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## Friendship Dissolution: An Unspoken Loss During Emerging Adulthood

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FRIENDSHIP DISSOLUTION: AN UNSPOKEN LOSS DURING EMERGING  
ADULTHOOD

**ALYSSA SHAPIRO, M.S., LMSW**

A DOCTORAL DISSERTATION SUBMITTED  
TO THE FACULTY OF  
THE GRADUATE STUDIES PROGRAM  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY  
LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY

POST CAMPUS

**April 26th, 2024**

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### **Acknowledgements**

I am deeply grateful to my dissertation chair, Dr. Calderon, for her unwavering support, invaluable guidance, immense amount of time, and constructive feedback throughout this journey. Thank you for your patience and kindness. In moments when I doubted myself and did not feel like I could do it, you encouraged me to trust the process and myself. This is a lesson I will take with me into all my future endeavors. Thank you.

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Feindler and Dr. Mavrides for your invaluable guidance and encouragement in this project as well as throughout my academic journey. Alongside Dr. Calderon, you have played a pivotal role in shaping both my research direction and my career aspirations as a psychologist. You have taught me so much, and I am grateful to you for being exemplary role models, shaping the clinician I aspire to become.

To the participants in the study who generously shared their stories with me, I extend my sincerest appreciation. Your willingness to open up and provide detailed insights enriched this study immeasurably. Your voices have added depth and authenticity to the narrative, and I am deeply thankful for your contributions. To my coders, thank you for giving your time and energy to capture the participants' stories in the most thorough and genuine way. I could not have done it without you.

To my friends and siblings, your support and cheerleading have sustained me through the highs and lows of graduate school. Whether you've been by my side from the outset or entered my life along the way, each of you has played a significant role in shaping who I am today, and for that, I am profoundly grateful. I would like to specifically acknowledge Yael. I feel so lucky to have been able to go through my dissertation journey alongside you. It has made this project feel so much more manageable. The tragic loss of your father this month has been heartbreaking.

Know that you are carrying on his legacy as a wonderful friend. I am grateful to have gone through this chapter of my life with you.

To my therapist, you remind me why this work is so important and meaningful. Your impact on my life and well-being is unquantifiable. Thank you for respecting my journey and empowering me to follow my own path, all while urging me to refrain from judgment and push myself to be better. Your kindness, humor, patience, and authenticity have provided me a beautiful guide for the type of therapist I try to be, but also the type of person. I feel lucky to have you in my life and thank you for being with me every step of the way through graduate school.

Last but certainly not least, I extend my deepest appreciation to my parents. Mommy and Daddy, your continued belief in me throughout the years, your encouragement, and your endless cheering from the sidelines has meant the world to me. Your love and support have been my constant inspiration, and I am forever grateful for the countless sacrifices you've made to see me succeed. I could not have undertaken this without you. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart.

### **Abstract**

This research explored the phenomenon of friendship dissolution for emerging adults (18-25 years). While romantic dissolution in this age group has received extensive attention (Belu et al., 2016), there remains a notable gap in understanding friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood, despite the recognized significance of high-quality friendships during this transitional developmental period (Arnette, 2006; McNamara Barry et al., 2014). Eighteen emerging adult participants partook in a semi-structured interview asking them to describe their experience of a friendship dissolution with a close or best friend during emerging adulthood. Using Moustaka's (1994) structured coding method, interview transcripts were methodically coded and analyzed. Through this process, seven key themes emerged: (a) definition of close/best friendship (b) underlying reasons for the dissolution (c) pathways to the dissolution (d) current state of the relationship (e) repercussions on self & other relationships (f) comparison of friendship and romantic dissolutions, and (g) commonality of the experience in contrast to societal expectations. Findings from this study revealed the nuances of the experience of friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood and uncovered the reasons for dissolution, the processes involved, and the emotional and identity-related implications. The study underscores the necessity for further investigation into this phenomenon and emphasizes the significance of recognizing and validating the experiences of friendship dissolution among emerging adults, despite the prevailing societal stigma surrounding it.

Key Words: Emerging Adulthood, Young Adulthood, Friendship, Friendship Dissolution, Relationship Dissolution, Breakups, Friendship Sustainability

**FRIENDSHIP DISSOLUTIONS: AN UNSPOKEN LOSS DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD DISSERTATION PROPOSAL****Introduction**

Having high quality friendships positively impacts well-being (Friedlander et al., 2007), and decreases loneliness (Von Soest et al., 2020) for folks across the life span. Friendships are especially important for emerging adults, ages 18-25, who face a unique developmental transition period (Arnette, 2006; McNamara Barry et al., 2014). Research has indicated that young adults rely on friends to help fulfill independence and interdependence needs, especially present during this in-between period where people feel no longer adolescent, but not quite yet full adult (Arnett, 2006; Norona et al., 2016). For the first time in development, friends are considered just as important attachment figures as family members, and even replace family members in importance for some (Douman et al., 2012; Sweson et al., 2008). In western cultures, emerging adult friends are known to help each other navigate challenges of moving out of the family home, choosing career paths, choosing romantic partners, and attending college or university (Baumgarte & Nelson, 2009; McNamara Barry et al., 2014). Given the importance of friendship during this developmental period, it is shocking that dissolutions (i.e., breakups) of these types of relationships has only scarcely been examined (McKieran et. al., 2018; Vieth et al., 2022).

Relationship dissolutions are known to be a common experience for emerging adults (Halpern-Meehin et al., 2013), but majority of the research thus far has focused on the experience of romantic relationship dissolution during this developmental period (Belu et al., 2016). Moreso, friendship dissolution has been found to be a profoundly real and impactful experience for children and adolescents, but the experience during emerging adulthood is largely overlooked (J. C. Bowker, 2011; Poulin & Chan, 2010). While friendships and romantic



relationships are similar, in that both types of relationships are sources of intimacy and closeness for emerging adults, there are core differences in maintenance and dissolution strategies that make it important to study the two experiences as separate constructs (Johnson et al., 2004; Rose & Serafica, 1986). Specifically, friendships tend to be less formally defined containing more ambiguous rules and expectations as compared to romantic relationships. This makes the experience of dissolution commonly less structured or negotiated (Rose, 1984). Lack of research focus into this type of dissolution during this developmental period is likely associated with the common misconception by emerging adults that friendships are forever despite evidence to the contrary (Rose and Serafica, 1986).

The current qualitative phenomenological research study aims to capture the essence of the construct *friendship dissolution* during the emerging adult developmental stage. The study explores the “what” and “how” of the experience of friendship dissolution for emerging adults. This will extend the awareness of the developmental experience of *dissolution* during emerging adulthood from romantic to also including friendship. It will contribute to clinical practice by guiding potential future design of evidence-based treatments for individuals who have been through this loss, and guiding the potential development of prevention or psycho-education efforts for emerging adults surrounding this phenomenon. The ensuing literature review delves into the pertinent concepts associated with this study, aiming to provide a substantial context for the results.

## **Literature Review**

### **Emerging Adulthood:**

Emerging adulthood, ages 18-25, is a newly recognized developmental stage in western society coined by Jeffrey Arnett in 1999. During this period, individuals experience unique developmental challenges such as: moving out of their family homes, attending college, joining

the military, or beginning new jobs (Arnett, 2015). The principal features of emerging adulthood include: identity exploration, instability, feeling in-between child and adult, self-focus, and exploration of possibilities (Arnett, 2006; Norona et al, 2016). By definition, emerging adulthood is a period of instability both environmentally and internally, as self-concept shifts and identity exploration are fundamental (Norona, et al, 2016; Sweson et al., 2008).

### **Friendships During Emerging Adulthood**

Two primary tasks during this developmental period include establishing one's independence and simultaneously creating meaningful romantic and other intimate relationships (Chow, Ruhl, 2014). These tasks can be understood as emerging adult's need for both independence and interdependence as they solidify life choices (i.e., life partners, employment, and ideology) (Arnett, 2015; Norona et al, 2016). Although romantic relationships become more important during young adulthood compared to adolescence, friends largely maintain their function (Neyer et al., 2011; Wrzus et al., 2016). Friendships have been found to be a source of security, safety, and support against environmental stressors, and friendship quality and satisfaction has been found to be associated with emerging adult happiness (Demir et al., 2010; Sakyi et al., 2014; McNamara Barry et al., 2014).

Friendship among emerging adults is unique since this period of time has distinct circumstances and characteristics whereby individuals leave their family while delaying their transition to other adult responsibilities (McNamara Barry et al., 2014). Research has shown that such transitions impact the characteristics of social networks (Von Soest et al., 2020; Wrzus et al., 2013). For example, while childhood and adolescent friends are mainly from school and the neighborhood, young adults begin building social networks from other settings such as college and work (Wrzus et al., 2016). Additionally, young adults interact significantly more frequently with friends compared to older age groups (Nicolaisen & Thorsen, 2016), suggesting that

friendship may be more central to the lives of young adults (Kullar et al., 2021). This is especially true for emerging adults who are not in romantic relationships (Demir, 2009; McNamara Barry et al., 2014). In fact, strong social connections have been found to act as a barrier towards negative reactions to romantic relationship dissolutions, common during this time (McNamara Barry et al., 2014).

Peers often fill the role of primary attachment figures as individuals work on gaining independence from their primary caregivers (Douman et al., 2012; Sweson et al., 2008). Friendships during emerging adulthood have demonstrated influence in areas of identity exploration, social needs, investing in intimate relationships, and determining beliefs and behaviors (Baumgarte & Nelson, 2009; McNamara Barry et al., 2014). Emerging adults can shift from involuntary sources of support to voluntary sources of support, an experience that can foster autonomy and independence in pursuit of identity development (Kansky & Allen, 2017). Identity development at this time is linked to perceived quality of one's peer relationships (Douman et al., 2012). This aligns with Erikson's (1968) view on identity formation where he notes that identity formation and redefinition of social worlds are intertwined. Intimacy in emerging adult friendships grows even further than those of adolescence as emerging adults engaging in identity development use friends to express newfound experiences of worldviews and attitudes that may differ from those of their family (Barry et al., 2009; McNamara Barry et al., 2014; Pittman & Richmond, 2008). Hence, disturbances in peer relationships, like romantic relationship dissolutions that are commonplace for emerging adults in this transition period, can have profound impacts (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013).

### **Online Friendships for Emerging Adults**

When exploring the dynamics of friendship formation and maintenance for emerging adults, it's crucial to recognize the significant shifts that have occurred in emerging adult friendships, particularly with the rise of social networking sites and online communication. This transformation has been further magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which compelled many in-person friendships to adapt to an online format. Amidst this transition, the experience of forging and sustaining friendships online during the pandemic unveils a nuanced landscape (Juvonen et al., 2021).

Studies reveal that online communication channels have had a positive impact on relationships among emerging adults, fostering increased closeness, intimacy, and meaningful connections (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; McKinlay et al., 2022). This indicates that during periods of isolation, access to platforms has facilitated the growth and nurturing of friendships. However, it's essential to acknowledge the potential drawbacks associated with excessive social media usage. While these platforms serve as effective means of connection, research warns that they may not necessarily alleviate loneliness as anticipated and could even have adverse effects on the well-being of young individuals when used excessively (Pittman & Reich, 2016; Jung et al., 2017). Therefore, while online friendships offer avenues for meaningful connections, it's vital for emerging adults to approach these digital spaces mindfully to mitigate potential negative impacts on their mental health and overall well-being. This intricacy further complicates our understanding of friendship dissolution experiences among emerging adults.

