierarchical social relations. The latter dimension looks into the relative priority given to the individual's goals and preferences against the priority placed on the needs, norms & goals of one's group. The mix of these dimensions leads to four categories: a) horizontal collectivism that emphasizes common goals, interdependence & sociability; b) vertical collectivism that emphasizes adherence to hierarchical relations within one's group; c) horizontal individualism that emphasizes the need to be distinct from others in the group but also seeing individuals as having equal worth and lastly d) vertical individualism that emphasizes the need to become distinguished through competition with others and the assertion of one's personal aims (Chirkov, Kaplan, Kim & Ryan, 2003).

2.9 Socialisation by cultural dimensions

Though for cultures, the demarcation by individualism versus collectivism is the broadest division even with its different "species", it would be incorrect to say that

any culture is purely one or the other, and neither does it imply that members of a culture are autonomous blindly and uniformly representing and reproducing the culture (Bhawuk, Gelfand, Singelis & Triandis, 1995). Culture is never static and as it evolves and changes with the passage of time, it becomes more difficult to speak of a homogenous population which has led some cultural researchers to come up with a further classification of “*idiocentricism*” as personal individualism and “*allocentricism*” as personal collectivism (Choi & Lee, 2017). It is thus taken that the defining attributes of cultures are best thought of as fluctuating pressures or tendencies which may or may not actually manifest themselves in a particular individual or context. Nevertheless, it would still hold that among collectivists, relationships are of the greatest importance even if the costs of these relationships exceed the benefits while among individualists, when the costs exceed the benefits, the relationship is often dropped (Bhawuk, Gelfand, Singelis & Triandis, 1995). Overall, culture is both conditioning and conditioned and as a man-made part of the environment, it is perpetuated by the actions and beliefs of individuals, and it is through socialization, practices, norms and institutions that cultures emphasize the connectedness and separateness of individuals in many ways (Brown & Singelis, 1995) for self-image is more often than not formed through the experiences and interpretations of one’s environment. Socialization practices that promote individualism help to foster a conception of self that is discrete and abstract while practices that include collectivism promote a concept of self that is embedded, ensembled and situated (Archer, Norlander & Wästlund, 2001).

In determining how culture influences socialization, Asakawa and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), postulated that as children, we acquire an attitude, belief, or behavioral regulation in the socializing environment which is progressively transformed into a personal value. They thus concluded that socialization is the issue of internalization. The proponents of internalization, Deci and Ryan (1985) considered internalization as the developmental process through which external regulations are gradually integrated into the realm of self-determination. In Asakawa and Csikszentmihalyi’s study, they found that children who felt more related to their significant others were more likely to identify with and thus internalize beliefs, values and behavioral styles

of the significant other. This was observed in Asian cultures that were classed within the horizontal-collectivism dimension and found through anthropological and psychological studies to report a stronger tendency to seek connectedness to others as Asian cultures strongly expressed the fundamental connectedness of human beings to each other and emphasized harmonious interdependence among individuals. The self in this type of culture was viewed not as separate from the social context but as more connected and less differentiated from others. American cultures, in contrast, being dominated by vertical individualism, takes on a different conception of the self that emphasizes independence from others by focusing on the individual and by expressing its unique inner attributes. The horizontal-collectivism class considers the self as most “fully-human” when in the context of others. Asians were thus found in the study aforementioned, to have their subjective experiences significantly impacted by whether or not they were with others as compared to Americans leading to the conclusion that the physical presence of others appeared to affect the level of happiness of those within the horizontal-collectivism dimension more strongly than that of vertical-individualists attributed to the fact that interdependent selves were more likely to have a tendency to seek harmonious interdependence among individuals by attending to and fitting in with others (Asakawa & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The horizontal collectivism dimension that is prevalent in Africa is characterized by persons who are strongly connected and as such this group entails persons who function with other’s interests in mind and those who identify with the group end up adopting values and behaviours that lend priority to that group (Chirkov, Kaplan, Kim & Ryan, 2003). The persons termed as collectivists share material resources like time and affection with people they share their selves with and relationships are nurtured with unequal social exchanges over a long period of time and are maintained even when they are not cost effective (Bhawuk, 2017). Vertical integrations on the other hand often act as barriers to the fulfillment of basic needs for autonomy and relatedness (Chirkov, Kaplan, Kim & Ryan, 2003) as the persons in this category also feel less emotional attachment to others and view social exchanges primarily as based on the principle of rationality and equal exchange

(Bhawuk, 2017). Iyengar & Lepper (1999), in their research titled “rethinking the value of choice”, noted that to better understand the different dimensions expressed by Triandis & Gelfand, it was also crucial to link intrinsic motivation with individual choice and self-determination. By this notion, it was deemed that people enjoy, prefer and persist at activities that provide them with the opportunity to make choices, control their outcomes and determine their own fate. Markus & Kitayama (1991) developed the self-systems theory that argued that whereas personal agency was an essential element of the self-construct of vertical individualists, it may be much less relevant to the self-constructs of members of more collectivistic cultures such as those of Africa. Markus & Kitayama supported the notion that interdependent cultures strove for interconnectedness and belongingness within their social in-group and sought to maintain harmony and would actually prefer to submit to choices expressed by others if the situation enabled them to fulfill the superordinate cultural goal of belongingness (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999).

When viewed in the context of collectivism, the African worldview is characterized as sacred, emotional and communal and one that emphasizes the ontological understanding of communion and connection with others as the concept of personhood sees individuals by their communing with others justifying their status as human beings. Moreover, it is also characterized by reliance, closeness to family, friendliness and may reflect mutual aid systems. Even with the dimensions of allocentrism and idiocentrism, individualism is still strongly associated with Western cultures and collectivism with Eastern and African cultures (Fairlie, Jackson, Lay & Melamud, 1998). Because Africans being collectivists, identify more with members of the traditional groups such as family, friends, relatives and neighbors (Clemente, Espinosa, Gouveia, 2010) the third objective of the study took on the hypothesis that at the time of the pandemic, their ties to their in-group sustained their well-being during such difficult moments while America’s dominant themes being individualism and verticality with a strong emphasis on independence (Moon & Travaglino, 2021), were more disadvantaged when it came to coping with the negative effects associated with isolation caused by the circumstances of the pandemic.

2.10 Happiness through the ages

“All men seek happiness. There are no exceptions. However different the means they may employ, they all strive towards this goal. The reason why some go to war, and some do not is the same desire in both, but interpreted in two different ways. The will never takes the least step except to that end. This is the motive of every act of every man, including those who go and hang themselves’ (Pascal, 1669, Section VII, No. 425)

One of the most controversial issues in well-being research has been the definition, investigation and translation of the term “happiness” (Araujo, Brdar, Castro, Delle, Freire, Hernández-Pozo, Jose, Martos, Nafstad, Nakamura, Singh, Soosai-Nathan & Wissing, 2016). The notion of happiness is undoubtedly a fundamental human drive and has been evaluated within the walls of philosophy from antiquity to the present. What matters in life is not just to live but to live well. Jim Holt, in reviewing Darrin McMahan’s book *Happiness: A History*, remarked that the idea of happiness could be summarised as a series of bumper sticker equations: happiness = luck (Homeric era), happiness = virtue (classical era), happiness = heaven (medieval era), happiness = pleasure (Enlightenment era), and happiness = a warm puppy (contemporary era). Democritus, considered to be the first philosopher in the Western world to make inquiries on the nature of happiness proposed that a happy life was not exclusively the product of a favourable fate or external circumstances, but rather of a man’s state of mind while philosophers who came later such as Plato saw happiness as the enjoyment of what is good and beautiful while Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* asserted that happiness was not out of one’s hands but was realizable for anyone willing to lead a life in accordance with the most valued virtues. Hellenistic history promoted hedonism as the road to the good life with the Cyrenaic school of thought promoted the idea that “no considerations should restrain one in the pursuit of pleasure, for everything other than pleasure is unimportant, and virtue is least important of all”. Stoicism on the other hand advocated for the felicitic powers of virtue with philosophers such as Cicero propagating that a man in possession of virtues could be happy even while being tortured. Middle Age Christian

philosophers took the life of virtue as indispensable to the good life but went beyond this to take the view that happiness was an ethereal, spiritual matter attainable by means of faith and the grace of God. Towards the age of Enlightenment, happiness became a more secular idea and an increased notion of pleasure as the path to happiness was well advanced by utilitarians who proposed that happiness equalled utility and this was derived from maximum pleasure. Today's understanding of happiness is also not as clear as more and more people take happiness as feeling good rather than being good. From these varying takes on happiness, it is quite clear that the definition of happiness is quite a difficult one. As psychologists and social scientists took up the topic of happiness, there was a shift in the use of the word itself to be synonymous with "subjective well-being" (SWB). SWB referred to people's evaluations of their lives, encompassing both cognitive judgements of satisfaction and affective appraisals of moods and motions (Diener & Kesebir, 2008). This view took happiness as a primarily subjective phenomenon for which the final judge was "whoever lived inside a person's skin" (Lyubomirsky, Schkade & Sheldon, 2005). The main components of SWB that are linked as determinants of happiness include: *life satisfaction* taken as the global judgments of one's life, *satisfaction with important life domains* taken as satisfaction with one's work, health, marriage, etc., *positive affect* understood as the prevalence of positive emotions and moods, and low levels of *negative affect* taken as the prevalence of unpleasant emotions and moods.

Nevertheless, high SWB and eudaimonic happiness aren't always interchangeable as a person could feel subjectively happy without leading a virtuous life though it can still be said that the two concepts are sufficiently close (Diener & Kesebir, 2008).

Other modern view of happiness, taking a scientific approach determined that when it came to happiness, genetics accounted for 50% of the population variation, circumstances accounted for 10% and the rest of the 40% was attributable to a person's intentional activity in a bid to become happy, giving more weight to the intentional activity over circumstances for happiness boosting potential (Lyubomirsky, Schkade & Sheldon, 2005). It is this latter aspect of the potentiality of intentionality over circumstances and why it is necessary for man to take up certain activities and interactions that will be delved into in this dissertation's study.

2.11 In pursuit of happiness

Happiness itself could also be taken to be ideal or actual. Ideal happiness, defined as happiness that is complete and lasting and that touches the whole of life being taken as perfect, pure and perpetual and being of high standards seems out of reach to the ordinary man. Actual happiness on the other hand is expressed as the experience of predominantly positive emotions accompanied by a satisfaction with life. Barbara Frederickson's "broaden-and-build theory" proposed that positive feelings allowed people to explore their environments and approach new goals thus allowing them to build important personal resources. Contrary to this theory, psychological discoveries also stipulated that happiness was an impossible human ambition and only resulted in a wild goose chase when directly pursued as a goal. The Philosopher, J.S. Mill, a proponent of utilitarianism, argued that happiness came to those who had their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness ie the happiness of others; mankind's improvement followed not as a means but as an end by itself. Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina* in refuting the idea that happiness was certainty that all men, sooner or later, accommodated themselves to whatever became their permanent situation elusive observed that there were no conditions to which a person could not grow accustomed (Tolstoy, 1877), and Adam Smith reiterated this when he stated that there was a never-failing (Smith, 1759).