### **Gender and Friendship Quality**

Among the literature, *best* and *close* friends are found to be qualitatively more intimate, stable, and influential when compared to *casual* friends, but not qualitatively different from one another (Richey & Richey, 1980; Urberg, 1992). Specifically, same-sex friendships are evidenced to be important for healing and empowerment (Bryant-Davis, 2013; Howard &

Hughes, 2012). While gender seems to play a role in the quality of friendships for children and adolescents, by young or emerging adulthood findings on gender differences are mixed (Kullar et al., 2021; McDonald & Asher, 2012). Generally speaking, by emerging adulthood, friendships are considered to be more similar than different qualitatively across genders (Norona et al., 2013; Norona et al., 2016; Norona, Preddy & Welsh, 2014). Women do tend to recognize the importance of talking for the development of intimacy more than men, who tend to see intimacy as a byproduct of spending time and partaking in activities together (Fehr, 2004; Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006). However, even with this difference in mind, friendship quality appears equivalent across genders (Norona et al., 2013; Norona et al., 2016; Norona, et al., 2014). The lack of importance for gender in relation to friendship quality and characteristics has been found for older adults as well, alluding to stability over time (Castanedo & Burns-Grover, 2017).

Cross-gender friendships become more common during adolescence and are considered adaptive by that time (McNamara Barry et al., 2014). By young adulthood, cross-gender friendships are commonplace for heterosexual peers (Castanedo & Burns-Grover, 2017). However, non-platonic friendships (i.e., when one or both members of the friendship have potential to be sexually attracted to the other) experience an extra layer of complexity when sexual intimacy is possible (Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005). Findings have indicated that the added possibility of sexual intimacy without follow-up action has led to the demise of friendships particularly for men (Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 2001).

### **Role of Friendship in Development and Well-Being**

When exploring the experience of friendship dissolution, it is imperative to also understand the significance of friendship more generally. Friendship has been defined as a “voluntary interdependence between two persons that is intended to facilitate socio-emotional goals of the participants, and may involve varying types and degrees of companionship,

intimacy, affection, and mutual assistance” (Demir et al., 2010). Friendships are informal bonds, meaning that they do not possess distinct agreements, contracts, or hierarchy (Wrzus et al., 2016). While family and friends continue to be distinct relationships in western cultures, non-family members (i.e., friends) are increasingly being seen as extensions of the family serving similar functions. Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) notes that friendships represent a person’s first genuine interpersonal relationship that contributes to “a profound sense of well-being.” Friendships provide a sense of mattering, which has been defined as “the psychological tendency to evaluate the self as significant to specific other people” (Marshall 2001). Mattering signifies a sense of belonging and relatedness and highlights the purpose for individuals to feel significant and relevant to others (Demir et al., 2010). A sense of mattering has been found to be important for the well-being of adolescents (Neyer et al., 2011), elderly individuals (Castanedo & Burns-Grover, 2017), and adults alike (Sakyi et al., 2014).

Regardless of age and sex, friendships are important relationships across the lifespan (Lippke et al., 2021; Wrzus et al., 2016). Just as attachment research on infancy looks at the interpersonal experience of infants as providing a blueprint for future interactions, friendships are seen as similar precursors for secure attachment representations during later periods of life (Chow, Ruhl, 2014). During childhood, friendship influences the development of social and emotional characteristics such as sense of identity, social emotional functioning, self-esteem, and social skills (Bierman, 2004; Glick & Rose, 2011; Ladd, 2005). Friendships become increasingly influential as children enter adolescents and later into adulthood (Hartup, 2021; Sakyi et al., 2014; Reis et al., 2000). While childhood friendships focus on play, adolescent friendships begin to replace parents as confidants (Bagwell et al., 2005). During adolescence, intimacy and solidarity become core developments in friendships. Intimacy and solidarity denote the closeness

that friends feel towards each other that often comes from sharing of personal experiences (Bagwell et al., 2005; McNamara Barry et al., 2014). With increasing age, higher quality friendships correlate with lower levels of loneliness (Von Soest et al., 2020). Additionally, adolescents who maintain a stable friend group at school were found to have stronger senses of belonging and social adjustment as compared to those who did not have a stable friend group (Ferguson et al., 2022).

While strong friendship has been associated with higher levels of well-being, low quality friendship can be detrimental to one's self-esteem (Cambron et al., 2009). When one's sense of well-being is highly dependent on how well relationships with friends are going, known as friendship contingent self-esteem (FCSE), then experiencing negative events in the realm of friendship can be associated with lower levels of well-being (Cambron et al., 2009; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Findings have also indicated that perceived negative changes in friendships (i.e., weakened relationship) were associated with increased interpersonal sensitivity symptoms (i.e., self-doubt, feelings of inferiority, discomfort in social settings) (Bagwell et al., 2005), and internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety (Cambron et al., 2009; Miething et al., 2016; Sakye et al., 2014; Sweson et al., 2008). High levels of negative friendship features are positively associated with clinical symptoms (Bagwell et al., 2005).

### **Clinical Symptomology and Friendship**

Clinical symptomology (i.e., depression, and anxiety symptoms) are closely associated with interpersonal discord and negative friendship features (Bagwell et al., 2005). For example, disruption in or lack of social support is a precursor and outcome of depression. Depression symptoms have been linked to friendship experiences in that individuals with higher levels of depression reported less intimacy with their best friend (Nezlek et al., 1994). Additionally, for adolescents it was found that low quality friendships triggered symptoms of anxiety, which in

turn negatively impacted social skills (Miething et al., 2016). Finally, in 2014, 21% of college students who completed suicide had identified “relationships issues” as their presenting problem when they had been in treatment (Gallagher, 2014).

### **Relationship Dissolution**

Dissolutions, the severing of an intimate relationship, are one of life’s most difficult events (LeFebvre et al., 2019; Priest et al., 2009), occur commonly during young adulthood (Halpern-Meehin et al., 2013), and are a leading cause of suicide among young people (Fordwood et al., 2007). Bowlby (1979) compares the experience of severing a strong relational bond, whether this be a romantic relationship or friendship, to the grieving process. It is also an event that occupies young people’s minds for quite some time after the ending (McKieran et al., 2018). The DSM-5 TR includes disturbances in social relationships, like friendships, to be an important criterion for diagnosis (APA, 2022). This signifies that severing intimate relationships are expected to be particularly detrimental for declining mental health.

Romantic relationship dissolutions have been a primary focus of the literature thus far as compared to friendship dissolutions. Differing experiences of romantic dissolutions (Belu et al., 2016), contact following dissolutions (Belu et al., 2016; Fox & Tokanuga, 2015), benefits of closure (Kansky & Allen, 2017), happiness or growth following dissolutions (McKieran, et al., 2018; Norona et al., 2016; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003), identity shifts related to dissolutions (Rollie & Duck, 2006) adaptive coping strategies (Norona et al., 2016), mental health implications (Davila et al., 2004; McKieran et al., 2018; Sbarra & Emery, 2005; Rhoades et al., 2011), avoidance strategies (Hawkins & Booth, 2005), the commonality of the experience during emerging adulthood (Norona et al., 2016), and lengths of adjustment periods (Barutçu Yıldırım & Demir, 2015) are just some of the many focusses that have flooded the literature surrounding



romantic relationship dissolution. Notably, research has begun to focus on the use of social media in romantic relationship dissolution strategies. For example, Meenagh (2015), found that young individuals tend to embrace digital technologies for ending relationships, especially in the initial phases. They find it easier and safer to communicate their disinterest through texting or reducing interactions on social networking sites (SNSs), ultimately leading to a disappearance from the relationship, rather than opting for a face-to-face breakup strategy.

### **Friendship Dissolution During Emerging Adulthood**

While there is a breadth of research focusing on romantic relationship struggles and dissolution during this developmental period (Belu et al., 2016; Fox & Tokanuga, 2015; Kansky & Allen, 2017; McKieran, et al., 2018; Norona et al., 2016; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003), there has been limited exploration into the experience of friendship quality shifts and dissolutions at this stage (McKieran et al., 2018 ; Vieth et al., 2022). The paucity of research is discussed in the following section including findings about friendship dissolutions during other stages of development that have been more extensively studied and invite inquiries into the experience for emerging adults. The research thus far looking at emerging adult friendship dissolution has primarily utilized all gender participants from undergraduate North American universities exploring close and best friend dissolutions. Thus, findings until now are difficult to generalize to other populations of emerging adults who have not attended university, or have partaken in a different life trajectory, and leave questions about the impact of ending casual friendships (Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 2001; Johnson et al., 2004; Kullar et al., 2021; Rose and Serafica, 1986). Additionally, distinctions between clinical and non-clinical populations have not yet been explored extensively (Mirsu-Paun & Oliver, 2017).

Having a friend is a generally positive experience, but closeness and intimacy can often breed conflict (Kullar et al.,2021). Emerging adults reported that disagreements with friends are

part of their daily lives (Schumann & Ross, 2010). Because a core tenant of friendship is their voluntary nature, it has been shown that as reciprocity becomes less apparent, friendships can deteriorate since friendship maintenance tends to require more effort than maintenance of ascribed relationships, such as family ties (Lippke et al., 2021; Wrzus et al., 2016). Since there is no societal mechanism in place to support friendships as there is for other relationships (i.e., couples counseling, and workplace mediation), friendships can easily disintegrate (Castanedo & Burns-Grover, 2017). Additionally, there is less social pressure to maintain friendships compared to romantic relationships so conflict may be even more risky for the sustainability of these dyads (Flannery & Smith, 2021). This is especially relevant considering the unspoken rules that exist within friendships, but that can be broken easily due to the unknown nature of what they are (Castanedo & Burns-Grover, 2017). Unlike romantic or other types of relationships that often have expectations or rules spelled out, friendships often have assumed “naturalness” not articulated, which has been shown to inhibit explicit conversation around expectations (Castanedo & Burns-Grover, 2017).

When looking into populations of undergraduates and same gender friendships, two studies have found that emerging adults endorsed dissolution in response to hypothetical scenarios involving conflict with a friend (McDonald & Asher, 2012; Santucci et al., 2021). This implicates a relationship between dissolution of friendships and conflict that may not exist in the same way for other types of relationships. Because of the voluntary and unstructured nature of these relationships, dissolution without substantial communication is more common compared to other types of relationship dissolutions. However, while both of these studies included large sample sizes of 147 and 145 undergraduate students respectively, both studies investigated the experience of relationship dissolution in response to vignettes of conflict scenarios rather than

actual friendship dissolution scenarios. As such, the construct of friendship dissolution represented in these studies is different than actual friendship dissolution, as they focused on vignette-based perceptions rather than on participants' actual experiences.

Losing a friend is not a rare experience. Children and adolescence are well known to experience friendship dissolution, especially with the emergence of more longitudinal studies on friendship (Bowker, 2010; Poulin & Chan, 2010; Bowker & Weingarten, 2022). Studies examining friendship stability in childhood and adolescence suggest a high prevalence of friendship dissolution (Bowker, 2004; Bowker, 2010; Chan & Poulin, 2007). In fact, it has been found that in a sample of 354 middle schoolers, only 50% of the early adolescents reported that their friendships remained stable over time. Furthermore, 86% of the participants reported having experienced a dissolution with a close friend (Flannery & Smith, 2021). Conflict/betrayal was cited as the number one motivator for adolescent friendship dissolutions with situational factors (i.e., switching schools or not having as much time to spend together) following (Flannery & Smith, 2021). However, teens reported notably less distress following a dissolution due to situational factors than conflict (Flannery & Smith, 2021). Adolescents do not experience full losses of friendship more negatively than partial losses (Bowker, 2010), but it was found that adolescents who had regular contact with their former friends in school following the dissolution had increased intensity of positive reactions and decreased duration of negative reactions about the dissolution (Flannery et al., 2022). Due to the high levels of conflict in emerging adult relationships and the numerous situational changes, questions about the causal factors for emerging adult friendship dissolutions and the distress associated with the loss emerge.