Some evidence suggests that the more a person wants to feel happy, the less happy they may actually feel and that negative emotions were in direct competition with the goal of feeling happier (Ford & Zerwas, 2021) yet Aristotle considered happiness the highest human good as long as one was in pursuit of virtue of some sort, a kind of monistic good entailing one single activity for the sake of which other activities were choice-worthy (Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1094a1-3) and which consisted in a contemplative or philosophical life (Galinha, Graham, Kesebir & Oishi, 2013). For Aristotle, friendship was deemed necessary for participation in contemplation (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 9.4), conceived as the goodness of the self through reflection on the goodness of the friend (Ward, 2016). Avoiding this paradox was determined to involve the acceptance of both the positive and negative emotions

rather than their judgement as good or bad (Ford & Zerwas, 2021). However, outside the idea that happiness is an outcome, research has shown that happiness precedes as well as causes several positive outcomes. One of these outcomes is better physical health. A study conducted by Danner, Snowdon & Friesen in 2001 validated the positive affect content in handwritten autobiographies of Catholic sisters written at the mean age of 22 strongly predicted their longevity six decades later while another study conducted on persons infected with a cold virus found that those who were less vulnerable to the common cold were those reported with high levels of happiness. Happiness was also observed to be linked to higher performance professionally with the research demonstrating that happy individuals were more likely to graduate from university, secure work, earn higher salaries, receive favourable evaluations from their managers and even more likely to be re-employed if they lost their jobs. Research also revealed the positive correlation between happiness and wealth though it was also observed that money had a diminishing effect on happiness for as Epicurus (1994) noted, nothing satisfies the man who is not satisfied with a little for what is needed is not so much an excess of wealth but an adequate amount. Religion was also found to be a source of happiness and specifically, participating in religious services, the strength of one's religious affiliations, a relationship with God and prayer. On a personal level, certain personality traits such as extraversion were identified as a predictor of positive affect while traits such as neuroticism predisposed people to negative affect. The cultivation of traits such as optimism, positive self-esteem, trust, agreeableness and such like traits was found to be a strong predictor of happiness (Diener & Kesebir, 2008). Research found that the long-term effectiveness of cognitive and behavioural strategies to combat negative affect had encouraging implications for the possibility of elevating long-term happiness (Lyubomirsky, Schkade & Sheldon, 2005). In the same light, in his Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle noted that it was evident that eudaimonia stood in need of good things from the outside in order for a man to be happy (Galinha, Graham, Kesebir & Oishi, 2013). On other fronts, happiness was also found to result in people being more social, cooperative and even ethical and more prone to self-disclosure. On a national level as well, countries with a happier index tended to score higher on generalised trust, volunteerism and democratic

attitudes (Diener & Kesebir, 2008). Thomas Jefferson in the 1776 Declaration of Independence demonstrated his similar belief that private happiness was also a result of being a good citizen (Galinha, Graham, Kesebir & Oishi, 2013). Happiness also had a direct impact on friendships and social relationships as demonstrated by the study conducted by Diener & Seligman in 2002, validating that happy people had some of the most excellent social relationships while perceived loneliness was linked to depression (Diener & Kesebir, 2008) demonstrating that happier people had larger social networks and friends compared to less happy ones (Sheldon & Titoya, 2021). Good social relationships were found to be one of the most important sources of happiness, living up to the statement that it is man who is essential to man's happiness. Aristotle came to the same conclusion when he proposed that no one would choose to live without friends even if he had all other goods. Epicurus (1994) himself believed that 'of all the things that wisdom could provide to help one live one's entire life in happiness, the greatest of them by far was the possession of friendship.

2.12 Buber's I-Thou relationship to happiness

On the relationship between "happiness" and "others", of this Martin Luther King Jr said, "The surest way to be happy is to seek happiness for others." Studies on this relationship revealed that in an effort to make oneself truly happy, one must first of all forget about oneself and instead mainly care about the happiness of others (Sheldon & Titoya, 2021). Research into the eudaimonic and hedonic components of happiness revealed that of all the features and sources of happiness, relational aspects were the most prominent with family and social relations ranking highest. This has led to the conclusion made in many studies that happiness seems to stem predominantly from interpersonal bonds and specifically from intimate relationships and interactions with friends and significant others (Brdar, Fave, Freire, Vella-Brodrick & Wissing, 2011). A study conducted where participants were asked to spend money on someone else or themselves revealed that those who spent it on others felt happier than their counterparts. Another study uniquely carried out on *very happy people*, titled by the same words, by Diener, Martin & Seligman in 2002 showed that very happy people had rich and satisfying social relationships and

spent little time alone relative to average people. Other studies demonstrated that engaging in acts of kindness towards others also led to the improvement of well-being of the initiator. The self-determination theory formalised this notion, postulating that people have a need for relatedness with others and that feelings of daily relatedness were strongly linked to the prediction of well-being. The process of trying to make someone else happier was found to lead to improvements in the other person's well-being which indirectly led to the improved well-being of the initiator validating the theory that trying to support other's happiness might be more important than trying to support one's own happiness (Sheldon & Titoya, 2021). On a different spectrum, Haybron (2008), in his review on the causes of unhappiness, made the claim that people adapted quickly to changing circumstances, concluding that many events had a surprisingly little effect on people's long-term happiness. He posited that people tended to overestimate the enduring emotional impact of future events and this made the pursuit of happiness problematic. Fixating too closely on the difference between their options, people forgot how similarly their options would affect their lives and could end up sacrificing too much to get the "better" option (Haybron, 2008). This latter aspect reveals an aspect that was developed in the study regarding the essential nature of friendships during the pandemic and whether this enabled young professionals to maintain their happiness at times of crisis and uncertainty as propagated by the pandemic or to instead deteriorate into unhappiness from a lack of friendships. The study sought to determine in relation to happiness whether young professionals' social relationships helped them get through impermanent states of social and physical isolation or on the other spectrum, where a lack of it may have had more detrimental effects on their well-being.

2.13 Theoretical Framework

The research conducted aims to determine the impact of the pandemic on the need for or lack of friendships on young professionals living alone in Nairobi City. These research aims are derived from the theoretical framework based upon Baumeister & Leary's belongingness theory as well as Martin Buber's dialogical personalism.

Baumeister and Leary posit six principles that support their theory around man's need to belong as a fundamental social motive.

- i. *Man has a basic desire to form social attachments and will do so readily even under seemingly adverse conditions*
- ii. *People resist losing long attachments and breaking social bonds even if there is no material or pragmatic reason to maintain the bond, even if maintaining it would be difficult*
- iii. *The need to belong shapes emotion and cognition. Forming or solidifying social attachments generally produces positive emotion, whereas real, imagined or potential threats to social bonds generate a variety of unpleasant emotional states*
- iv. *Deficits in belongingness leads to a variety of ill effects both physical and psychological*
- v. *People seem to need frequent interactions to occur within a framework characteristic of being long-term, stable, caring and embedded with concern*
- vi. *People need a few close relationships and forming additional relationships beyond those few has less and less impact*

By reviewing these principles against the experiences of young professionals in Nairobi around the need for friendship, the researcher was able to determine how the perceptions they held tied in with the meaning they attached to friendship, happiness and how these perceptions changed during the pandemic.

Buber's philosophy is categorized as Dialogical Personalism. In his 1908 book, *Personalism*, Bowne noted that 'persons are regarded as the sole or highest form of reality, and therefore, as possessing intrinsic value' (McInroy, 2011). Jacques Maritain, an early proponent of Personalism, took up the idea that the person is an open whole not shut up in himself, demanding communication with others in knowledge and love, sharing with and receiving from others the fruits of personal life, in need of loving with others because of his very perfections and spiritual riches (Evans, 1952). Buber's Personalism is considered *dialogical* because in it he posits that human beings are constituted in encounter with another (McInroy, 2011).

Buber makes an essential distinction between the two attitudes that man is capable of: the *I-Thou* relation and the *I-It* relation. The *I-Thou* relation designates relationships between persons i.e., “subject and subject” and a relation of reciprocity, dialogue and mutuality while the *I-It* relation stands between a “subject and object” characterized by using and experiencing objects and constitutes one-way relationships. Buber proposes that a person cannot say the word “I” without relating to a world outside the self. The “*I-Thou*” relationships, the basis upon which this research is conducted is a two-way relationship (Crabtree, Miller, Scott, Scott & Stange, 2009). As Buber suggests, man needs man in order to be fully alive. In an essay titled *Distance and Relation*, Buber explores, similar to his *I-Thou* theory, how human relations develop and observes that children are themselves born with an ability to relate which he called the *instinct of communion*, and it is this ability to relate that provides the pre-reflective support that enables an adult to return to relationship at a later time in life. Buber suggests that the “I” becomes clearer as more members are embraced. The more man experiences the *I-It* relation, the more separate he becomes from himself as well as others (Blenkinsop, 2006).

Man can treat the world ... as an 'It' – an orderly, comprehensible collection of things of objects to be experienced and used When we behold what confronts us in the world, we deal with it by treating it as an object which can be compared and assigned a place in an order of objects, described, analyzed objectively, filed away in our memory to be recalled when needed. (Buber, 1970, p.90)

This research went deeper into the opposition between these two ways of relating, as the pandemic created a situation that brought to light, and especially for young professionals who lived alone during the pandemic. In a time of minimal social interaction, the environment created an affinity for *I-It* relationships versus *I-Thou* relationships as reciprocity, dialogue and mutuality were radically limited thus curtailing experiences of fully living the nature of *I-Thou* relations.

Baumeister and Leary's *belongingness theory* and Buber's dialogical personalism complement each other. Even as Buber proposes *I-Thou* relations as the highest form of relational encounter, Baumeister & Leary posit that people have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships (Cox & Leary, 2008). Buber's theory supports why such relationships are crucial to man.

These key concepts of the theoretical framework are connected to the research objectives and research questions. These concepts are also connected to the research design and the data collection instruments will focus on these concepts.



Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the research methodology highlighting how it best fit as a way to allow young professionals to express their perceptions on the need for friendship. It also brings out how the methodology allowed the researcher to convey the meaning that the respondent held from their own personal experiences. It discusses the research design, population and sampling methods used, the data collection procedure and data explication. Ethical considerations are also discussed.

3.2 Research design

A research methodology is the way in which research is done scientifically, emphasizing the steps that are considered in the research process to get insight or identify a solution to a problem, along with the logic behind those steps (Kothari, 2004). The description below highlights how the methodology was best suited to the topic of study especially in obtaining the right information from Finance young professionals living alone and working from home and how this information was analysed to reach a conclusion for a larger population.

The study employed a qualitative study to promote greater understanding of not just the way things are, but also why they are the way they are (Amin, Harrison & Weinstein, 2006). A phenomenological research methodology was utilised.

Phenomenology has been documented as a philosophical tradition and a qualitative research paradigm (Groenewald, 2004).

3.2.1 *Phenomenology as a methodology*

Edmund Husserl is the putative founder of phenomenological philosophy, and his work directly informs 'descriptive' phenomenological methodologies, which seek to describe the essence of experiences (Gill, 2020). The term 'phenomenology' refers to the study of phenomena, where a phenomenon is anything that appears to someone in their conscious experience (Moran, 2000) and addresses a variety of topical research questions that consider subjective experiences and meanings (Gill, 2020). This study aimed at determining the

perceptions young professionals held of friendships during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this way, their perception of friendships during the pandemic were understood by analysing the description of their subjective experiences with their friends during the pandemic.

Phenomenology concerns itself with the study of consciousness as it wants to clarify concepts in terms of the original intuitions in which they are experienced in a living way (Moran, 2013). It seeks to explore, examine and understand experiences through the subjective eye of the participants or "experiencers" rather than providing causal explanations of such experiences. Phenomenology assumes that human beings seek meaning from their experiences and that their accounts convey meaning. This also means staying close to the research participants' language to provide a faithful account that clearly connects the researcher's interpretations to the participants' experiences (Gill, 2020).

The study utilized homogeneous and purposive samples. The participants recruited offered a meaningful perspective on the phenomenon of interest and shared the lived experience of living alone and working from home. As is the case with phenomenological methodologies, thematic analysis was used to unravel the experiences under study (Gill, 2020).

The analysis carried out in a phenomenological study can be described as follows: First, a researcher describes the phenomena experienced by a participant, as revealed in interviews. Second, the researcher identifies the common themes that emerge across the descriptions. Third, the researcher reflects on these themes and establishes the object as perceived or the 'what' of participants' conscious experience and the meaning this holds for the participant or 'how' this is experienced. It is their relationship which represents "the individual's perception of the reality of the phenomena under investigation". Fourth, the researcher utilises intuition and reflection, to abstract the essences or 'why' individuals experience a phenomenon in the way they do.

3.3 Population

The population (or universe or target population) is the entire set of individuals to which findings of the study are to be extrapolated (Levy & Lemeshow, 2008).

Sampling is the process of choosing a part of the population to represent the whole in order for the researcher to make a comprehensive analysis of the whole population. The targeted population comprises of Nairobi, Finance young professionals who live alone and are working from home at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The population of Nairobi is 4.4M (Nairobi City Council, 2019). Young professionals are taken to be the population of young adults within the age range of 25-39. This category accounts for 28% of Nairobi's population (Nairobi City Council, 2019). There was no data segmenting Nairobi inhabitants by profession type and by age group as well as by the classification of living situation or work-location.

3.4 Sampling technique and sample size

Qualitative analysis typically requires a smaller sample size than quantitative analysis but should be large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions until saturation is achieved. Saturation occurs when adding more participants to the study does not result in additional perspectives or information. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend the concept of saturation for achieving an appropriate sample size in qualitative studies. Creswell (1998) recommends 5 to 25 for phenomenological studies, and Morse (1994) suggests at least 6. There are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research. Qualitative sample size may best be determined by the time allotted, resources available, and study objectives (Patton, 1990).

Purposive sampling will be used in this study. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, selected purposefully (Patton, 1990). The researcher selects individuals for the study based on their particular knowledge or experience of a phenomenon for the purpose of sharing that knowledge (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). This is an appropriate method to select the participants for a study using a descriptive phenomenological approach because the aim is to understand

and describe a particular phenomenon from the perspective of those who have experienced it.

Incorporating a maximum variation sampling method, a sample size of 12 respondents will be used. This strategy for purposeful sampling aims at capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation (Patton, 1990). As the study is investigating young professionals with different work experience levels, 3 Finance experience levels will be used taking 3 samples in each category: early career finance professionals (0-3 years of working), associate finance professionals (4-6 years of working) and mid-senior finance professionals (7-15 years of working). To get a deeper sense of young professionals' experiences, a 4th category of Finance young professionals who are not working during the pandemic will also be selected. This group relates to those who lost their jobs during or before the pandemic.

The Finance young professionals were selected using a referral system based on the criteria of having lived alone and worked from home during the time period of March 2020 to March 2021, as well as having been between the ages of 25-39 during the same timeframe. Five women and seven men were selected as stipulated below:

Table 3.4.1 Sample of research respondents selected by gender and work experience level

Index	Respondent Code	Gender	Work category
1.	F_AS1	F	Associate level
2.	F_EC1	F	Early-career level
3.	F_EC2	F	Early-career level
4.	F_AS3	F	Associate level
5.	F_MC5	F	Mid-career level
6.	M_MC1	M	Mid-career level
7.	M_AS2	M	Associate level
8.	M_MC2	M	Mid-career level
9.	M_MC3	M	Mid-career level
10.	M_MC4	M	Mid-career level
11.	M_U1	M	Unemployed
12.	M_U2	M	Unemployed

3.5 Data collection tools

The data collection method utilized in this study was in-depth interviews. The data collection involved an informal guided interview with short open-ended questions that avoided ambiguity and saved on time. The face to face or virtual nature of the interview allowed for clarification of thoughts and access to non-verbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007).

3.6 Data explication

Data explication - investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon, while keeping the context of the whole, is preferred to data analysis which involves breaking into parts what is whole. Since phenomenology is concerned with the essence of an experience from the perspective of the participant, keeping the whole intact should not be easily dismissed as trivial to the process (Groenewald, 2004). Hycner's explication process happens as follows:

3.6.1 *Bracketing*

Bracketing entails having the participants describe their lived experience in a language that is as free as possible from the constructs of society. It also means that the researcher must bracket their own preconceptions and enter into the individual's lifeworld. The informal nature of the interview helps the researcher to obtain as much information such as the setting of the person that assists in the study (Groenewald, 2004). The researcher will have to put aside personal views or preconceptions on the importance of friendship and their own assessment of what this impact may be based on their own personal experience.

3.6.2 *Delineating units of meaning*

This involves extracting statements that are seen to illuminate the research phenomenon while bracketing one's own presuppositions in order to avoid inappropriate subjective judgements. The researcher considers the literal content, the number (the significance) of times a meaning was mentioned and also how (non-verbal or para-linguistic cues) it was stated. The actual meaning

of two seemingly similar units of meaning might be different in terms of weight or chronology of events (Groenewald, 2004).

3.6.3 *Clustering of units of meaning to form themes*

This stage involves rigorously examining the list of units of meaning in order to elicit the essence of meaning of units within the holistic context. Clusters of themes are typically formed by grouping units of meaning together and the researcher identifies significant topics, also called *units of significance*. Often there is overlap in the clusters, which can be expected, considering the nature of human phenomena (Groenewald, 2004).

3.6.4 *Summarizing each interview*

The next step entailed summarizing each interview in the researcher's own words as understood from the experiences expressed by the young professionals. When the above steps are completed, the researcher then goes back to the interview notes and transcriptions and writes up a summary of each interview incorporating the themes that have been explicated from the data. This summary gives a sense of the whole as well as providing the context for the emergence of the themes. Ellenberger described phenomenological analysis as the method that aims at the investigator reconstructing the inner world of experience of the subject (Groenewald, 2004). An example of clusters is shown below:

Table 3.6.4.1 Clustering in phenomenological studies

Clustering units of meaning	Specific theme (summary)
Social ties, companionship	Friendship
Joy, laughter, cheerfulness	Happiness

3.6.5 *Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary*

The final stage in the explication of data involves extracting general and unique themes from the individual summaries and making a meaningful whole. The researcher looks for the themes common to most or all of the interviews as well as the individual variations. Common themes should not be clustered if significant differences exist as minority voices are important counterpoints to bring out regarding the phenomenon researched. A composite is then written which transforms participants' everyday experiences into expressions appropriate to the scientific discourse supporting the research study (Groenewald, 2004).

3.7 Ethical considerations

Phenomenological approach to inquiry also requires attention to ethical considerations. The respondents in the study will be above the age of consent as the target is young professionals. To ensure confidentiality, all the data gathered for this study will be protected and only accessible by the researcher while being stored in encrypted files in the researcher's personal computer and password protected hard drive. The participants will also be assigned numbers or aliases in order to further protect their anonymity. The respondent will be provided with information regarding the study and their voluntary and informed ethical consent will be noted. The researcher will also inform the interviewees of the purpose of the interview and assure them of the confidentiality of the information they provide. Interviewees will be free only to answer questions they are comfortable with.

Approval for the study was issued by Strathmore University institutional Ethics Review Board under the reference *SU-IERC1362/22* and as well as the National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation (NACOSTI) under the license *NACOSTI/P/22/18871*.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Research Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an explication of data which means that the findings of the research are presented using a phenomenological approach. A brief overview of the research process is provided along with relevant information regarding the participants. The findings are then presented according to the research objectives.

The general objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions young professionals hold on the need for friendships during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of these perceptions. The key questions that guided the interview were as follows:

- i. What are the perceptions young professionals hold on the need for friendships during the global Covid-19 pandemic in Nairobi City in light of Baumeister & Leary's belongingness theory?
- ii. How may Buber's "I-Thou"- "I-It" relationships theory be used to analyze young professionals' perceptions of friendship during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nairobi?

4.2 Young professionals' perceptions on the need for friendships

The researcher inquired from the young professionals about the necessity of friendships. In addition to this, the researcher determined how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the perceptions they had previously held and what their personal experience and perception of friendship was during the pandemic. To get a better sense of young professionals' perceptions of friendships, the researcher sought to determine from them whether:

- a) Friendships were a necessary aspect of life
- b) The level of engagement one had previously had with their friends had been impacted by the pandemic and working from home

- c) Factors one felt were important for friendships had shifted during the pandemic
- d) One now defined friendship differently in light of the pandemic

Below is a summary of the researcher's findings.

4.2.1 Unemployed during the pandemic

The young professionals in this group affirmed that friendships were necessary in life. One interviewee highlighted the caveat was that when one needed friends the most, such as in trials, one would know for sure who one's true friends were and those were the friends one truly needed. Another interviewee mentioned that he had come across so many lonely people, making it very clear that friends were indeed necessary for and in life. Another interviewee mentioned being aware that men needed to realize their need for friends more as the participant held the view that men struggled more with loneliness, himself included.

Due to the change in circumstance of being unemployed, the interviewees felt that at the beginning of the pandemic, it was harder to spend time with one's supposed friends or maintain a social life due to the lack of income and the high cost of living in Nairobi proving itself a challenge. The interviewees also felt that some people now looked at their situation as a burden and this made interactions socially even more difficult, making it a personal struggle as well. What became clear however, was that the professionals in this bucket mentioned they were able to determine who their true friends really were through the challenge of unemployment, moving from a large volume of acquaintances to a few good friends. The participants mentioned that these filters were marked by aspects such as making intentional time to catch up with one's friends and also receiving both financial and non-financial support during their time of unemployment were some ways they were able to determine their true friends. One participant mentioned having some of his friends pay his rent a couple of times during the time he was out of work. It

was also interesting to note that all the interviewees in this stage, being men, also mentioned that they broke off their romantic relationship with their girlfriends post the loss of their jobs during the pandemic which they categorized as part of the impact of understanding for themselves who their true friends were and what was important to them at this point in their lives. Despite this the participants also mentioned being able to go deeper in the friendships they had as the number of friends reduced and getting to know their friends and their families much better. This took the form of sharing their fears and concerns but also having difficult discussions about mental health which had previously not been topics they had shared as friends. Some challenges were also experienced in terms of social activities as the pandemic curtailed the meeting up in public spaces and some pass times were stripped off such as watching football matches together which one of the interviewees realized was so much better done with one's acquaintances despite them not being friends and another example was the lack of frequent cookouts at home with a large group of friends due to the physical restrictions of the pandemic.

One unique situation that was encountered was one participant mentioned that due to his underlying health issues, the social restrictions though limiting socially, were also necessary given his health risks during the pandemic. Choices such as having to turn down social activities with friends due to exposure to the virus in such settings and living with the long-term paranoia of being around crowds made his social struggle even worse. In spite of this, the interviewee did mention that he still felt the best set up to form friendships included physical meetups and so limited his social spheres to hosting people at home with no more than 3 friends at a time and doubled down on scheduling regular online meetups and phone calls with his now smaller crowd of friends.