While close friendships and romantic relationships can be seen as mirroring one another due to their shared nature as dyadic, reciprocal, supportive, and intimate, it has been found that

termination trends do differ. The smaller pool of research on friendship dissolutions thus far has found that friendship dissolutions tend to occur less directly than romantic dissolutions as a result of informal nature of these relationships (Johnson et al., 2004; Rose & Serafica, 1986). Johnson et al. (2004)'s study supported and extended the foundational work of Rose & Serafica (1986) by employing a comprehensive turning point analysis, which offered a holistic perspective on the trajectory of former friendships. Unlike the prior study that narrowly focused on the termination moment, Johnson et al. adopted a process-oriented approach. They conducted interviews with 162 undergraduate students, instructing them to recall an experience of a dissolved friendships excluding those of romantic nature. Employing the Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT), they mapped out the evolution of closeness within these friendships. Participants were guided through a chronological account, identifying pivotal moments of closeness shifts throughout the friendship's lifespan. The study encompassed diverse friendship pairs in terms of gender presentation, encompassing various combinations including male-male, female-female, and male-female relationships. However, the study's age range spanned from undergraduate students aged 18 to 41, posing a challenge in directly correlating the findings to emerging adult friendship dynamics.

Additionally, friendship terminations are more commonly found to occur through quality shifts (i.e., shift from *close* to *casual* friend), and indirect means (i.e., little negotiation or conversation) in comparison to complete termination as is considered best practice when it comes to romantic dissolutions (Rose, 1984). Downgrading rather than complete termination of friendships has been found to be a common strategy among adolescents (Bowker, 2010), and emerging adults alike (Kirmayer, Küller & Dirks (2021) utilized a research approach whereby 179 undergraduate students were presented with hypothetical scenarios of friendship challenges

and were asked how their choices regarding the dissolution of these hypothetical friendships. However, the hypothetical nature of this study once again highlights an experience of friendship dissolution that may differ slightly from real life friendship dissolution experiences.

The complexity of the emotional experience of friendship dissolution is also present in the literature exploring adolescent dissolutions. One such study looking into adolescent emotional reactions to dissolutions from a best friend found that the initial response to the dissolution was to feel sad followed by happiness and anger (Bowker, 2010). Later research also pointed to the idea that friendship dissolution during adolescence contributed both positively and negatively to well-being dependent upon the quality of the friendship that was lost (Flannery & Smith, 2021). At the same time, research exploring the positive emotional impacts of romantic relationship dissolutions, known as post dissolution growth, also indicate that the experience of friendship dissolutions for emerging adults may not only correlate with negative emotional experiences (McKieran, et al., 2018; Norona et al., 2016; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003). Perhaps, friendship dissolutions can also be a positive experience for emerging working towards independence and making important life decisions. One study looking into emerging adult's need for interdependence did find that unfulfilled interdependence needs have been found to be associated with friendship dissolution during this time (Norona et al., 2016). Bowker (2010) supported the notion that emerging adults often feel happy following a friendship dissolution. Furthermore, Rose (1984) emphasized that emerging adult friendships can end even without dissatisfaction in the relationship by either partner. This could be due to identity shifts and reprioritization that is common at this stage (Arnette, 2000).

In the earliest known qualitative study looking at views on friendships sustainability for young adults, an attitude of denial became present when considering the possibility of dissolution

(Rose and Serafica, 1986). Participants commented strong sentiments such as “it would have to take something really drastic” and “it would take a monumental issue...a holocaust for instance” when asked about what would constitute reason for a friendship dissolution (Rose and Serafica, 1986, p. 284). Yet, just two years earlier, the same researcher found that 57.5% of young adults have lost at least one friend in the last five year. Specifically, the factors cited as predictors of friendship loss during this time were physical separation, priority shifts, growing dislike of friends, and interference from dating and marriage (Rose, 1984). This reflects a discrepancy between expectations of friendship sustainability for emerging adults compared to the reality of the commonality this type of dissolution; a potential obstacle when considering researching this topic. Rose & Serafica (1986) laid the groundwork for investigating the dynamics of young adult friendship dissolution. However, their study solely focused on Caucasian participants, which limits generalizability of this study due to the homogenous nature of the sample.

In their exploration of dissolution strategies employed by emerging adults to terminate friendships, Kullar, Kirmayer & Dirks (2021) identified several prevalent approaches: ending the friendship completely, distancing from the friend, and compartmentalization of friendship (i.e., turning to certain friends for only certain activities or conversation topics). Adding to the literature on pathways towards friendship dissolution for emerging adults, Vieth et al.(2022) and Apostolou (2023) researched strategies of dissolving friendships for young adults. Veith et al.(2022) found that young adults choose both active (i.e., deliberately discussing the termination of the friendship) and passive routes to dissolution (i.e., disengagement from contact without discussion). Apostolou (2023) identified three main strategies utilized by young adults: immediate termination, engaging in open conversation about the situation, and the gradual termination process. Of these, gradual termination emerged as the most commonly adopted

approach for ending friendships. This encompassed behaviors like "ghosting," which involves abruptly ceasing communication without providing an explanation. It was further observed that participants with higher scores on agreeableness tended to opt for gradual termination, whereas those with higher conscientiousness scores were more inclined to choose immediate termination or engage in open discussions. However, in this study the friendship dissolutions analyzed were not limited to close or best friends, so the strategies used may differ for more intimate or significant friendships. Nonetheless, both Vieth et al. (2022) and Apostolou (2023) speculated that a combination of active and passive dissolution styles might be employed depending on the effectiveness of the initial attempt to end the friendship.

In their study, Forrai et al., 2023, specifically investigated the experience of ghosting in both romantic and friendship relationships. They defined ghosting as the termination of contact without explanation, both in-person and on social media. Interestingly, their findings indicated that ghosting friends is associated with increased depressive symptoms for both the person who gets ghosted and the person who initiates the ghosting. Building upon this concept, Pancani et al., 2022 added a layer to the phenomenon of ghosting by looking into a nuanced instance of ghosting termed "orbiting." Orbiting involves disengaging from a relationship while still maintaining a presence by following the person who experienced the ghosting on social media. Individuals who were orbited, rather than simply ghosted, demonstrated a reduction in the negative mental health impacts associated with relationship termination. The authors proposed that this may be attributed to the absence of complete rejection in cases of orbiting compared to traditional ghosting. This insight adds a significant dimension to our understanding of friendship dissolution strategies among emerging adults. As far as the researcher is aware, no other studies

have investigated the interaction between social media usage and strategies for ending friendships thus far.

When it comes to reasons for the dissolution, Johnson et al. (2004) supported Rose's (1984) assertion that physical separation is a likely reason for friendship dissolution among young adults. Apostolou & Keramari (2022) more recently examined the main reasons that young adults choose to terminate friendship, and they identified four primary factors as: selfishness, romantic involvement, the lack of frequent interaction, and the perceptions and friends and family. They also posited that young adults chose to take the step to terminate these friendships because of a cost/benefit analysis whereas they no longer felt that they were getting enough benefit from the friendship as compared to cost (i.e., time, money, social input).

Taken together, while there seems to be a societal attitude towards the denial of friendship dissolution, in general and specifically during this developmental stage, it is clear that friendship dissolutions do occur, are quite common, and follow trends that we are only now slowly learning about. The discrepancy in emerging adults beliefs about friendship sustainability and the reality of the prevalence of this type of loss may contribute to the unique experience of this type of dissolution for emerging adults. Friendship dissolutions during emerging adulthood is clearly a construct flowered with nuance and complexity. It is important to remember that research on emerging adult friendship dissolutions thus far has primarily examined the experience for college students in North America who ended a friendship with a close or best friends for people of all genders, and are therefore lacking in high levels of generalizability (Apostolou & Keramari, 2022; Bleske-Rechek & Buss, 2001; Johnson et al., 2004; Kullar et al., 2021; Rose and Serafica, 1986).



### **Purpose of The Current Study**

The purpose of the current study was to qualitatively describe the experience of friendship dissolution for emerging adults. The goal was to collect personal narratives of close platonic friendship dissolution experiences during emerging adulthood, including expectations about the commonality of this loss, what led to the dissolution, the mechanisms by which the dissolution occurred, and what the individuals believed were the implications of the decision emotionally and in terms of their burgeoning identity. The qualitative phenomenological approach guided the formation of a descriptive picture of the experience of friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood that allowed for a greater understanding of this developmental phenomenon by expanding upon the limited literature thus far, and guiding or inspiring future studies and treatments.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

18 emerging adults were recruited for the current study. The researcher utilized purposeful sampling to recruit these study participants. To be eligible for participation, individuals were required to fall within the age range of 18-29 years. They had to report having experienced the dissolution of a *close* or *best* platonic friendship within the last six years, exclusively within the period of emerging adulthood (18-25). The dissolution should not have occurred more recently than six months prior. Eligible participants were required to have maintained that friendship for a minimum duration of at least 6 months. Clinical populations were excluded from the study (i.e., self-report history of Depression, Anxiety, or Suicidality).

Demographically, participants were only asked to share their gender identity and the gender identity of the former friend who they planned to discuss in the interview. The majority of the participants identified as cis-gender females, while one participant identified as a cis-

gender male. Of the friendship pairs discussed in interviews, 15 friendship pairs consisted of two cis-gender females, one friendship pair consisted of one cis-gender female and one non-binary individual, one friendship pair consisted of one cis-gender female and one cis-gender male, and one friendship pair consisted of two cis-gender males. While participants were not explicitly prompted to identify their country of origin, the majority of the participants shared that they were from the United States. In contrast, three participants shared that they were not from the United States and indicated their origins as Peru, Somalia, and the Philippines.

*Table 1: Participant Demographics*

<b>Gender Identity of Participant</b>	<b>% of Participants</b>	<b>N</b>
Cis-Gender Female	94.44	17
Cis-Gender Male	5.55	1
<b>Gender Identity of Friendship Pairs</b>	<b>% of Pairs</b>	<b>N</b>
Cis-Gender Female/Cis Gender Female	83.33	15
Cis-Gender Female/Non-Binary	5.55	1
Cis-Gender Female/Cis-Gender Male	5.55	1
Cis-Gender Male/Cis-Gender Male	5.55	1
<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>% of Participants</b>	<b>N</b>
United States	83.33	15
Outside of United States (Peru, Somalia, the Philippines)	16.66	3

## **Design**

The research was conducted utilizing a qualitative, phenomenological study design.

**Procedure**

Before beginning interaction with human subjects, Long Island University's Institutional Review board approved of the study. The study consisted of two phases. Phase A of the study tapped into the mental health of the participants to examine eligibility for Phase B, a qualitative phenomenological semi-structured interview where participants were asked to describe one personal experience of friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood. Incentives were provided for completing both phases: participants could enter a raffle for a \$25 Amazon gift certificate. Those who completed only Phase A received one entry, while Phase B participants received an additional entry. Two winners were chosen after data collection and notified via email.