In looking at what factors had changed in establishing friendships or determining who one's friends were, one of the interviewees mentioned a Swahili saying that states "when you spend time with them (people) you will

truly know them" (*kaa nao uwajue*). The respondent illustrated this in light of realizing that knowing people primarily at a surface level and having friends were two very different things. The interviewees here mentioned that they were more aware of what their friends did vis a vis what they said, the former being the more important especially when one lacked work and needed more support than normal. They mentioned that they saw friendship more in a support framework because they felt it would be absurd to ask help from strangers when one had "apparent friends". In aspects regarding physical distance with friends, it was mentioned that distance wasn't a limiting factor for friendship in some cases especially where the friendship was deep. One participant mentioned that their friend lived in Dubai but because they had been friends since childhood, they spoke often despite the physical distance and that was good enough for the friendship to survive that long even in the pandemic. The interviewees mentioned that the quality of their friendships became more apparent during the pandemic relative to having a large quantity of friends, looping in a Swahili saying that one could have many friends during their lifetime and it would be known that one had few friends on the day of their funeral. The participants mentioned having a greater appreciation for being more present to their friends relative to doing things together as one could be linked by activity but not really have the actual knowledge of the type of person or concerns one's friend actually had. The participants also mentioned a preference for meeting their friends at home as it was both convenient and cost effective and felt that it allowed people to be themselves but also gave cues as to how a person was doing such as if they were able to take care of their personal space or even material aspects such as their ability to pay their utilities which were a challenge especially when one is facing financial challenges.

Reflecting on the impact of the pandemic on their perceptions of friendships, the young professionals here mentioned that they now included their friends' ability to sacrifice for them as something important as well as their ability to sacrifice for their own friends in their time of need. Despite this, one of the

interviewees did mention that friendship was not just about giving and taking but now also understood it as having more value alignment such as understanding, respect, communication, trust, reliance and the ability to lack shame and judgements when dealing with one's friends. Another participant also made it clear that there were friends whom he had no benefit materially, but just appreciated the friends as they were without a give or take idea. It also became more apparent because of the pandemic that friendship also meant being genuinely involved in the lives of one's friends and that it was ok that these aspects had to be intentional versus spontaneous as had been previously perceived. One person mentioned how they had known some friends for about 10 years but only got to know them truly during the pandemic period with all the changes in circumstances and the discussions triggered by these changes.

From a phenomenological review of the interviews in this category, the researcher was able to cluster units of meaning and determine specific themes. These units of meaning were obtained from statements from the interviewees that were seen to illuminate the researched phenomenon and had the quality of recurring statements or were significant to the respondents. The clustered units of meaning and themes in this category were as follows:

Table 4.2.1.1 General themes from the interviews of unemployed young professionals

Clustering units of meaning	Specific theme
Trial, burden, fears, concerns	Difficulties
Loneliness, social struggle, mental health, self-care	Well-being
Lack of income, high cost of living, financial challenges, cost effectiveness	Financial stress
Intentional time, scheduling regular catchups	Quality time

Support, sacrifice, genuine involvement	Support
Break-ups	Romantic relationships
Difficult discussions	Vulnerability
Health risks	Health
Long term paranoia	Paranoia
Physical meetups, hosting, meeting at home	Hospitability
Truly knowing people, Apparent friends, childhood friendships, being present	Deep friendships
Doing vs saying	Commitment
Convenience	Convenience

4.2.2 *Early career professionals*

Young professionals in this category also affirmed the necessity of friendships. In describing its necessity, they used terms such as friendship being a social capital; friendship as a consequence of being social in nature, and a crucial aspect of life during the low and high moments but also in the enjoyment of life, likening it to a piece of a complete puzzle.

In relating to the changes caused by the pandemic to their friendships, there was a similar thread amongst the participants of the interview. They felt that there was a slight but impactful change in their friendships, attributable to having few but close and intimate friends. One change they experienced was they became more intentional about meeting up and also realized the downside of certain habits they had gotten used to such as spending a lot of time on their phones when they met up versus actual conversations. There was also the shift from more sporadic to planned meetups especially with the benefit of working from home and having a more flexible schedule than before the pandemic where they were required to go into the office. The downside mentioned by one participant

was limited interactions with what was termed as “work friends” and also limited physical interaction due to the risk of contagion with “non-work” friends. Though there was a split in how the engagement looked like for the participants, with half of them maintaining their engagement with their friends through online meetups and phone calls and seeing more value in these avenues than before, to the other half continuing to meet physically in home locations and outdoor setups. Overall, the participants concluded that their biggest change was a mindset shift from taking their friends for granted to realizing what a gift friendship was.

In looking at what factors had changed in establishing friendships or determining who one’s friends were, participants mentioned that during the pandemic they valued good quality friends over a large quantity of friends. In this regard, the participants mentioned the idea of looking at how they built each other up as friends and the values and beliefs one’s friends held. There was however a contrast in the participants’ views with one participant mentioning that having a good quantity of friends was beneficial especially when one needed financial support. Another participant mentioned that before the pandemic having many friends and being unable to speak about her problems to them made her mind shift to a preference for fewer friends whom one could be very honest with about personal challenges. Participants also mentioned they would choose presence over doing activities with their friends as with their inner circle they felt there was more value to this as it allowed one to get to know one’s friends better relative to doing activities which was more the default for acquaintances one didn’t really know that well but wanted to still spend time with. One participant mentioned that she was struck by this question after one of her fathers’ friends committed suicide during the pandemic and her own father realizing that he was not aware of the challenges and worries his deceased friend had throughout their friendship. This caused her to lean more towards presence and the idea of really creating an environment where one’s problems could be shared, and one could get support. In relation to physical and/or non-physical availability in relating to one’s friends, participants chose both options as

applicable preferences, relating this more to availability regardless of it being physical and non-physical especially because both participants had close friends that were not located in Nairobi city and had been away for a good number of years yet were still good friends. One participant mentioned that non-physical availability also gave her the space to recharge as due to her introverted personality she appreciated the allowance distance gave her to be able to achieve this. On location of meetups, there was a disparity in preference. One participant mentioned that working from home had led her to now have a preference for non-residential locations for meeting her friends in order to get away from being in the house. She however noted that before the pandemic she preferred home meetups especially in a bid to avoid large crowds of people. The other participants had a preference for meeting at home due to the environment it created of building more intimacy than meeting up in public spaces.

When determining what personal considerations they incorporated in light of the pandemic when assessing their friendships, the participants mentioned now having a keener sense for virtues and values such as kindness, empathy, diligence and humility, inspiring people. They also noted being ok with having different friends for different purposes such as people to go to when one needed to laugh, others to dream with and others as a source of encouragement. One participant mentioned that the main criteria she was now conscious of during the pandemic was the mutual choice to be friends versus a one-way interaction as intentionality in friendship was now more important.

In defining friendship at this stage of their life, the participants reflected on the fact that friendship was about choosing each other and realizing that friendship was a crucial aspect of a wholistic life especially when it impacted aspects such as mental health. Participants mentioned that they saw friendship before as a tool to achieve an end but now reflected on it more as so much more than that and that intentionality especially with the pandemic, was the secret key to developing good friendships.

The clustered units of meaning and themes in this category were as follows:

Table 4.2.2.1 General theme from interviews of early career young professionals

Clustering units of meaning	Specific theme
Social capital, part of a complete puzzle	Integrity of friendship
Low and high moments	Cycles of life
Intentional meetups, intentional friendships, planned meetups	Quality time
Few but close friends, intimate friends, work friends, non-work friends, taking friends for granted, gift of friendship, building each other up, building intimacy, Spending too much time on phone, actual conversations, inner circle	Quality friendships / Intentionality
Flexible schedule	Flexibility
Values and beliefs	Values
Outdoors, Get away from the house	Alternative meeting spaces
Financial support	Financial support
Problems, personal challenges, worries	Challenges
Suicide, mental health, wholistic life	Well-being
Space for sharing, support	Support
Recharge, introverted personality, avoid large crowds	Introversion
Kindness, empathy, diligence, humility, honesty	Virtues
Different friends for different purposes	Categorizing friendships

Mutual choice	Mutuality
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4.2.3 Associate level professionals

Young professionals in this category also found friendships to be a necessary aspect of life. The participants mentioned that friendships are a big part of who we are as people as no man is an island. They also alluded to friendship enriching life experiences, helping one decompress from the pressures of life, noting that they found it difficult to be loners given man's social nature.

In relating to the impact of the pandemic on their engagement with their friends, the interviewees mentioned that some of their biggest changes involved reconfiguring their friendships. This took the form of determining which friendships were circumstantial such as being in the same work or social locality as well as the change to meeting up more in friends' homes versus in other locations. Other participants mentioned that the biggest impact they experienced was moving from physical meetups to interacting over social platforms and trying to find ways to ward off loneliness such as spending more time with family as that was easier given the situation of actively avoiding people due to health risks.

In determining which factors were important when it came to friendships and in relation to the pandemic, the young professionals in this category took the quality of their friendships as more important than quantity both before and especially during the pandemic. One participant attributed it to her introverted personality while another participant of the study mentioned that his selection was based on the fact that he kept few but quality friends based on how much value they added to each other. This view was taken based on reliability of one's friends being more important than having many friends with whom one could mostly only have a few laughs. In relation to physical or non-physical availability, participants mentioned their preference before the pandemic for physical availability of their friends and like most people being forced to transition to the convenience of non-physical availability through online meetups during the peak of the pandemic. Both

mentioned however a transition back to accessing their friends more physically once the restrictions of movement eased up. When it came to presence versus doing activities with one's friends, participants here mentioned a preference for presence both before and during the pandemic. This selection was made on the basis that it was easy to do things with just anybody, but a true kind of presence was needed with friends. It was also noted that because of the pandemic and the limitation placed on doing things together, presence became even more important. In selection the preferred location for meeting up with one's friends, participants were divided on the option. Half the participants mentioned they preferred restaurants before the pandemic but had been forced by the circumstances of the pandemic to shift to residential environments which they found caused more work relative to the convenience of meeting outside the house. Participants with this view also mentioned the shift back to restaurants as a preferred meetup location once things eased up. The other half of the group chose a home location as the best option both before and even more during the pandemic. This they attributed to the privacy it provided, convenience, cost effectiveness and the feeling of not being rushed to leave before restaurants closed for the day as most people preferred to meet up in the evenings during the week, given work schedules.

Other considerations that the participants looked at when evaluating their friendships included values such as empathy, reliability, the ability to wholistically build each other up (emotionally, mentally, financially and spiritually) as well as aspects such as having friends that allowed them to be their authentic and true selves when around them.

In defining what friendship meant for them, the young professionals in this category used phrases such as a place of safety and authenticity, being appreciated for who one truly was. In reflecting on how this definition may have been impacted by the state of the pandemic, participants mentioned being keener that true friends did what they said, and this was clearly seen based on which friendships survived the tumultuous time of the pandemic when so many things became inconvenient and there was an additional struggle of keeping in touch.

The clustered units of meaning and themes in this category were as follows:

Table 4.2.3.1 General theme from interviews of associate level young professionals

Clustering units of meaning	Specific theme
Man's social nature	Social nature
Circumstantial friendships	Categorizing friendships
Loneliness	Well-being
Introversion	Personality
Value adding friends, enriching life	Quality friendships
Convenience, online meetups	Convenience
Empathy, reliability, building each other up, authenticity, safety	Virtues in friendship/Values
Doing vs saying	Commitment
Cost effectiveness	Financial stress
Privacy	Quality time

4.2.4 Mid senior level professionals

Professionals in this category used very affirming language on the necessity of friendships. They described it as “very important” and “absolutely necessary”. Some further described this necessity as a platform whereby one could be seen and could receive help and attention, establish confidants and a worthier investment in people as opposed to things.

The impact of the pandemic on the friendships of participants in this category was varying. All young professionals agreed that there was a reduction of in-person interactions. In another view, despite the lack of physical interactions, some professionals further described a change whereby they deepened some friendships even with a reduction in the number of friends one had and were able to get more support from their friends at this crucial time. This was attributable in their view, to intentional checking up on each other. Other professionals had a different perspective. For them, the reduced interaction led to a definitive reduction in the number of friends one had the consequence of which was the experience of what one called a “social imbalance”. Another professional also mentioned that as friends reduced, the experience of loneliness arose and increased. This was fueled by being home alone and thus not interacting physically with others in addition to working from home meaning one was cut off from colleagues for a good number of days as the nature of work done by these professionals was more solitary. One person mentioned that they could go for up to a week without seeing anyone. A few professionals also mentioned seeking some mental help to cope with the loneliness and also acknowledging that their alcohol consumption, watching too much TV and oversleeping significantly increased throughout the day as a coping mechanism. Other professionals mentioned that the downtime of activity later enabled them to process their thoughts and emotions much better enabling them to show up for their friends and trying to ward off loneliness by visiting family and friends that lived nearby. The impact of this “time to think” was realizing that some of the people they considered friends were really strangers or acquaintances as they were not able to discuss the difficulties they were going through during the pandemic with them and so decided to later seek out new friends and shift the way in which they interacted with friends, taking care of their own state of mind and emotional health, creating a better environment to talk about personal struggles and challenges with others.

While reflecting on the impact of the young professional’s discernment of what were key aspects to consider in a friendship, a third of the professionals noted that the quantity of one’s friends had held some importance before the pandemic as the focus was on having people to fill up activities with over the weekends. The rest of the

professionals mentioned that the quality of one's friends had been a key aspect they considered both before the pandemic and also for the time period of the pandemic despite the changes they experienced. When it came to aspects of activity over presence, there was a difference in views. Some professionals found that they valued doing things with their friends versus just being present to their friends both before and during the pandemic. One participant also felt that doing things together was more important before the pandemic than it was now and that the focus had shifted to being more present to one's friends during the pandemic and having more intimate conversations. Another participant felt that both were really blended. Their view was that presence was always important but that he felt that one could still do things with one's friends and also be present to them as there was no prize for participating in so many activities if he wasn't really getting to spend quality time with his friends. In looking at the importance of physical availability over non-physical availability such as with an online presence, there were also differing views among the participants. Some felt that now more than before physical availability was more critical for friendships while another professional felt that she now realized that she had taken availability for granted as before she was able to meet up with her friends at any time, be it 2AM or 2PM but the pandemic created some restrictions. However, now as restrictions eased, the option to have non-physical availability was a reasonable alternative given young professionals' busy schedules. One participant was also very clear about the realization that physical presence and availability was important and quite different from calling someone on the phone or taking a zoom call with them. The participant described this realization as "not the same as looking into someone's face and experiencing the other person which can't be found in a Zoom meeting or a WhatsApp chat". When it came to aspects of location of meeting up with friends and the impact of the pandemic on this choice, there was a split in preference. One part of the group acknowledged that before the pandemic they preferred to meet in a home setup and still held to this preference during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, the other part of the group had preferred to meet in a non-residential location such as a restaurant or bar but now shifted this preference over the time of the pandemic to be a blend of both, once the social scene was re-established. The specific change was opting to meet friends at home,

especially where small groups were involved. This was pointed out as the participants became more aware of the need to be present and develop more meaningful relationships as the alternative would have been to meet up in a club and go drinking without necessarily getting to know one another. As mentioned by some participants, the option for a restaurant kind of set up was reserved for large groups of friends. In describing this change, one of the participants mentioned that the pandemic had now made home a sort of “sacred space” for meeting up one’s close friends.

Other personal consideration that the mid senior young professionals felt had come to light in a way triggered by the pandemic was looking at the values one’s friends held, the ability to serve others wholeheartedly, people who valued financial freedom, being aware of what actually brought them (the individual and their friend) together, mutual honesty, vulnerability, intentionally checking in with each other, friends who respected boundaries and also people who were keen on developing themselves and others and viewed life as a work-in-progress.

In defining what friendship meant to the mid senior young professionals, terms used included it being a safe space, a judgement free zone, authenticity, accountability, and an opportunity to love others. Reflecting on what had changed in their definition of friendship during the pandemic, the professionals noted aspects such as being intentional about the people they considered and made time for as friends; realizing that it was easier to keep fewer friends who were unique and honest and also coming to the eye-opening realization that “meeting up” even if frequently and “checking in” were two very different things.

The clustered units of meaning and themes in this category were as follows:

Table 4.2.4.1 General theme from interviews of mid-career level young professionals

Clustering units of meaning	Specific theme
Confidants, intimate conversations	Deep friendships

Intentional check-ups, quality time	Intentionality
Social imbalance, loneliness, mental health, oversleeping, alcohol consumption, support, emotional health, life as a work in progress	Well-being
Solitary work	Solitary work
Time to think	Introspection
Strangers, developing meaningful relationships	Deep friendships
Challenges, difficulties, personal struggles	Difficulties
Busy schedules, intentional checking in	Intentionality
Home: a sacred space	Sacred spaces
Shared values, service, wholehearted, shared meaning, honesty, vulnerability, boundaries, self-development, being seen, investing in people	Virtues in friendship/Values
Financial freedom	Financial freedom
Confidants, intimate conversations	Deep friendships
Intentional check-ups, quality time	Intentionality
Social imbalance, loneliness, mental health, oversleeping, alcohol consumption, support, emotional health, life as a work in progress	Well-being

4.3 Summary of emerging themes

There was a unanimous agreement among all categories of young professionals on the necessity of friendships. It was notable that a stronger emphasis on its importance was issued as the number of working years increased.

The researcher found that some key impacts of the pandemic on friendships among young professionals included a reduction in the number of friends or maintaining the status quo of quantity one had with one's close friends. The reduction in friendships was attributable to the realization that some of the friendships were circumstantial e.g., the parties worked together and now faced a work-from-home situation, as well a shift in one's work circumstances as was the case with those who became unemployed during the pandemic. Young professionals also realized the need to intentionally make time to meet up with their friends or be available to grow their friendships. Another impact attributable to the pandemic was an increase in loneliness among young professionals and the uptake of daytime drinking and oversleeping among some effects. There was also a different shift among some professionals who did not report a reduction in the number of friends they had but rather going through a season of deepening the friendships they already had as the pandemic gave them the time and triggered more meaningful conversations that did their friendships much good.

When considering the impact of the pandemic on various factors that young professionals now viewed differently, most of the research participants agreed that they valued quality over quantity in their friendships vis a vis pre-pandemic time. The only basis given for valuing quantity over quality was when one needed financial support, which led quantity to be more of a priority. The dominant preference when young professionals had to select between taking part in activities versus being more present to their friends most professionals had a preference for presence over taking part in group activities. This selection was more popular based on the view that while taking part in group activities one could easily not end up spending quality time with one's friends. In this regard, presence and availability for open communication was more valued than a flurry of activities. However, there was also some views that where activities were being done with one's close friends one could also have many opportunities to be present to one's friends. In view of physical availability versus non-physical availability of one's friends, most professionals took a view of appreciating the blend of both during the pandemic as restrictions were eased up. There was also a clear view that physical availability was

even more appreciated because of the restrictions merited by the pandemic making such touch points more meaningful. As professionals with busy schedules, the ability to catch up over social and online platforms also came in as a middle ground to keeping in touch especially where friends were no longer close by or both parties had hectic schedules. When it came to location of meeting up with friends, there was a greater selection to meet one's friends at home. Some views for this included the convenience, the cost effectiveness, the ability to have more intimate conversations and also what was described as the sacredness of the home as a place for one's close friends. Despite this, there were some preferences for restaurants as a way to get out of the house especially as the participants worked from home and lived alone. In their final reflection on what young professionals felt had been the biggest shift for them in their friendships that they related to the pandemic, there was a unanimous agreement that the intentionality of making time for one's friends and the mutuality of choice to be and to keep being friends stood out the most.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher presented the data collected from the guided interview questions during the interviews. These findings were discussed further in chapter five. It concludes by merging the study results with the research questions to focus on findings and provide explanation as to how young professionals perceive friendships during the pandemic and the impact these perceptions have on them.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from the data collected from the guided interviews of young professionals in Nairobi. The researcher established how the perceptions young professionals held of friendship drawn from Baumeister & Leary's belongingness theory impact how they relate in view of Buber's "I/Thou" - "I/It" relationships theory.

5.2 Perceptions on the need for friendships in light of Baumeister & Leary's Belongingness Theory

Baumeister & Leary's belongingness theory posits that patterns of group behaviour and close relationships can be understood to serve the need to belong and is a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The theory is based off six tenets that will be useful in discussing the results of the guided interview with young professionals from Nairobi:

1. *Man has a basic desire to form social attachments and will do so readily even under seemingly adverse conditions*
2. *People resist losing long attachments and breaking social bonds even if there is no material or pragmatic reason to maintain the bond, even if maintaining it would be difficult*
3. *The need to belong shapes emotion and cognition. Forming or solidifying social attachments generally produces positive emotion, whereas real, imagined or potential threats to social bonds generate a variety of unpleasant emotional states*
4. *Deficits in belongingness leads to a variety of ill effects both physical and psychological*
5. *People seem to need frequent interactions to occur within a framework characteristic of being long-term, stable, caring and embedded with concern*
6. *People need a few close relationships and forming additional relationships beyond those few has less and less impact*

5.2.1. The basic desire to form social attachments even under adverse conditions

The belongingness theory advances that positive bonding will occur even in adverse circumstances and that the mere presence of others can be comforting. Threatening events on the other hand, stimulate the need to belong and people will tend to move towards a communal orientation when there is a chance to form a relationship (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.501).

The research findings reveal the uniformity regarding the need for friendships amongst all the different types of young professionals in Nairobi. Despite the circumstances of the pandemic, Baumeister and Leary's belongingness theory holds true even when health becomes a risk factor and there exists limitations to physical movement and accessibility of other persons as caused by the state of the pandemic. The evidence to this is shown in the feedback both in the perceived necessity of friendships among young professionals as well as the views shared demonstrating friendships getting deeper during the time of the pandemic relative to periods before the pandemic.

People tended to deepen the friendships that they considered valuable and supportive while also doing away with apparent friendships that were not value adding or mutually beneficial. The consideration of value-adding though a subjective criterion, is still a measure to consider as a key aspect of friendship. Both Aquinas as well the participants of the study brought out two crucial aspects regarding *mutuality and choice*, postulating them as key for *true* friendship to both exist and persist.

The research findings bring out the need even among young professionals who live alone and work from home to be communal. This specific category of persons are not only constrained by the circumstances and conditions of the pandemic from an external perspective of health risks but are also constrained through their personal choice to live alone and the additional choice (primarily imposed in earlier pandemic

periods) of having to work from home, creating conditions more adverse than would be for a contrary group, say a family or similarly, young professionals who live with others, be it friends or acquaintances or even relatives.