**Recruitment and Informed Consent**

Following IRB approval, the researcher recruited participants by posting an advertisement (see Appendix A) for her study through the LIU-Post psychology department, and online via social networking groups through universities in the tri-state area. She also shared the advertisement on her personal social network pages, asking others to repost it to expand the reach. The advertisement included the study purpose, eligibility criteria, compensation, procedure, time commitment, and the researcher's contact information. It also contained a URL leading to an informed consent form (Appendix B) hosted on Anthology, a HIPPA compliant service. The consent form assured participants they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Upon consenting, participants were asked for their email solely for entering a raffle and possible future contact for Phase B of the study, with assurance that their email would be kept separate from their provided data.

**Phase A**

Participants who consented were directed to Phase A of the study, where eligibility for the interview was assessed through a questionnaire and three mental health screenings. (see measures below). Those currently experiencing suicidality, or moderate to severe anxiety or depression, were excluded from the study because research shows a correlation between these conditions and poor social functioning. Before completing the mental health screeners, participants were presented with a disclaimer. Prior to completing the mental health screenings, participants were given a disclaimer informing them that the questions would address their current mental health status and providing resources for mental health support.

**Phase B**

After completing Phase A of the study, a message appeared thanking participants and explaining the next steps. The primary investigator then checked the data for the first time. Out of those who qualified for an interview, 15 were randomly selected and invited for a 30-60 minute interview via email. (see Appendix C). If an eligible participant did not respond within one week, the primary investigator randomly selected one more eligible participant to invite. 51 individuals completed Phase A. 30 were deemed eligible for Phase B, while 21 were not. Of these 21 individuals who were deemed ineligible, five endorsed experiencing “several days” of suicidal ideation within the last two weeks. Nine reported experiencing moderate to severe levels of depression, and two reported experiencing severe levels of depression. Ten reported experiencing moderate levels of anxiety, and six reported experiencing severe levels of anxiety. All 18 eligible participants who responded to the email invitation opted for a virtual interview rather than in-person.

Participants met virtually on a HIPPA compliant Zoom platform with the researcher. Interviews ranged from 33-69 minutes ( $M = 39.33$ ,  $SD = 11.21$ ). At the beginning of the

interview, participants were briefed on the study's purpose and encouraged to ask questions. They were then prompted to focus on a specific friendship dissolution for discussion. After providing their gender identity and that of their former friend, they responded to seven open-ended questions aimed at exploring their experience (see interview questions below). The researcher occasionally asked follow-up questions for clarity. Interviews were video recorded, transcribed without personal identifiers by the primary investigator, and videos were then promptly deleted. Two research assistants from the LIU-Post PsyD Program aided in coding and data analysis.

### **Measures**

#### 1) *Eligibility Questionnaire* (see Appendix D):

Only individuals ages 19-25, who experienced a dissolution with a close or best same-sex platonic friend during the ages of 18-25 within the last 6 years, but not less than 6 months ago, were eligible for the study. The eligibility questionnaire asked respondents their ages and whether they experienced a friendship dissolution that fell within these parameters.

#### 2) *Suicidal ideation* (see Appendix D):

The Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) is a self-administered version of the PRIME-MD diagnostic instrument for common mental disorders (PHQ-9: Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002). The PHQ-9 is the depression module, which scores each of the 9 DSM-IV criteria as “0” (not at all) to “3” (nearly every day). For the purpose of this study, only question 9 was used with the goal of assessing for suicidality. Question 9 of the PHQ-9 states ‘Over the past 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered with the thought that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way’. The options include 0=not at all, 1=several days, 2=more than half the days and 3=nearly every day. Endorsing any of the options apart from ‘not at all’ is considered as having

suicidal ideation according to the developers of the questionnaire (PHQ-9: Kroenke & Spritzer, 2002). Any degree of suicidality excluded that respondent from the study.

3) ***Beck Depression Inventory Second Edition (BDI II)*** (see Appendix D):

The BDI II is a 21-item self-report measure of depressive, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms (BDI II; Beck, et al., 1996 – Appendix 2). It assesses the presence and severity of depressive symptoms over the span of the past two weeks. Each item is rated on an ordinal scale from 0, “not at all/never” to 3 “extremely/every day.” Total BDI scores are calculated by summing the ratings of each item, and higher scores indicate greater depression. Scores from 0 through 9 signify no or minimal depression, scores falling between 10 and 18 indicate mild to moderate depression, scores from 19 through 29 show moderate to severe depression, and scores from 30 through 63 demonstrate severe depression (BDI II; Beck, et al., 1996 – Appendix 2). A moderate-severe level of depression excluded that respondent from participating in the study.

4) ***Beck Anxiety Inventory Second Edition (BAI)*** (see Appendix D):

The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) is a 21 item self-report rating inventory that measures characteristic attitudes and symptoms of anxiety (BAI: Beck et al., 1988– Appendix 3). The scale ranges from 0, which indicates “not at all,” to 3, which indicates that the participant is experiencing the symptom “a lot” or “severely.” It measures anxiety along its physical and cognitive dimensions. The score ranges between 0 and 63. A total score of 0–7 is classified as an individual having anxiety in the minimal range, a score between 8 and 15 is considered to be mild anxiety, a score between 16 and 25 is moderate anxiety, and an individual who scored between 26 and 63 is considered to have severe anxiety (BAI: Beck et al., 1988 – Appendix 3). A moderate-severe level of anxiety excluded that respondent from participating in the study.

5) *Interview Questions* (See Appendix E):

In a semi-structured interview, the researcher explored the participants' experience of a friendship dissolution. While the same eight questions were asked to all participants, the semi-structured nature of this procedure allowed for spontaneous follow-up questions. Participants were encouraged to be as detailed and descriptive as possible. Questions were derived based upon past research to ensure content validity. Specifically, the questions were created with knowledge of existing research that focused on reasons for friendship dissolutions (Flannery & Smith, 2021), dynamics of friendship dissolutions for emerging adults (Johnson et al., 2004; Rose, 1984; Rose & Serafica, 1986), sustainability of friendship (Demir, 2009; McNamara Barry et al., 2014; Belu et al., 2016), experiences of romantic relationship dissolution (Bowker, 2010; Flannery & Smith, 2021), and societal support for friendship dissolution (Castanedo & Burns-Grover, 2017).

**Data Analysis**

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design. Moustaka's (1994) structured coding method was utilized (Creswell, 2013). This design aims to describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a phenomenon. The purpose is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon into a description of the *essence* of the experience (Creswell, 2013). *Essence* has been described as "a grasp of the very nature of the thing" (van Manen, 1990). This coding method also includes bracketing, where the researchers took note of their own experience with the content before coding in attempt to limit and acknowledge biases to increase trustworthiness.

The primary investigator recruited two research assistants who assisted with coding. The coders recruited were 2nd year PsyD. students at LIU-Post. They both identified as female and were 25 years old at the time. The key concepts of the study were then discussed with the coders.

The investigator then trained the research assistants in using Moustaka's (1994) structured coding method with the following process. Firstly, the research assistants were asked to read Chapter 5 in Creswell (2013) that outlines the approach. Then they met with the primary investigator to ask any clarifying questions on the method. Once it was clear that the coders had a basic understanding, they each were provided 2-3 transcripts to practice, and the investigator provided individualized feedback to ensure the coders understood the process.

Each transcript was then coded by the primary investigator and research assistants until achieving complete inter-coder agreement. Only data exhibiting 100% consistency across all coders were included in the results. The process included breaking down the transcripts by first identifying significant statements, known as meaning units, which were then grouped into significant themes. The primary investigator then created a detailed description and summary of the themes and the "what" and "how" of the experience. The primary investigator met with the research assistant after coding every 2-3 interviews to discuss any discrepancies among the coding, and come to agreement. Meaning units and themes were only considered if all coders agreed. The data analysis process ended with the primary investigator then describing the essence of the experience of friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood based on the agreed upon themes by the coders.

## **Results**

### **Bracketing:**

The researcher embarked on this study drawing from personal encounters with the phenomenon and close interactions with individuals who similarly recounted experiencing this type of loss. During the data analysis phase, the researcher conscientiously set aside personal biases and preconceptions, despite her intimate familiarity with the subject matter. Prior to coding each interview, transcripts were carefully reviewed, and initial impressions were noted



and written down. Subsequently, the researcher reflected on these impressions, considering their potential influence stemming from personal experiences. During the actual coding process, conscious efforts were made to ensure that these biases did not unduly influence the coding decisions. This methodology was also applied to the two coders participating in the study. They were instructed to adopt a comparable approach in their coding tasks if they encountered personal experiences related to the phenomenon.

### **Findings:**

After the completion of the data analysis by the researcher and her two coders, we identified 7 themes related to the experience of friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood: (a) definition of close/best friendship (b) underlying reasons for the dissolution (c) pathways to the dissolution (d) current state of the relationship (e) repercussions on self & other relationships (f) comparison of friendship and romantic dissolutions, and (g) commonality of the experience in contrast to societal expectations. Next, we present an in-depth exploration of each theme, delving into associated subthemes.

### **Theme 1: Definition of Close/Best Friendship**

Participants provided a multifaceted perspective on why they considered their former friends to be close or even best in terms of quality, with a significant emphasis on both practical and emotional factors that contributed to the sense of closeness. Notably, most participants highlighted the coexistence of practical and emotional reasons. Please see Table 1 for a breakdown of this theme. In the table, *N* represents the number of participants who supported the theme, and *% of Total N* represents the percentage of the total number of participants in the study who expressed the theme.

From a practical standpoint, many participants identified the proximity of distance, the duration of their friendship, and the regularity of interactions as key factors underpinning their

sense of closeness. Remarkably, five out of eighteen participants mentioned that they had shared living arrangements with their former friends as roommates before the friendship dissolved. Additionally, several participants attributed the regularity of their interactions to some form of shared affiliation, such as belonging to the same sports team, attending university classes together, sharing mutual friends, or having common cultural backgrounds.

On an emotional level, participants emphasized the capacity to turn to their ex-friends for emotional support as a pivotal aspect of their friendship's quality. Specifically, feeling understood and accepted by their former friends emerged as a significant subtheme for many participants. This sense of being understood and accepted created a safe space where participants felt they could freely express intimate details of their lives. Participant 3 captured the significance of this quality, stating, "I think that was the biggest factor, to feel understood. I was provided a space where I could totally totally be myself with no fear, no worry of rejection." Participant 6 similarly shared that her close bond with her ex-friend allowed her to comfortably confide in them during a romantic dissolution, providing her with essential emotional support.

In addition to emotional support, participants highlighted compatibility as a crucial indicator of emotional intimacy within their former friendships. Compatibility, as they described it, encompassed a blend of personality traits, interests, and values. Participants considered both similarities and complementary personality attributes as contributing to compatibility. Within shared interests and values, many participants stressed the importance of having fun and enjoying activities with their friends as a significant component of compatibility.

Lastly, several participants expressed a deep sense of closeness to their ex-friends, viewing the friendship as an integral part of their identities. Participant 12 even noted that the friendship was so intertwined with her life that she and her ex-friend began to adopt each other's

mannerisms. Participant 3 likened the connection to "a marriage," underscoring its profound impact. Participant 11 described their bond as being "two sides of the same coin," highlighting how they mutually supported each other in fulfilling their potential. Additionally, several participants felt that their former friendships were close because they facilitated personal growth and fulfilled their respective needs. In contrast, Participant 2 felt that the friendship was close but unequal, with only one member benefiting from personal growth.