The overriding attribute of *intentionality* regarding making time for friends that pervaded the interviews goes to show that as Baumeister and Leary suggest, positive bonding does occur even in adverse circumstances and that this bonding is not merely spontaneous but planned with the intended effect of obtaining support from others, growing in friendship, and creating spaces to share one's "inner life" with others. Whether this can be called a survival instinct, though not part of this study, is something that can be inferred. The termination of relationships thought of as not leading to anything meaningful such as when young professionals realize that some relationships existed merely to pass time or to solely have a good time, or that people in one's inner group were actually very different from what they had expected once they got to know them more, do we see the inverse reaction of the need to belong. Above the tenet of the belongingness theory, people desire to belong in circles where the bond created is not only positive but is genuine and authentic i.e., goes beyond mere pleasure and is linked more to a subjective assessment of being able to share the deeper aspects of one's life be they positive or negative aspects that they face in life from financial stress to mental stress. It seems that without this subjective judgement social bonds will form but will not necessarily last or lead to what we can term as real friendship.

5.2.2. Resistance to losing long attachments

The tendency for human beings to respond with distress and protest to the end of a relationship is universal. While some relationships are limited in time by external factors such as graduation, new job, etc., in many cases people seem reluctant to dissolve even bad or destructive relationships. The fact that people resist breaking off an attachment that causes pain attests to how deeply rooted and powerful the need to belong is. The resistance appears to go well beyond rational considerations of practical or material advantage (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.502).

It was evident in all categories of young professionals that there was no lack of reference to having friends from one's long-term past whether it was having a close circle of friends that included friends that one had met in childhood, high school or college. There was a minority of professionals who noted that they had a good friends' base from work. Where friends from professional spheres were discussed, there seemed to be a categorization of "work" friends and "non-work" friends in a bid to bucketize this group as "outside" what was considered the "inner circle" of friends. However, where the friendship by circumstance was removed by deepening of relationships outside the work sphere, then the distinction as a "work friend" was dropped and one merely moved to the term of simply "friend".

Where mutual choice and the effort to make time for each other existed, there was growth and deepening of friendships. The reason why these friendships seem to last rather than to be lost even during a time of strain such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is that people resort to what I would refer to as their "default settings". Those who know them and understand them are easier to grow and bond with when adversity hits, than it would be to let go and form new attachments. With these friendships there is less effort to be understood and known and at such adverse times where there are many other external factors to consider, people will tend to default to what they know as "safe". This is also the reason why it becomes clear that apparent friends at this time of stress and strain are let go of in order to create more space for the development or maintenance of friendships that are valuable and meaningful.

Though this tenet on the resistance to the dissolution of bonds may seem contrary to the ending of relationships as brought out in the interviews with young professionals, a clear sense of when this happens supports the belongingness theory. Friendships in the study that were deemed to have ended or had been intentionally terminated had a similarity in thread. For the most part these were friendships where the party describing them had come to the conclusion and identification that there was no mutual benefit that existed. This took the form of realizing that one's friends were simply there to have a good time and nothing more, or that the friendships were circumstantial such as was the case with some work friends. The

shift in work locations from the office to one's abode acted as a trigger for apparent or circumstantial friendships to fizzle away. This evidence of dissolution of friendships requires some form of reflection on the party that conducts the termination. It means a realization of what true friendship means to the individual. This will usually involve some form of mutuality, well-wishing, communion and communication as Aquinas would put it. If some of these aspects were missing, such as effort from only one party to maintain the friendship, the discernment that a friend was not available during difficult times, a sense of loneliness rooted in being unknown to one's friends or a decline in the frequency of keeping in touch, a breaking point arose, and a long-term attachment becomes "at risk".

Vivek Murthy, a physician, and contributor to the study of loneliness as a public health concern and the healing power of connection, termed this type of loneliness as *intimate loneliness*. He further detailed intimate loneliness as one where people lacked connection with others who really know them well, people who can show up completely as themselves and people with whom one can be real with (McKay, 2021).

All these factors including intimate loneliness as brought out in the study, create grounds for either the evolution or final dissolution of relationships among friends. Though Baumeister and Leary do affirm that relationships persist even in the irrational degree of a lack of material or practical advantage, where I disagree and where the pandemic creates a different environment to view this principle is that people, being reflective in nature, stand to contradict the irrationality of certain bonds. Young professionals who both live alone and work from home can be said to be within a category of people who possibly spent more time being reflective about the kind of relationships they wanted to be in, and that would support their adverse circumstances. This being considered, it would only be prudent, for the sake of their own happiness, to let go of relationships that they had maintained before the pandemic that they now realized are not in line with their own goal of attaining happiness and a life well lived during the pandemic. Though young professionals may have been maintaining some friendships before the pandemic in what

Baumeister and Leary would consider to be lacking material or pragmatic reasons, the onset of the pandemic shifted this view, providing a period of discernment around the meaning and reality of friendship and the consequent action of letting go of those who did not meet the definition. Particular triggers such as loneliness that were prevalent in almost all the categories of professionals studied, also reveal the willingness to let go of relationships that do not further real friendship.

5.2.3. Belonging shapes emotion and cognition

People devote considerable cognitive processing to interpersonal relationships and interactions. Actual and potential bonds exert substantial effects on how people think while real, potential or imagined changes in one's belongingness status produces emotional responses. The development of shared emotions is one of the principal causes of the formation of small groups as the basic function of emotions is to regulate behaviour so as to form and maintain social bonds (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.506).

Baumeister and Leary posit that developing a sense of belongingness as happens within friendship, produces positive emotion while the lack of it advances negative emotion. In each category of interviews of young professionals there was a general attribution of positive terms when talking about one's friends to showcase the positivity surrounding the advancement or maintaining the status quo with one's friends during the pandemic. There was also the clear identification of negative terms when talking about the fall out of friends whether that was using terms such as lacking support from friends, realizing one's friends were actually strangers, the feeling of loneliness described in almost all categories of interviewees or even the deep loss and grief one interviewee mentioned when her father's close friend committed suicide bringing up questions of whether the two were actually friends or not and what real friendship truly meant.

The discussions around loneliness and the description of friendship as a *safe space* or a place where one can be genuinely or authentically known denotes emotions of

positivity and welcome, versus a desire of being looked at as an outcast. As Baumeister and Leary point out, being chosen and being considered a friend in the genuine sense not only allows one to feel seen and heard but also provides a space where people can share their worries, fears and concerns without the fear of judgement. This environment thus wards off loneliness which some professionals spoke of especially when they faced the lack of genuine friends beside them.

As posited in the belongingness theory, young professionals do devote time and energy to thinking about relationships such as friendships and how this impacts their day to day lives. To deny this would be to deny the wealth of information provided by the interviewees in this study. The effects of such dedicated time whether conscious or not, reveals that for professionals living alone and working from home, there is a greater desire and need to belong and it could possibly be said that this desire places young professionals of this category as more susceptible to dedicating more time to thinking about friendships, being more emotionally affected by the presence and flourishing of friendships as well as the negative effects of their lack of, or, of its dissolution.

This tenet also supports the evidence from the study showing that where there was a similarity in what friendship meant such as support, quality time, mutuality, authenticity, etc. or where there was a commonality of emotions experienced, it fostered the development and deepening of friendships while the inverse led to their deterioration. This is also linked to this category of professionals' preference of having few, quality friends who are easier to keep constant communication with, develop a deeper sense of intimacy required for deep and meaningful friendships as these professionals already spend much of their time in the framework of a solitary lifestyle.

5.2.4. The ill effects of a deficit in belongingness

Considerable research shows that people who do not have adequate supportive relationships experience greater stress than those who do. This is due to the fact that having other people available for support and assistance

enhances coping and provides a buffer against stress (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.508).

Some of the ill effects of a lack of friends that was pointed out in the interviews of young professionals was an increase in alcohol consumption and more so day-time drinking, over-sleeping when workloads were low and interactions with people were scarce and over consumption of media. The positive need to seek mental health assistance in order to avoid sinking into a depression and ward off the effects of loneliness were also some of the effects driven by a lack of friends or a lack of quality and meaningful friendships. These ill effects though harmful to both the body and the psychological state of the interviewees, were subdued with time. It is however interesting to consider what population of professionals omitted in this study still face this challenge. The professionals who were vulnerable enough to speak of these struggles mentioned seeking professional help as well as making a considerable effort to reconnect with both friends and family.

Man's social nature and his need to belong are affirmed with the devastating effects no matter how minimal, of the rapture of relationships or a lack of an authentic group of friends. Man needs others in order to be more productive in society and more so to be more authentically human. If this were not so, he would not sink into such ill effects very easily when these social structures were disrupted externally such as with the pandemic or even internally, upon realizing that one's cohort of friends were really strangers that one spent and passed time with.

One defining phrase that came up in the interviews of the young professionals who faced a majority of the ill effects described above, was the clarity around the difference between "checking in" and "meeting up"; being seen, heard and known being equated to checking in while meeting up was seen merely as the superficial spending of time together but nothing meaningful coming out of the experience whether this was shared emotions or a better awareness of each other. Though possibly considered synonyms, the contrast in meaning to the participant of the

study, are worlds apart, and the difference between them is demonstrated in human behaviour that grasps at things that only satisfy in the short term.

The realization that friendship is in a sense irreplaceable with other things is an important aspect to identify. The ill effects of a lack of friends demonstrates how much friendships should be valued and protected but also its lack can lead to reaching out for other things in a bid to override the strong desire and the need to belong as Baumeister and Leary would put it. Aquinas addresses this in the same manner when he speaks of latching onto apparent good only to realize that there is a more satisfactory real good that one seeks when the failure of apparent goods to satisfy us is revealed.

5.2.5. The need for frequent interactions and a stable environment

In cases where people have relationships without frequent interactions the persons experience only partial, incomplete satisfaction of the need to belong and suffer over the lack of direct contact with the other person (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.513).

In their theory on belongingness, Baumeister and Leary posit that man has an innate need for frequent interactions in a stable environment. In their theory, this tenet of belongingness applies to parties with an already existing bond. The study revealed that there was a material time investment young professionals applied to deepening already established friendships and letting go of apparent friends where it was determined that no real friendship existed. When it comes to the need for a stable environment, though the pandemic is itself an “unstable” state to be deepening friendships, people were able to establish certain rhythms and routines that became normalized after the pandemic had been present for a good number of months. As the peak periods of the pandemic subsided, young professionals pointed out intentionality in meeting up as a fuel for igniting the deepening of already established friendships, functioning as a micro-environment stable enough to cope with the state of the pandemic.

In the belongingness theory, Baumeister and Leary posit that the lack of frequent interactions and the lack of a stable environment leads to a partial or incomplete satisfaction regarding the need to belong and also causes the parties to suffer (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This suffering comes in the form of the ill effects aforementioned such as resorting to disproportional alcohol consumption and other interim stopgaps in a bid to restore a balanced state of friendships i.e., a balance of both frequency and stability of environments. Loneliness is also an effect of a lack of stability as *relational loneliness* as Vivek Murthy puts it, arises where one lacks the friendships where one can seek out others to spend time with, a factor that became more prevalent during the pandemic (McKay, 2021). The need for frequency of interaction as a basis for a meaningful friendship is demonstrated by the intentionality taken up by young professionals to make time for each other and this intentionality also has the advantage of creating a stable environment despite external challenges such as the pandemic. Online meetup spaces such as zoom calls that gained popularity during the pandemic or simple things like a phone call though impersonal, were a good attempt at creating some form of stable environment among young professionals.