*Table 2: Definition of Close/Best Friendship*

<b>Theme:</b>	<b>Subtheme:</b>	<b>Description and Quotes:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% Of Total N</b>
<b>(a) Definition of Close/Best Friendship</b>	<b>Practical Reasons:</b>		17	94.44
	Proximity	This refers to the proximity of physical distance between the friends. Several participants shared that they had been roommates with their former friend.  <i>Participant 11: "And we were living in a dorm together. So that was like a friendship accelerant."</i>	8	44.4
	Duration	This refers to the length of the friendship. Participants noted that having been through several different stages in life together often led to feelings of closeness.  <i>Participant 2: "So we were friends through middle school and through high school and then actually like through college as well."</i>	11	61.11
	Regularity of Interactions	How commonly communication and interaction occurred. This often included mention of shared affiliation, such as belonging to the same sports team, or attending the same university class.  <i>Participant 5: "We played soccer and then we played lacrosse together and both of us stuck with those sports together... in soccer, we would sometimes be sitting on the bench together and laughing, like making jokes about that, making light of it"</i>	15	83.33

	<b>Emotional Reasons:</b>		15	83.33
	Emotional Support	<p>This refers to the feeling of acceptance and understanding by a friend which allowed for opening up and vulnerability with one another at all times, and in times of need.</p> <p><i>Participant 6: "I was in a bad period because of this breakup, and she helped me. She was really a really caring person in that time with me. And I needed a lot of support and she did provide it to me."</i></p>	8	44.44
	Compatibility	<p>This refers to complementary personality traits, interests, and values. The ability to have fun with each other was also considered an important element of compatibility.</p> <p><i>Participant 15: "We were both like, introverted, but over time, we definitely found a lot of common interests. We have the same sense of humor...like we had the same like mindset honestly. And then we just became very close."</i></p>	15	83.33
	Identity	<p>This refers to the experience of participants who shared that they felt that their friendship was so essential to their being that it felt like a part of their identity. For example, one participant shared that she began to take on the mannerisms of her former friend. Another participant described the relationship as so important to her that it felt like a "marriage."</p> <p><i>Participant 3: "We also like totally took on each other's mannerisms and like people would say like we're just extensions of each other"</i></p>	4	22.22
	Facilitated personal growth	<p>This refers to the experience of friends helping each other reach their full potential as well as fulfill individual emotional needs. s</p> <p><i>Participant 11: "I think both of us helped the other come out of their shell."</i></p>	4	22.22

**Theme 2: Underlying Reasons for Dissolution**

When examining the factors contributing to the termination of the friendship, participants frequently pointed out a combination of reasons for the separation. Please see Table 2 for a breakdown of this theme.

Many participants attributed the dissolution of their friendships to a diminishing sense of shared experiences and connections. This encompassed both practical and emotional disconnection, mirroring how participants defined their close or best friendships. The erosion of commonality encompassed practical elements such as a decrease in physical proximity, sometimes due to geographical distance or shifting time zones, as well as a decline in the regularity of communication and everyday interactions. On an emotional level, participants identified several facets of commonality that had diminished, including shared interests, values, priorities, personality traits, emotional bonds, and ways of enjoying life. Concerning values, differences in superficiality and social status frequently emerged as sources of discord. As for priorities, a shift toward a focus on romantic relationships was often cited. In fact, seven participants explained that differences related to romantic relationships were the core of their conflicts with their friend.

Interpersonal dissonance emerged as a prominent factor contributing to the eventual breakdown of friendships, as highlighted by multiple study participants. This concept underscores that conflicts leading to friendship termination often stemmed from unresolved tensions, encompassing communication mismatches and strained interpersonal dynamics. The aspect of communication mismatch frequently encompassed misunderstandings, differing opinions regarding the frequency and content of communication, as well as difficulties in addressing conflicts. Notably, Participant four encountered a particularly pronounced mismatch amidst the evolving social landscape brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, the concept of strained interpersonal dynamics sheds light on the friendships' vulnerability when issues like competitiveness, jealousy, judgment, or cultural differences entered the participants' experiences. In a related vein, three participants noted that these struggles often resulted in an imbalance of emotional investment in the relationships, with one friend becoming more emotionally invested than the other. Furthermore, several participants observed that their friends no longer fulfilled the same role in each other's lives. For instance, Participant 11 shared that once she and her friend both got married, they no longer relied on each other for emotional support.

Many participants experienced specific events or conflicts that directly contributed to the end of their friendships. Notably, several friendships unraveled due to hurtful feedback. For instance, Participant seven had a distressing conversation where her friend labeled her a "bad roommate." Additionally, external disapproval, particularly from friends' mothers, as experienced by both Participant three and Participant 11, exerted significant pressure and ultimately led to the dissolution of their friendships.

Furthermore, participants identified various disagreements as pivotal factors, including differences in COVID-19 decisions (mentioned by four participants), political divisions, and disputes over friends' romantic partners. Some participants were able to pinpoint exact moments that caused their friendships to fracture, such as Participant five, who cited her friend's absence at her mother's funeral as a turning point. In addition, three participants cited violations of relationship boundaries as the key event that ultimately led to the dissolution, while one participant noted a shift in her friend's mental health as the direct cause of their friendship's end.

Many participants highlighted a change in their perception of their friends as a significant factor leading to the dissolution of their relationships. Participant six articulated this sentiment

effectively by describing how she "removed her rose-colored glasses." In essence, she recognized that she had started to notice aspects of her friend's behavior that didn't align with her expectations for a friend, and these realizations were impossible to overlook. Four other participants expressed a similar viewpoint.

Furthermore, numerous participants acknowledged experiencing a shift in their attitude towards the friendship when they realized that their friends offered only one type of support, either positive or negative. For instance, Participant six felt distressed because it seemed like her friend could provide emotional support during difficult times in her life, such as a dissolution, but couldn't share in her joy during positive moments, such as when she received a new job offer.

Finally, a number of participants highlighted instances where their friendships came to an end without any clear discernible causes. Two participants mentioned that their friends had withdrawn from their entire social circle without adequate explanation. Additionally, several participants attributed the dissolution of their friendships to their friends' decisions to seek new companionships or join alternative friend groups without offering any clarity. Participant 12 likened this experience to being cheated on by a romantic partner.

*Table 3: Underlying Reasons for Dissolution*

<b>Theme:</b>	<b>Subtheme:</b>	<b>Description and Quotes:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% of Total N</b>
<b>(a) Underlying Reasons for Dissolution</b>	<b>Loss of shared experience/commonality:</b>		17	94.44
	Practical Disconnect	This refers to the loss of shared practical everyday experiences, such as loss of physical proximity or loss of regularity of interactions.  <i>Participant 7: "And when high school ended, we rarely saw each other since it became the COVID-19 pandemic. It was lockdown. I see. That's it. That is</i>	7	38.89

		<i>when our friendship declined.”</i>		
	Emotional Disconnect	This refers to loss of emotional commonality, such as shared interests, valued, compatible personality traits, emotional bonds, or ways of enjoying life. For seven participants, the common value that changed was related to romantic relationships.  <i>Participant 2: “I think that was like another aspect of the friendship in general that as we were getting older I think I was really realizing that like did have different values.”</i>	15	83.33
	<b>Interpersonal Dissonance:</b>		15	83.33
	Communication mismatch	This included both different styles of communicating, which often led to miscommunication as well as differing opinions regarding frequency and content of communication preferred by friends. Additionally, it included difficulty addressing conflicts through communication.  <i>Participant 10: “So overall, like the communication was not the best. And I probably could have communicated better too, but like it was such an uncomfortable topic that I didn't want to like bring it out and add conflict.”</i>	9	50
	Strained Interpersonal Dynamics	This refers to moments in the friendships when issues such as competition, jealousy, judgment, or cultural differences created tension in the friendship dynamics.  <i>Participant 9: “She was very academically inclined, very smart, I'll give her that. But she would always put you down because like you weren't...she would say things like your life must be so easy, like you don't have it as hard as me, like I looked at your textbook and it's so much easier.”</i>	10	55.56
	Lack of reciprocity	One type of tense dynamic that occurred was when one friend would begin to invest more into the friendship than the other.  <i>Participant 2: “I think there was at one point like a whole year of time that went by where I was reaching out when I would be home and trying to do stuff with</i>	3	16.67



		<i>her, and where she was just never available to hang out.”</i>		
	Friendship no longer serving purpose	<p>This refers to an experience where a friendship seemed to fulfill a certain purpose in the friend’s lives, and no longer does this.</p> <p><i>Participant 5: “We didn’t have sports to bring us together anymore. So it was more like, you know, just keeping up on each other’s lives, and that wasn’t why we became friends in the first place.”</i></p>	3	16.67
	<b>Specific Event:</b>		14	77.78
	Hurtful feedback	<p>This refers to when participants cited the giving of hurtful feedback as the experience that directly led to the dissolution. For example, when participant seven shared that her former friend called her a “bad roommate.”</p> <p><i>Participant 8: “She had said some really hurtful things to me as a person, as a friend...and it made me feel like a bad friend and a bad roommate. And after that, it was just kind of never the same.”</i></p>	5	27.78
	External Disapproval	<p>This refers to when external disapproval of the friendship by an outside source is the event that leads to the dissolution. For both participants who named this occurrence, the disapproval was by the former friend’s mother.</p> <p><i>Participant 11: “But a huge part of the dissolution was her mother’s sense that the relationship wasn’t healthy.”</i></p>	2	11.11
	Disagreement	<p>This refers to when a specific disagreement led to the dissolution. Several examples were cited were disagreements on decisions regarding COVID-19 precautions, disagreement over a friend’s romantic partner, and political divisions.</p> <p><i>Participant 15: “My assumption is obviously I talked bad about her husband before, so I think that’s why the friendship ended.”</i></p>	6	33.33
	Identifiable incident	Some participants were able to name the exact event that led to the dissolution. For example, participant	9	50

		<p>five knew that the friendship would dissolve after her friend did not attend her mother's funeral. Others cited violations of boundaries as the specific event.</p> <p><i>Participant 12: "She sent me a message that she was going to have to leave my wedding early to go to another friend's brother's wedding. So that for me was like, I just was done after that, because that I thought was disgusting."</i></p>		
	<b>Perception Change:</b>		6	33.33
	Took off rose colored glasses	<p>This refers to when a member of the friendship noticed something about the friend that they could not unsee, which changed their perception of the friendship indefinitely.</p> <p><i>Participant 9: "I think it started because like we were so close, and I think you automatically trust those like who are close to you, like you can't see them doing anything like wrong... but then I took off the blinders when we first started college... I think I noticed, she said like one thing in particular, I can't remember what it was...I think she just like put down someone about their academics and I think it just clicked."</i></p>	5	27.78
	One type of support	<p>This refers to when a friend changed their perception of the friendship after realizing that their friend was only able to provide one type of support, positive or negative. For some, this meant that their friend was only able to be there emotionally in good times while not in bad times. For others, the experience was the reverse.</p> <p><i>Participant 10: "It just got to a point where I felt like super uncomfortable, like too uncomfortable to like speak my girlfriend's name in front of my friend who I'm living with, and is meant to be one of my best friends. So it got to the point where I felt like I could not share like the most important part of my life with her. That's what made me like really reevaluate."</i></p>	3	16.67
	<b>No Clear Reason:</b>		7	38.89
	Don't know	This refers to when a participant just could not	2	11.11

		pinpoint any reason that may have led to the dissolution.  <i>Participant 15: "I do know what happened"</i>		
	Distance from entire social circle	This refers to when a friend decided to distance from the entire social circle or social group with no explanation.  <i>Participant 12: "She started to just like become more distanced with everyone in my friend group."</i>	2	11.11
	Friend sought out new companionship	This refers to when a friend decided to spend time with other friends with no clear reason.  <i>Participant 16: "I'm not sure. I don't know. He just started hanging out with other friends."</i>	6	33.33

### Theme 3: Pathways to Dissolution

When it comes to the pathways to the dissolution, or how the dissolution actually looked, participants were divided between an unspoken dissolution versus one that involved communication. Like the themes above, participants often shared a mixture of occurrences where elements of the dissolution followed an unspoken pathway and other elements of the dissolution followed a spoken pathway. This highlights the complexity of the experience of a friendship dissolution at this time. Please see Table 3 for a breakdown of this theme.