The study revealed that as the risks of the pandemic subsided, more and more people opted to meet in person versus take up a non-physical option unless it was a case of convenience that it afforded the parties due to distance or practical aspects such as having a busy work schedule. The special place that people reserved for their homes as an environment of privacy, intimacy was also another key observation from the study. Young professionals' homes were places where they could not be rushed or asked to leave relative to a restaurant or a bar, signifying the stable environment brought out in the belongingness theory. Home environments especially because of the pandemic seem to have been reserved for close friends. This could be because professionals working from home had now gotten comfortable in their own homes thus finding it easier to bring people into spaces where they already spent a lot of time in a bid to make it more humane with a more life-like spirit created with the presence of friends. The limitation of how many

people one can host in a residential location given that living spaces are small enough for a single young professional also conveniently tied in with people's preference to meet up with their inner circle of friends at home relative to a larger subset of acquaintances. Though the "home as a sacred space" as one respondent in the study put it, may not have been a sustainable meeting space during the pandemic in comparison to a phone call or a zoom catch-up, it seems that people were willing to suffer the wait of having to meet in person upon the invite or request of a friend and still found this avenue more relational and good for the friendship than the non-physical options that were available.

Qualifying frequency based on the quality of the meetup, and the desirability amongst friends to meet, was also important to gauge as it showed the value not so much of the environment in which it occurred, but more so the depth of the relationship and the quality of the interaction among friends. There is a need for frequent interactions in a stable environment, but the study also reveals that the primary aspect of consideration lies with the quality of the interaction amongst friends.

5.2.6. The need for few close relationships and its diminishing returns upon increase

Satiation refers to the diminished motivation that ensues when the need to belong is already well satisfied. Substitution refers to the replaceability of one social bond with another. What both satiation and substitution imply is that people need a certain quantity of belongingness, attachments and interactions and beyond that minimum should be subject to a pattern of diminishing returns (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.515).

Within the belongingness theory, its proponents note that it is a world of difference to possess two friends than to have none at all. However, they also point out that having six friends and having eight friends may have very little consequence on the person's health and happiness. The theory also suggests that if one does end up

losing friends as happened with a sub-set of the young professional interviewees, people tend to recover best if they form a new relationship. Within this tenet, the two theorists also advance that people without close friends will engage in a variety of activities to find friends, but people with already close friends will be much less active at seeking additional relationships of the same kind, what is termed as the *satiation hypothesis*.

Most young professionals pointed out that they preferred to assess their friendships based on their quality rather than the quantity of friends they had. For some this came to light because of challenges presented by the pandemic and having a greater need to have a space to tackle their own personal struggles with people they trusted and felt they could be authentic and vulnerable with. This also came in light of needing a better support system with the challenges this category of professionals dealt with given their circumstance of living alone as well as working from home. The few instances where young professionals mentioned a need for a large quantity of friends was more based on a utilitarian aspect of getting financial support where it made sense to tap into a large group of friends with the clarification that within this circle of friends, there existed the fundamental inner circle of few friends then “everybody else”.

In addition to satiation, Baumeister and Leary speak of substitution: replacing one social bond with another. The study was able to close in on this aspect especially where respondents mentioned that they either ended close relationships that did not meet their expectations in times of need both materially or emotionally or came to the realization that the people they referred to as friends were not really so. Where there was a move from a large quantity of friends to a small quantity, satiation was evident. The fewer friends one had, or the smaller the “quality” inner circle one had, the easier it was to conclude that the quality of one’s friends was a key consideration both before and during the pandemic. Those with a subjective assessment of quality friends demonstrated no need to expand their friends’ base as they were satisfied with what they already had with their few friends. In the case of those who moved from having a large quantity of friends as a key consideration prior to the pandemic

and later moving to considering the quality of one's friends during the pandemic, it was observable that the shift was based on the realization that what they expected of their friends could be achieved by a few of them or the realization that it could be achieved by none of the people they considered to be friends. This then led to substituting apparent friends with other people either by reconnecting with old friends or making new friends as well as the interim struggle of replacing a social bond with an alternate plug such as alcohol, oversleeping or watching too much TV or consuming too much of social media. Based on this, it was also possible to deduce that one of the reasons young professionals seemed to amass a large quantity of friends before the pandemic, was the subtle awareness that one was still searching for that small subset of deep and meaningful friendships. When one was able to obtain this kind of friendship, the relationships that did not satisfy these criteria become invalid, leaving one with their true inner circle of friends. An alternative reaction as well was the subtle identification of friends by category such as friends for having a good time only, friends for such and such an activity and another much deeper category of friends whom one shares more personal and deeper aspects of themselves with or what can be termed as one's "inner circle" of friends.

5.3 Summary of key ideas from Baumeister and Leary's Belongingness theory and Buber's Relationships theory

Buber's dialogical personalism theory posits that human beings are constituted in encounter with another (McInroy, 2011) while Baumeister and Leary through the belongingness theory echo a similar idea in that man has a fundamental, pervasive need to maintain some form of interpersonal relationships with other humans (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Young professionals who lived alone and worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, from the standpoint of their solitary work and residential environment, were more at risk of having frequent *I-It* relations. This was noted from the experiences especially of those who noted struggles with mental health, overconsumption of social media and consumption of alcohol during working hours of the day.

The study also revealed that where young professionals were not able to encounter friends in an authentic and genuine manner, the friendship fizzled away. This was evident where respondents noted that friends did not show up in one's time of need, where there was a lack of authenticity as well as a lack of mutuality in choosing one another or allocating time to spend with one's friends, or in actively supporting one's friend in their time of need, key words and themes extracted from the in-depth interviews across work experience levels.

The feedback loop regarding mutuality and reciprocity is at the heart of sustaining friendships and is the fuel for deepening and developing meaningful friendships. Aristotle laid this down well when he noted that friendship is indispensable for life among animate creatures specifically because of the reciprocity and love in the active versus passive sense that is required amongst the parties. The deepening of friendship humanizes the parties involved while the deterioration of friendship has negative effects on the persons involved as demonstrated in the belongingness theory on the ill effects of a lack of relationships. The overarching theme around deepening friendships coupled with the theme of mutuality and intentionality tied to well-being as brought out by the young professionals is evidence of Baumeister & Leary's belongingness theory on forming social attachments even in adverse circumstances as well as Buber's relation theory regarding I-Thou encounters.

It is thus clear that for *I-Thou* relationships to exist, friends have to be intentional about actively seeking the good of their friends in whichever way that may look for them, over and above seeking them for the purpose of *pleasure* such as having a good time or *utility* such as financial support, though these are in themselves desirable things that make a friendship flourish and sometimes even basic for living well. In the study, the pull towards *I-Thou* relations took the form of young professional's preference for the presence of their friends, having a small quantity of friends, and the intentionality in making time for one's friends. This minimized circle of friends as well as a higher evaluation of friendship above material needs evokes a true attribution of Buber's *I-Thou* relationships among Nairobi's young professionals.

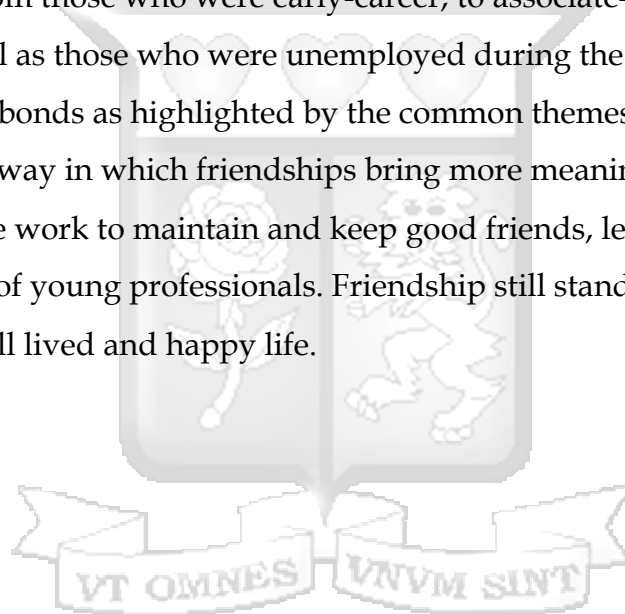
From Buber's theory we can thus conclude that young professionals do desire to form social attachments. They appreciate the need for friendships, they are convinced of the benefits to their own lives and view them as enriching to both their lives and the lives of their friends. Where these authentic relationships are lacking, young professionals tend to experience loneliness, the impact of a lack of encounter which is restored both by obtaining the right mental help and/or reinstating some form of relational, intimate and communal life with others be it re-establishing connection with friends or family.

Buber's "*I-It relations*" could be attributed to the uptake of excessive drinking, a disproportionate consumption of media such as TV and social media and oversleeping among young professionals who were struggling to maintain some form of relational environment during the pandemic. This goes to show that people do not necessarily gravitate towards *I-It* relationships but rather because of the lack of *I-Thou* relationships, substitute human relations with encounters of using and experiencing objects as Buber would put it. In the presence of *I-Thou* relationships, there is a substitution of one set of people for another while in *I-It* relationships, the misjudgment for an apparent good occurs when one substitutes the lack of friends not for other people to relate and establish some form of relationality until it blossoms into a friendship with time, but instead substitutes the bond lost with a non-reciprocating "quick-fix" relationship with experiences that cannot match the fulfillment obtained from friendship.

Man was not made for *I-It* relationships but for *I-Thou* encounters. One of the ways we can determine what is most important to people is to look at what they are willing to sacrifice in order to obtain a good. One key indication of this from the study is that young professionals living alone and working from home still met up with their friends during the pandemic when questioned about their preference for physical availability over non-physical availability. Even the one participant who had a high-risk health status acknowledged putting a caveat of meeting no more than 3 friends in his house. This preference reveals that young professionals are willing to take on disparate amounts of risk in order to protect and grow the bonds

they have established with their friends. That risk is also included in the preference to take on online meetups for the sake of sustained connection during the pandemic despite the non-desirability of such platforms as pointed out regarding one's close friends. This high-risk tolerance when it comes to friendships shows that *I-Thou* relationships are important to young professionals even during adverse circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Young professionals who live alone and work from home desire to form and maintain social attachments such as friendships even in adverse social and societal circumstances. This was evident from the experiences across the diverse work experience levels from those who were early-career, to associate-level, mid-career professionals as well as those who were unemployed during the time frame of the study. These social bonds as highlighted by the common themes extracted from the research, reveal the way in which friendships bring more meaning to the lives of those who put in the work to maintain and keep good friends, leading to happiness and the flourishing of young professionals. Friendship still stands as a desirable component for a well lived and happy life.



Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the key findings are summarized in terms of the initial research questions. Conclusions are drawn from the findings and recommendations are made based on these conclusions. Finally, suggestions for future research are presented.

6.2 Conclusion on core findings

The study addressed the following research questions:

- i. *What are the perceptions young professionals hold on the need for friendships during the global Covid-19 pandemic in Nairobi City in light of Baumeister & Leary's belongingness theory?*
- ii. *How may Buber's "I-Thou"-"I-It" relationships theory be used to analyze young professionals' perceptions of friendship during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nairobi?*

With regard to question one, the researcher found that young professionals have a strong need and desire to form and maintain friendships. The most critical aspect that they recognized as crucial during the time of the pandemic was *intentionality* to maintain the bonds of friendship.

The other key aspects that stood out in the study was young professional's shift to a smaller subset of friends relative to a large group before the pandemic or maintaining an already established small group of friends rather than expanding it. Both the principle of satiation and substitution apply.

The pandemic also caused a greater appreciation for physical presence of one's friends as this was an aspect formerly taken for granted. Most young professionals had a stronger preference for their friend's presence even when unable to do activities together as a limitation of the pandemic.

Finally, when it came to their close group of friends, the pandemic led young professionals to have a greater preference for meeting their friends at home than in non-residential locations despite going back to outdoor activities and non-residential meetup spaces, as the effects of the pandemic subsided.

Regarding question two, it was evident that young professionals conformed to Buber's relational theory regarding their view of friendships as a primary means of establishing *I-Thou* relationships as well as a desirable one. There was also evidence demonstrating the ill effects of *I-It* relationships on young professionals' lives.

Overall, during the pandemic, young professionals took on a large amount of risk in adverse circumstances to maintain *I-Thou* relationships and took up considerable effort to get out of *I-It* relationships supporting the belongingness theory and the earlier conclusion around the intentionality required in friendship. As Buber proposes in his dialogical personalism, man needs man in order to be fully alive. Young professionals, in their choices for happiness, place friendships as a necessity for life and more so, a well-lived and fully alive life.

6.3 Recommendations

Based on the conclusion regarding the intentionality required for friendships to grow, the researcher recommends that young professionals should make the time and effort to deepen their friendships as friendships that last and endure adverse circumstances, both external and internal, are a factor of effort, reciprocity, and mutuality amongst friends.

Regarding the number of friends one should keep, the researcher recommends a small group of friends as the key to creating meaningful friendships as well as deepening them with time. Though one should not put a limit on getting to know people, research reveals that in the formation of friends, one will have an inner circle and an outer circle, creating no barrier to having many friends, only that one should be aware that the deeper friendships will necessarily mean a fewer subsection of one's friends will fit into the inner circle given the investment of time and

knowledge one can expend in getting to know each friend. Having a large inner circle requires a much larger dedication of time and energy for young professionals in terms of competing priorities but this does not prevent having a large outer circle.

The study reveals that physical presence plays a big role in deepening friendships in a way that the substitution with online options is incomparable. Though a lack of physical presence is not a deterrent to friendship, it is the foundational aspect of friendships that continue to grow even when physical presence is lacking as evidenced by the respondents. It is thus recommendable to invest the time in meeting one's friends in person as it catalyzes the depth of the friendship. Tied in with location, another catalyst for deepening friendships is intentionally meeting in spaces and places that make it easier for deeper conversations and quality time amongst the friends. Though this came up as meeting up in a residential location, it can also be postulated that environments with less distractions and time restrictions as well as places that create an environment of comfort where possible, are ideal places for meeting up one's friends.

The researcher also recommends that friends value the gift of their friendship and invest the time and effort required to getting to know their friends well, deeply and truly. This helps ward off "*intimate loneliness*" which occurs when people lack connection with people who really know them well, as Vivek Murthy puts it in his book, *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* (McKay, 2021). Friendship is not merely having people we call friends but forming and sustaining relationships with people who we know well enough to connect with on the level of enduring friendships. The counterintuitive effect of this is friendship does us more good than it does the friends we have. Based on the principle of substitution and in view of the ill effects of *I-It* relationships, friendships allow us to keep to social bonds of friendships as opposed to other bonds such as overconsumption of social media, drugs as well as prevents and/or mitigates psychological effects such as loneliness, amongst other ills.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

The findings of the study offer a foundation from which to build on further studies on similar themes. Recommendations for further research include:

- i. Delineating the study to one gender i.e., male or female, to understand the perspectives of friendships within a narrower subset of the young professional population
- ii. Studying how one's family of origin impacts one's perspectives of friendship as a young professional
- iii. Exploring how different types and circles of friends mitigate different categories of loneliness that young professionals experience (intimate, relational and communal loneliness as stipulated by Vivek Murthy)
- iv. Investigating the impact of romantic relationships on friendships among young professionals
- v. Examining the influence and impact of therapy on social bonds such as friendship among young professionals
- vi. Determining the impact that the physical environment of meeting one's friends has on their friendship
- vii. Investigating the social factors that influence the geographical location of residence for single young professionals
- viii. Exploring the significance of having friends at work on young professional's work satisfaction
- ix. Examining the differences and similarities in "the way of friendship" among female and male sets of friends

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Appendix A: Guided Interview Questions

Interviewee Profile: Finance young professional; lives alone; primarily works from home during the pandemic; resides in Nairobi City; falls into one of the professional categories/classes [early career, associate, mid-senior professional or unemployed]

Introduction:

- Please tell me a bit about yourself outside what you do professionally and what do you do for work.
- What were your thoughts (if any) on (the importance of) friendship specifically before the Covid-19 pandemic?

Interview Questions:

- Do you feel that friendship is necessary in your life?
- Has your schedule and level of engagement with your friends changed during the time of the pandemic especially while working from home? How?
- Have you felt any changes if any in your relationships with your friends due to the pandemic? How and what is the biggest change?
- Do you feel that the pandemic has had any effect on how you look at friendships?
- What do you feel is more important when it comes to friendships and why? Is it quality or quantity; activity or presence; physical availability or non-physical availability; meeting at home or meeting in a non-residential location e.g. restaurant, bar, or any other aspect that you feel has become more important? Do you feel that any of these preferences have been impacted by the pandemic?

Concluding Questions (General or arising from the interview):

- Where have you met most of your friends to date?
- How would you define friendship now? What would your previous definition have lacked or included?
- From a social perspective what have been some benefits you have gained in your perception of friendship during the pandemic?

Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent Form

This form is located online < my.forms.app/form/629609f0bd94a175bb7b5487 >

A. ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research is being conducted by Lu (Lucy) Kimari under Strathmore University (School of Humanities & Social Sciences)

The research seeks to determine the impact of the pandemic on friendships among young professionals living alone as well as working from home.

The participants who take part in this study do so voluntarily and are free to decline responding to any questions put forward or withdraw from the research entirely.

B. TARGET AUDIENCE

Finance young professionals who lived and worked in Nairobi during the early periods of the COVID-19 pandemic.

C. RESEARCH APPROACH

You will be approached by Lu and requested to take part in the study. If you are satisfied that you fully understand the goals behind this study, you will be asked to sign the informed consent form (this form) and then taken through an interview process related to the study.

D. RISKS INVOLVED

There are no risks in taking part in this study. All the information you provide will be treated as confidential and will not be used in any way without your express permission.

E. BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The information will be used to better understand the importance and impact of friendships on different facets of young professional's lives such as the wholistic health, family and work.

F. CONFIDENTIALITY

To ensure confidentiality, all the research data gathered for this study will be protected and only accessible by the researcher while being stored it in encrypted

files. The participants will also be assigned numbers or aliases in order to further protect their anonymity.

G. FURTHER QUESTIONS?

You can contact me, Lu Kimari, by e-mail lucy.kimari@strathmore.edu, or by phone +254 11 55 99 275. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Charles Sotz by e-mail csotz@gmail.com.

If you would like to ask someone independent anything about this research, please contact:

The Secretary–Strathmore University Institutional Ethics Review Board

Address: P. O. BOX 59857, 00200, Nairobi,
Email: ethicsreview@strathmore.edu
Tel: +254 703 034 375

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT DETAILS:

1. Name?
2. Consent date?

CONFIRMATION OF CONSENT

I have had the study explained to me.

I have understood all that I have read and have had explained to me and had my questions answered satisfactorily.

I understand that I can change my mind at any stage.

3. Please select your consent (1 selection to be made)
 - a. *I give my consent to participate in this study*
 - b. *I do not give my consent to participate in this study*
4. Signature

Appendix C: NACOSTI License

			
National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation PERMIT APPLICATION DETAILS			
Personal Details			
Application Reference No	213306		
ID/Passport No	BK056845		
Orcid ID	? 0000-0002-8543-2261		
Application Date	Mon 04 Jul 2022		
Country	Kenya	Full Name	? Lucy KIMARI
PROJECT details			
Category Of The Research:	Research (Masters)		
NAME OF UNIVERSITY/ORGANIZATION:	Strathmore University - Letter from institution		
SOURCES OF FINANCE:	N/A		
AMOUNT:	0.00		
Title Of Research Project:	FRIENDSHIPS AMONG YOUNG PROFESSIONALS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC		
AREA OF RESEARCH:	Humanities and Social Sciences		
LOCATION OF FIELDWORK:	Nairobi		
ESTIMATED PERIOD OF THE PROJECT:	Mon 01/Mar 21 to Fri 30/Sep 22		
PUBLIC RECORDS TO BE ACCESSED:	N/A		
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO BE INTERVIEWED:	N/A		
MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO BE INTERVIEWED:	12		
Required Document		Attached File	
Letter from institution		✓ Provided	
Research Proposal		✓ Provided	
Certificate of Ethical Approval		✓ Provided	



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

Ref No: 213306



NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Date of Issue: 19/July/2022

RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Miss.. Lucy Wanjiru KIMARI of Strathmore University, has been licensed to conduct research in Nairobi on the topic: FRIENDSHIPS AMONG YOUNG PROFESSIONALS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC for the period ending : 19/July/2023.

License No: NACOSTI/P/22/18871

213306

Applicant Identification Number

Walter Wanjiru

Director General NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Verification QR Code



NOTE: This is a computer generated License. To verify the authenticity of this document, Scan the QR Code using QR scanner application.

THE SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION ACT, 2013

The Grant of Research Licenses is Guided by the Science, Technology and Innovation (Research Licensing) Regulations, 2014

CONDITIONS

1. The License is valid for the proposed research, location and specified period
2. The License any rights thereunder are non-transferable
3. The Licensee shall inform the relevant County Director of Education, County Commissioner and County Governor before commencement of the research
4. Excavation, filming and collection of specimens are subject to further necessary clearance from relevant Government Agencies
5. The License does not give authority to transfer research materials
6. NACOSTI may monitor and evaluate the licensed research project
7. The Licensee shall submit one hard copy and upload a soft copy of their final report (thesis) within one year of completion of the research
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registry@nacosti.go.ke Website:

www.nacosti.go.ke

Appendix D: Ethics Review Board Approval



28th June 2022

Ms Kimari, Lucy
lucy.kimari@strathmore.edu

Dear Ms Kimari,

RE: FRIENDSHIPS AMONG YOUNG PROFESSIONALS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

This is to inform you that SU-ISERC has reviewed and **approved** your above **SU Masters'** research proposal. Your application reference number is **SU-IERC1362/22**. The approval period is **28th June 2022 to 27th June 2023**.

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SU-ISERC.
- iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SU-ISERC within 48 hours of notification
- iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to SU-ISERC within 48 hours
- v. Clearance for export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.
- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to SU-ISERC.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke/> and obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,

for: **Dr Ben Ngoye,**
Secretary; SU-ISERC

Cc: Prof Fred Were,
Chairperson; SU-ISERC

STRATHMORE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL
ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE
(SU-IERC)

28-Jun-2022

Email: ethicsreview@strathmore.edu
P.O BOX 59857-00200
NAIROBI-KENYA

Appendix E: Similarity Checker



Document Information

Analyzed document	MAPE THESIS_51577_Final Submission_Friendship.pdf (D142402675)
Submitted	2022-07-25 14:46:00
Submitted by	
Submitter email	lucy.kimari@strathmore.edu
Similarity	5%
Analysis address	library.strath@analysis.arkund.com