In the context of the friendship dissolutions discussed, it became apparent that many of these relationships dissolved without a specific conversation marking their end. Instead, the dissolution followed an unspoken pathway. Individuals often sensed that something was awry or different within the friendship but refrained from addressing the underlying conflicts directly. Two primary modes of unspoken dissolutions emerged: a gradual drifting apart over time and the practice of what participants described as "ghosting." Ghosting was the label given by participants to describe the abrupt withdrawal of communication by one party of the friendship.

For some, the dissolution included both a slow drift and ghosting where the communication was slowly dwindling, and then abruptly ended by one party. In these cases, one or more friendship members were left perplexed and yearning for answers, harboring unresolved emotions and a strong desire for closure. The lack of clarity typically led to a moment of realization where participants suddenly accepted that the friendship had indeed dissolved. This realization often followed a period of denial, during which individuals, due to the ambiguous nature of communication, could convince themselves that the friendship was not truly disintegrating. This often included a one-sided pursuit where one party repeatedly reached out to the other via phone or social media, and not getting responded to.

Much like the phenomenon of ghosting, several participants observed a sudden shift in the level or quality of communication within their friendships as the pathway to the dissolution. In this context, these friendships experienced a shift in their overall quality, transitioning from profound and meaningful conversations to superficial small talk, and from being best friends to merely regular friends. It's worth noting that in these instances, communication did not come to a complete halt as it typically does during ghosting. Participant nine aptly described this transformation as the friendship evolving into "not the same kind of friendship we used to have."

As compared to the unspoken friendship dissolutions, fewer participants described having had a deliberate conversation where one party told the other that the friendship would be dissolving. Many participants did describe that the dissolution actually involved repetitive failed attempts at communication and repair of the relationship. The most common of these narratives was a description of a confrontation gone wrong. This included one member of the friendship attempting to share their qualms about the relationship with the other but being responded to with defensiveness. Some participants also shared that as one friend attempted to communicate

with the other, there was avoidance of such conversations by the other friend making communication impossible. Several participants reported that their friends blocked them on social media to avoid engaging in conversation about the friendship. Several participants noted trying to have a productive conversation with their ex-friend several times, before giving up. One participant described a failed apology attempt several months after the dissolution.

*Table 4: Pathways to Dissolution*

<b>Theme:</b>	<b>Subtheme:</b>	<b>Description and Quotes:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% of Total N</b>
(c) Pathways to Dissolution	<b>Unspoken Nature:</b>		17	94.44
	Slow drift over time	<p>This refers to the experience of communication slowing gradually over time by both members of the friendship.</p> <p><i>Participant 17: “The dissolution happened over a few months time. It began with first finding out the things she was saying about me behind my back. That started to crumble some of my sense of trust towards her. And then, as a few months went by, and I started gaining more information from this guy about her true feelings towards me, I think my demeanor towards her changed. I was less open. I was reaching out a lot less. And she responded immediately to that and reciprocated, you know, also stopped texting me, stopped calling me. Neither of us confronted the other and said, hey, what's going on here, like we used to be so close. So because there was never a full sit down of sharing what was going on, the friendship just ultimately ended. So it was like a silent breakup.”</i></p>	12	66.67
	Ghosting	<p>This refers to the abrupt withdrawal of communication by one party of the friendship.</p> <p><i>Participant 3: “She would tell me we were best friends, and then all of a sudden she stopped answering my calls. I was like, okay, I’ll give her space. I first I tried to give her space and then like we went two weeks of no talking... And I then just kept</i></p>	9	50

		<i>calling her. It was embarrassing. She would never answer.”</i>		
	Unresolved	<p>This refers to the experience by one or both members of the friendship where the ambiguous nature of communication leaves them with unresolved and perplexing feelings.</p> <p><i>Participant 15: “It was just like I spent a lot of time agonizing over our friendship, of just like, what did I do wrong? I don't have any insight. None of that. I think it would give me clarity on that. Like on what did I do specifically?... It's just like, a bunch of confusion. I don't really know.”</i></p>	14	77.78
	Realization	<p>This refers to a moment following ambiguous communication, and sometimes denial of the reality of this communication shift, where a member of the friendship suddenly has a realization that the friendship is dissolving.</p> <p><i>Participant 14: “I didn't know that it was over quite yet..., but I remember where I was when I realized. I was at (gives address) and I sat down. I just kind of sat on the street corner and felt like, oh, I don't know, like it occurred to me that our friendship might be over.”</i></p>	10	55.56
	One-sided Pursuit	<p>This refers to the experience where one member of the friendship repeatedly reaches out to the other member of the friendship who is not reciprocating the communication equally.</p> <p><i>Participant 11: “I would reach out and say something, and she would respond like in a friendly way until she started like ignoring my messages, which is probably about like two years ago or something, where it just became very clear that like she really did not want to hear from me.”</i></p>	7	38.89
	Level change	<p>This refers to the type of friendship dissolution where the quality of communication lessened. This was described by participants as a shift from a close or best friend to a regular friend or acquaintance.</p> <p><i>Participant 1: “And it's not that like, we're not</i></p>	6	33.33

		<i>friendly, we don't have like animosity. We're not like enemies now. We're just aren't really close anymore."</i>		
	<b>Spoken Nature:</b>		14	77.78
	Deliberate Conversation	This refers to the scenario when one party was able to successfully engage in a conversation with their former friends about the impending dissolution of the friendship.  <i>Participant 13: "So then I told him, I was like, unfortunately, I'll have to distance myself from you. I was very transparent about it. I was like, I wish you all the best."</i>	4	22.22
	Confrontation issues	This pertains to the common situation where one friend makes an effort to address conflicts or issues within the friendship, hoping to resolve them. In such cases, some friends, sensing the potential for a confrontational conversation, opt to evade this kind of communication by resorting to actions such as blocking their friend on social media or avoiding returning to their shared apartment.  <i>Participant 9: "She would purposefully come home in like late hours. If we had like a roommate like hangout, like we would all eat dinner, we would invite her and she would say no each time. And she voiced to me that she felt out of place in the apartment after that first confrontation."</i>	13	72.22

#### Theme 4: Current State of the Relationship

Participants discussed the status of their past friendships and recounted their interactions with these friends, whether virtual or in-person, after the friendships ended. Please see Table 4 for a breakdown of this theme.

One third of the participants revealed that they had no contact with their former friend after the dissolution. Additionally, four participants mentioned actively avoiding their former friend's post-dissolution. For participant 17, this included avoiding locations where she knew the friend frequented, such as a local supermarket.

While some participants successfully severed all ties with their ex-friends following the dissolution, many others found it challenging due to shared social circles and close proximity. Consequently, they occasionally encountered their former friends. In these encounters, they described maintaining a courteous demeanor while keeping an emotional distance. Similar experiences emerged for those whose friendships changed in which interactions became lower quality rather than there being complete break in interactions. As described in the pathways to dissolution section, these individuals continued to interact with their ex-friends after the dissolution but noted a reduced level of emotional closeness compared to their previous relationship. In lower quality interactions as compared to the occasional encounter, the friends still consider each other friends rather than acquaintances. Participant 11 expressed confusion about these interactions, as their friend's responses oscillated between warmth and indifference at times, which was a marked qualitative difference from how the friend used to interact with the participant.

Many participants discussed the significant role social media played in their lives following the dissolution of their friendships. Some shared that they only had a peripheral connection with their ex-friends, merely keeping tabs on their whereabouts through social media. Participant five recounted a distressing experience where their ex-friend maintained a facade of friendship on social media, engaging in activities like tagging them in posts. Furthermore, Participant eight expressed how scrolling through their friend's life on social media could be emotionally triggering. Meanwhile, three participants revealed that they had to take the difficult step of blocking or unfollowing their ex-friends on social media due to the emotional toll it took on them. Conversely, Participant 15 found herself uncomfortable with the lack of insight into her ex-friend's life and resorted to seeking updates from mutual friends. On the other hand,



Participant 18 found it disconcerting when mutual friends continued to inquire about updates regarding her former friend.

Table 5: Current State of the Relationship

Theme:	Subtheme:	Description and Quotes:	N	% of Total N
<b>(d) Current State of the Relationship</b>	<b>Current Level of Contact:</b>		12	66.67
	No contact	<p>This refers to a clean cut, where participants and their former friends were eventually able to completely cut contact following the dissolution.</p> <p><i>Participant 15: "And the final final text message I sent her was literally, it said just, like, again, if you have a problem with me, please talk to me. If you don't want to talk to me ever again, I'd rather hear that from you... That was like my final final message to her. Never heard from her again."</i></p>	6	33.33
	Active Avoidance	<p>This refers to a participant's decision to actively avoid situations where they may encounter their former friend in order to maintain no contact.</p> <p><i>Participant 17: "I felt nervous to go places, I didn't want to run into her. I was really scared. I didn't go to certain coffee shops. I didn't go to the supermarket I knew she was always at. I really didn't want to run into her. So I think being in your own city but afraid to like fully be in it can cause some isolation."</i></p>	4	22.22
	Occasional Encounters	<p>This refers to those who were unable to avoid their former friend due to life circumstances, such as shared social circles, who then act cordial but not emotionally vulnerable when running into the former friend. In this case, the friendship is considered something of the past.</p> <p><i>Participant 8: "I see her a lot now. We run in similar crowds, and that only makes it harder because I wanted to distance myself, and it's really hard when you're hanging around with the same people or similar people. It's a constant reminder for me of the</i></p>	5	27.78

		<i>fact of what happened and the fact that we are no longer friends.”</i>		
	Lower quality interactions	<p>This refers to those whose dissolution occurred through a level change, where quality of interaction diminished because of the dissolution, but the friends still have regular contact. In this case, as opposed to the occasional encounters, the friends still consider each other friends rather than acquaintances.</p> <p><i>Participant 9: “I do still see her, just not as much because we're on the same campus....It is just like awkwardness now, like it's not the same kind of friendship that we used to have, obviously.”</i></p>	6	33.33
	<b>Social Media:</b>		9	50
	Only acquainted through social media	<p>This refers to the experience of only knowing updates or whereabouts of the former friend via social media networks.</p> <p><i>Participant 12: “And she has like tagged me and things on Facebook, but we haven't really spoken since then.”</i></p>	5	27.78
	Unfollow/Block on social media	<p>This refers to the experience of blocking or unfollowing the former friend on social media due to finding content about the friend on social media to be emotionally triggering.</p> <p><i>Participant 17: “She deleted me and blocked me and yeah. I'm not on Instagram anymore, but we, either her or myself, like unfollowed or blocked the other person. The same on Facebook too.”</i></p>	3	16.67
	Interactions with mutual friends	<p>This refers to the experience of discussing updates about the former friend's whereabouts with mutual friends, often related to information found on social media.</p> <p><i>Participant 15: “Since I don't follow the friend anymore, sometimes I will ask mutual friends to give me updates because it is weird that I don't know what is going on for her anymore.”</i></p>	2	11.11

**Theme 5: Repercussions on Self and Other Relationships**

Participants openly discussed how the dissolution had personally and emotionally affected them, as well as its impact on their other relationships. Please see Table 5 for a breakdown of this theme.

Participants articulated a diverse array of emotional experiences following their dissolutions, encompassing a spectrum of both negative and mixed emotions. It is noteworthy that a significant number of participants expressed a combination of negative and positive or mixed emotions simultaneously.

When considering the self-reported psychological or mental health effects on participants, specifically in relation to the emotional consequences of friendship dissolution, self-doubt and questioning oneself emerged as predominant emotions in the aftermath of friendship dissolution. Numerous participants revealed that since the end of their friendships, they have grappled with persistent questions about their abilities as friends and the validity of the seeming negative judgments their former friends held against them. These ceaseless inquiries often trap participants in a cycle of overthinking and self-blame. This psychological turmoil was vividly expressed by some participants who confessed that the dissolution had caused them to regress in their personal growth, as it felt like a fundamental part of their identity had vanished along with the friendship. Participant three, for instance, shared her journey of healing, explaining that it took her approximately three years post-dissolution to "get over" the pain, coinciding with her sense of gradually reestablishing her own unique identity.

Participants in the study reported a range of negative emotions because of the dissolution including sadness, confusion, anger, and shame. For each participant, these negative feelings manifested in different ways. For example, while participants four and five described their sadness as a reaction to feeling hurt by their friend, participant six explained that her sadness

stemmed from the feeling of loneliness following the dissolution. These negative emotions were often described as being intense, to the point where some participants felt unable to discuss their experiences with others due to the overwhelming sense of shame.

In addition to the negative emotions named above, participants shared of experiencing grief and loss as well as trauma. Participant 14 vividly likened her sense of grief to the profound sorrow of losing her own father. She expressed that this grief manifested itself in recurring thoughts and a sense of longing for her former friend during significant occasions, such as birthdays and holidays. Regarding trauma, a number of participants revealed that the dissolution of their friendships had etched itself into their minds as a traumatic experience, leaving them with hazy recollections of the specific details. In addition to these accounts, two participants offered more general narratives of how the dissolution had adversely impacted their mental well-being, while three participants shared stories of improved mental health following the end of their friendships.

When discussing the complexity of mixed emotions, numerous participants expressed that, although they might experience some of the negative feelings mentioned earlier, their predominant sentiments also revolve around nostalgia and a profound sense of missing their former friend. Several participants recounted their experiences of simultaneously grappling with sadness regarding the friendship's conclusion and gratitude for the chance they had to foster that friendship in the first place. Three participants explicitly mentioned that they do not hold negative sentiments towards their ex-friend; instead, they harbor a deep sense of respect for the individual.

Four participants shared that the emotional impact of the dissolution was so strong that the experience inhabits their subconscious. They shared of regularly dreaming about the former

friend, even years later for some. Two of these participants noted that the content of the dreams usually include regular everyday conversations, which they attributed to the friendship having been so strongly a part of their everyday lives and identity prior to the dissolution. The other two participants shared that in their dreams they are feeling angry and often yelling at the friend, expressing feelings they did not get to share in their real life.

One of the most prevalent outcomes stemming from the dissolution of friendships, as shared by the participants, was the transformative effect it had on their perspectives about friendships. This often prompted them to reevaluate their previous notions about forming and maintaining friendships, resulting in a shift in their approach to new friendships. Participants gleaned several valuable insights from their experiences, including the realization that not everyone is compatible as friends, that true friends offer support in both good and bad times, that not all friendships are enduring, and that friendship dissolutions are a common occurrence. Consequently, many participants revealed that following the dissolution of a friendship, they became more deliberate and discerning in their selection of friends. A recurring sentiment expressed was the shedding of what some referred to as "rose-colored glasses." Participant four aptly used a metaphor to elucidate this concept, likening it to noticing a speck of dirt on a glass surface. Once this imperfection is observed, it becomes impossible to disregard the existence of the glass. Similarly, this participant removed her rose-colored glasses in relation to friendships, now entering into them with a heightened awareness of the lessons she had learned from her previous friendship dissolution.

While many participants experienced shifts in their views on friendships, some also mentioned how the dissolution of a friendship affected the sense of safety they felt when forming new connections. They shared that trust issues arose, making them fearful of opening up to new

friends because of the pain they had endured in the past. Participant 17 expressed that her trust in women was shattered after the dissolution of a female-female friendship. Consequently, she found it difficult to open up to women for several years, hindering her ability to make genuine friends in graduate school. Other participants mentioned being cautious about sharing certain aspects of their lives with new friends due to the specifics of their previous dissolution. For instance, participant 15 decided to withhold her opinions on a friend's significant other, while participant 11 chose to only share positive events in her life with new friends, as her former friend had failed to provide support during difficult times.

Although the dissolution of their friendship was filled with painful emotions and reactions, many participants viewed it as an opportunity for self-improvement. They expressed a sense of growth and resilience, which made them feel more mature and capable as friends. Some participants learned to trust their instincts more, speak their truth, and become more introspective and reflective individuals. Interestingly, two participants even decided to seek therapy for the first time as a result of this dissolution, where they further discovered these personal insights. Additionally, about one-third of the participants experienced a domino effect, leading to further friendship dissolutions due to their newfound understanding of friendships.

When discussing what type of support was helpful in the aftermath of the dissolution, participants named types of helpful support as well as sources of support. Most commonly among participants, validation of the feelings associated with the dissolution was found to be helpful while invalidation was found to be unhelpful. This was especially important as participants felt that society does not do a sufficient job of validating this experience. Validation from therapists, partners, family members, and friends were the sources of support that felt most important to participants. When discussing how therapist have been helpful, Participant ten

described feeling validated by their therapist because the therapist labeled the experience as a trauma. Furthermore, participant ten then engaged in EMDR with her therapist in order to work through this trauma, and they found this experience to be profoundly helpful in reducing the anxiety and self-blame associated with the dissolution. While participants named these types of supports, a common sentiment was feeling that support was lacking following the friendship dissolution and a wish for more.

Participants expressed various desires after the dissolution, in addition to seeking more support. Some participants felt that having a new friend to fill the void would alleviate the pain. Others wished for closure or a better understanding of why the friendship ended. Some mentioned wanting the opportunity to have a final conversation with their former friend to address any grievances. One participant desired greater transparency on social media regarding the dissolution, while another regretted apologizing during the time of the dissolution.

*Table 6: Repercussions on Self and Other Relationships*

<b>Theme:</b>	<b>Subtheme:</b>	<b>Description and Quotes:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% of Total N</b>
<b>(e) Repercussions on Self &amp; other relationships</b>	<b>Psychological and Emotional Impacts:</b>		18	100
	Self doubt/questioning oneself	This pertains to the introspective questioning process that occurred for many after the friendship had ended. They found themselves contemplating the credibility of their former friend's seeming negative judgments about them. To be more precise, many participants found themselves pondering their own capacity to be a good friend.  <i>Participant 8: "It just like made me second guess a lot about myself."</i>	10	55.56
	Negative emotions	Participants shared a range of negative emotions experienced after the dissolution including sadness,	18	100

		<p>confusion, anger, and shame. Additionally, several participants named grief and loss as a negative emotional experience they encountered following the dissolution. As such, participants described thinking of their friends during significant moments in their lives, like the experience of grief. Additionally, several participants shared that they have hazy memories of the experience because it was so emotionally painful that they consider it to have been a trauma.</p> <p><i>Participant 14: "I think it was similar in the sense of like, I felt like there was kind of the process of grief, of like, oh, now I'm living my life and this person who was very important to me and had known many of the details from my life for five years is no longer in my life, and will no longer know those details going forward."</i></p>		
	Improved mental health	<p>This refers to the general experience of improved mental well-being described by some participants.</p> <p><i>Participant 9: "I think my mental health has gotten better without like having to worry about what she said or over analyzing what she has said or done."</i></p>	3	16.67
	Decreased mental health	<p>This refers to the general experience of decreased mental well-being described by two participants.</p> <p><i>Participant 8: "It really took like a real toll on like my mental health and like my self esteem."</i></p>	2	11.11
	Loss of identity/ regression	<p>This refers to the emotional experience of feeling as if you have regressed in life following the dissolution because of losing a part of your identity.</p> <p><i>Participant 3: "I remember saying this felt like a marriage, and I feel like I just got divorced. It felt like I lost a part of myself."</i></p>	4	22.22
	Secret because of shame	<p>This refers to the experience of many who felt so much shame following their dissolution that they felt the need to keep the experience a secret.</p> <p><i>Participant 17: "And I felt shame, and so I didn't tell anyone."</i></p>	6	33.33



	Inhabits subconscious	<p>This refers to the experience of dreaming about the former friend after the dissolution because of the strong emotional impact.</p> <p><i>Participant 2: "I still dream about her... In the dreams I am just like seeing her, and like kind of catching up with her. I always feel really sad in the dreams. I always just feel sort of abandoned."</i></p>	4	22.22
	Attend therapy	<p>This refers to the decision to start therapy to specifically discuss the emotional impact of the friendship dissolution.</p> <p><i>Participant 10: "So I would say that going back to therapy was a bit of like a repercussion of the dissolution of the friendship. I ended up doing EMDR with my therapist to process, this event"</i></p>	2	11.11
	Nostalgia and gratitude	<p>This refers to the predominant sentiment by some of missing and feeling nostalgic about their friendship. Specifically, many participants described feeling appreciative of the good times they had together with their former friend. Many also described still having deep respect for their former friend and wishing them well.</p> <p><i>Participant 6: "I also feel nostalgic of that friendship, especially because my boyfriend right now has a lot of childhood friends."</i></p>	10	55.56
	Mixed feelings	<p>This refers to the experience of having mixed feelings of both sadness that the friendship is over, but happiness that it happened.</p> <p><i>Participant 14: "I would say definitely there were moments where I felt sad about it, like, you know, when it was their birthday, I felt a little sad about it, but I also felt like, okay, you know, we had a really nice friendship that I am thankful for."</i></p>	7	38.89
	<b>Implications on other relationships:</b>		18	100
	Re-evaluate previous views on friendships	<p>This refers to the changing of previous perspectives on friendships. This included realizations about friendships such as: the realization that not everyone</p>	7	38.89

		<p>is compatible as friends, true friends offer support in both good and bad times, not all friendships are enduring, and that friendship dissolutions are a common occurrence.</p> <p><i>Participant 7: "Before, I thought I could grow with all friends, and that if the communication was lost because of distance or because of time, there was still a friendship that I could go back to always. I thought that about friendship before... now, I think of friendships as another type of relationship that can end."</i></p>		
	Took off rose colored glasses	<p>This refers to the experience of seeing flaws in the friendship that cannot be unseen. Often the realizations from the former friendship extend to future friendships.</p> <p><i>Participant 13: "I have learned to see the signs and red flags in the beginning with new friends. I'm going to just cut it off right then and there if I see what I saw in my ex-friend. I used to ignore the red flags, but now I see them."</i></p>	9	50
	More intentional when selecting new friends	<p>This refers to the impact of viewing friendships differently than before, and subsequently choosing new friends more intentionally.</p>	5	27.78
	Impact on trust	<p>This refers to the experience explained by participants whereby they felt distrustful when entering new friendships. For some, this meant entering new relationships with the intention of holding back on what and how much they share with the new friend.</p> <p><i>Participant 8: "Now, I'm just more cautious about like the people, or try to be more cautious, about the people that I surround myself with."</i></p>	10	55.56
	Domino effect	<p>This refers to the dissolution of additional friendships following the end of an initial friendship.</p> <p><i>Participant 11: "I think one important piece was that it shifted my social circle. It made certain people pick a side, and that was quite excruciating and very isolating. Other friendships ended as a result of this one."</i></p>	6	33.33

	Self-Improvement	<p>This refers to the experience by several participants where they felt the friendship dissolution led to growth and resilience that they were then able to extend to new friendships and relationships. Participants described trusting their instincts more, speaking their truth, and being more introspective and reflective when entering new relationships.</p> <p><i>Participant 15: "I think I am a better friend now because I went through this and have learned to trust my instincts."</i></p>	10	55.56
	<b>Support Dynamics:</b>		14	77.78
	Validation	<p>Participants reported that validation of the emotional experience felt like the most helpful type of support.</p> <p><i>Participant 1: "I really prefer when I get sort of like a "that sucks I'm sorry" response. I don't love like a constructive "here's what you could do next" response. I'm not asking for advice. There's nothing, I don't feel like there's really anything to be done. I just want like someone to say like, "that's weird and painful, like I'm sorry to hear that."</i></p>	10	55.56
	Sources of support: therapists, friends, family members, partners	<p>Participants named their therapist, friends, family members and partners as primary sources of support and validation.</p> <p><i>Participant 18: "I really, really am so happy that I was in therapy at the time. That helped a lot."</i></p>	13	72.22
	<b>Desires and wishes following the dissolution:</b>		14	77.78
	More support	<p>This refers to the desire for more support following the dissolution because of a lack.</p> <p><i>Participant 2: "I had support from friends, but I wish I had more, and that they knew more about what I was going through."</i></p>	9	50
	Replacement friend	<p>This refers to the desire to make a new friend with the same level of intimacy as the former friend to serve as a replacement.</p>	2	11.11

		<i>Participant 16: "Maybe if I get another friend like him then it will stop hurting. Right now, it still hurts."</i>		
	Closure	This refers to the wish for a final conversation with the former friend to provide answers and closure.  <i>Participant 15: "And it's just like, I'll never be able to like really get that closure that I ultimately want."</i>	10	55.56
	Honesty on social media	This refers to the desire for the former friend to be honest on social media rather than posting as if the two are still friends.  <i>Participant 5: "I wish she didn't get to keep pretending everything was fine on social media after what she did to me."</i>	1	5.56
	Regret apologizing	This refers to one participant's wish that they had not apologized to the former friend in the past during the time of the dissolution.  <i>Participant 18: "I wish I hadn't apologized to her because in retrospect I know that she was wrong, and I did not need to feel bad about myself and give in."</i>	1	5.56

### **Theme 6: Comparison of Friendship and Romantic Relationship Dissolutions**

The experience of friendship dissolution was compared with the experience of romantic relationship dissolution with participants discerning both commonalities and differences between these two forms of dissolutions. Please see Table 6 for a breakdown of this theme.

When examining the parallels between the termination of friendships and romantic relationships, participants emphasized their prevalence among emerging adults, the similarity in emotional experiences involved, and the comparable patterns that unfold in both scenarios. In the realm of emotional experiences, many participants underscored common feelings such as loss, pain, heartbreak, lingering unresolved emotions, grief, and the repercussions on other relationships and daily life. These emotional facets were frequently reported, given that both friendship and romantic relationships were often described as equally intimate. Furthermore, in

terms of the pathways leading to dissolution, two participants observed that these two distinct types of separations could manifest in similar ways, including occurrences like ghosting and drifting over time.

When discussing the distinctions between friendship dissolutions and romantic dissolutions, participants highlighted a key differentiator: the way society normalizes and acknowledges these experiences. It became evident that participants believed that society places a more significant emphasis on romantic dissolutions, while friendship dissolutions receive relatively limited recognition and associated expectations. Participants noted that because romantic dissolutions are widely accepted and normalized, friends going through a friendship dissolution are not held to the same standards or expectations of communication during conflicts. Consequently, individuals grappling with the end of a friendship often find themselves facing more unanswered questions and confusion compared to the relatively straightforward and direct nature of romantic dissolutions. Moreover, the emotional aftermath of friendship dissolutions tends to lack the validation that is often extended to their romantic counterparts. Additionally, participants pointed out that emotional support is generally scarcer for those navigating the challenges of friendship dissolutions.

When participants compared the levels of pain experienced during friendship and romantic dissolutions, their responses were varied. Some participants argued that romantic dissolutions were more painful, primarily due to the exclusivity often associated with romantic relationships. In the context of a romantic dissolution, individuals typically don't have other romantic partners, intensifying the emotional impact. Conversely, when ending a friendship, most people still have other friends to turn to for support. On the flip side, several participants contended that friendship dissolutions were, in fact, more distressing than romantic ones.

Participant 18, for instance, articulated this viewpoint by suggesting that, during emerging adulthood, people tend to invest more in their friendships than their romantic relationships. This heightened investment can result in deeper emotional connections with friends, making the dissolution of a friendship more acutely painful for some individuals.

A range of perspectives emerged regarding the influence of one's romantic relationship status on the experience of friendship dissolution. Two participants firmly expressed that their relationship status had no impact on their friendships. In contrast, several participants held the belief that the nature of one relationship could overshadow the importance of the other. For instance, Participant eight explained that drifting apart from a friend didn't affect her as much as it could have because she was in a romantic relationship at the time. Participant three went as far as to say that due to the depth of her close friendship, she had no interest in dating at that time as her emotional needs were fully met by the friendship.

Moreover, 5 participants pointed out that during a dissolution, whether it involved a romantic partner or a friend, having the other type of relationship typically provided vital support during challenging times. For example, Participant 12 revealed that their friendship dissolution would have been far more difficult if they hadn't had their romantic partner to lean on. Conversely, Participant 18 felt that their friendship dissolution was more challenging than it would have been if they had been in a romantic relationship at the time for additional support. Interestingly, Participant 8 also emphasized the reciprocity of support in these relationships by highlighting how their friend had assisted them through a romantic dissolution.

*Table 7: Comparisons of Friendship and Romantic Dissolutions*

<b>Theme:</b>	<b>Subtheme:</b>	<b>Description and quotes:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% of Total participants</b>
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<b>(f) Comparison of Friendship &amp; Romantic Dissolutions</b>	<b>Similarities:</b>		15	83.33
	Prevalent among emerging adults	<p>This refers to participants taking note of their belief that both romantic and friendship dissolution are common during this developmental stage.</p> <p><i>Participant 18: “Both types of breakups happen a lot at this age, and friendship breakups are particularly hard because it is a time in life when friendships are more important than romantic relationships for many people.”</i></p>	2	11.11
	Similar emotional experiences	<p>This refers to the similarity in emotional experiences of both types of dissolutions, with common feelings such as loss, pain, heartbreak, lingering feelings, grief, and repercussions on other relationships in daily life.</p> <p><i>Participant 3: “I remember girls going through breakups, and explaining what it felt like, and I was like I know exactly how you feel. I know exactly exactly how you feel. And I'd explain the feeling, and they would be like yeah yeah yeah, how do you know that feeling. I would be like, well I broke up with my friend.”</i></p>	13	72.22
	Comparable patterns and pathways	<p>This refers to the similar ways in which the dissolution may occur, such as ghosting or drifting over time.</p> <p><i>Participant 12: “In a way she kind of ghosted, like was starting to ghost me. It’s just like when a guy starts to get one wordy in responses. Like, I feel like that’s similar to what it is in a relationship breakup.”</i></p>	2	11.11
	<b>Differences:</b>		14	77.78
	Normalization of Romantic Dissolution	<p>This refers to society’s normalization and acknowledgement of the experience of romantic dissolution compared to friendship dissolution.</p> <p><i>Participant 2: “I think in society there's no conversation about friendships ending, or the way that it impacts someone. You know, I think there's all this conversation about like romantic breakups and what you can do and like how that impacts you and</i></p>	8	44.44

		<i>all this stuff. I feel like there's really no conversation about friendships ending even though I think it's a very common experience and people often experience it as a really painful ending."</i>		
	Different standards of communication	<p>This refers to society's expectation that communication is warranted when conflict arises in a romantic relationship. This expectation is not extended to friendships, which consequently leaves individuals going through a friendship dissolution more confused as compared to going through a romantic dissolution, which generally entails more clear communication.</p> <p><i>Participant 4: Romantic relationships are usually more direct. I feel like with this it was more of like a fade type of thing...whereas I feel like in in a romantic relationship, it's like I need it to more be like, now what? And then it's clearer boundaries of like this was this, and now it's this."</i></p>	8	44.44
	Romantic dissolution more painful	<p>This refers to participants who expressed the belief that romantic dissolutions are more painful than friendship dissolutions because of the exclusivity generally expected in a romantic relationship. Alternatively, people are expected to have more than one friend, so they can turn to their other friends for support following a friendship dissolution.</p> <p><i>Participant 7: "I just feel that romantic relationship breakups are more painful than the friendship."</i></p>	2	11.11
	Friendship dissolution more painful	<p>This refers to participants who expressed the belief that friendship dissolutions are more painful than romantic dissolutions. Some participants believed this is because during emerging adulthood many people are more emotionally invested in their friendships as compared to their romantic partners.</p> <p><i>Participant 16: "I think friendship breakups hurt more, because friendships usually last longer, so it hurts more. So when friendships end, they end really badly."</i></p>	3	16.67
	<b>Relationship Status:</b>		10	55.56



	Status has no impact	<p>This refers to the belief that romantic relationship status had no impact on the experience of friendship dissolution.</p> <p><i>“Participant 7: “I don't think it had an effect because when we were still friends, I had a romantic relationship, and she also had one...So, I think it didn't really have effect on our friendship because we were both in relationships.”</i></p>	2	11.11
	One type of relationship makes the other type less important	<p>This belief pertains to the notion that when individuals are deeply involved in a close relationship, whether it's a friendship or a romantic one, they tend to prioritize one type of relationship over the other. For instance, some might argue that when they have a romantic partner, they may rely less on their friends for emotional support, or conversely, they may prioritize their friendships over their romantic relationship for emotional connection and support</p> <p><i>Participant 4: “So I think that like had I been in a relationship at a time, then it probably would have made it less hard because there was just like other people to like go to for support.”</i></p>	5	27.78
	One type of relationship provides support for the dissolution of the other	<p>This concept revolves around the notion that during the dissolution of one type of relationship, whether it's a friendship or a romantic partnership, individuals have the option to seek solace and support in their other existing relationship. In other words, when someone experiences the breakdown of a friendship, they may lean on their romantic partner for support, and conversely, when a romantic relationship faces challenges, they can seek solace from their friends.</p> <p><i>Participant 6: “When I started to date the other dude, it was like a new beginning, and I started doing things. I started, like, spending more time with him. That was a close relationship. I liked close relationships, and I was having that close relationship with him rather than with her. This made the loss easier.”</i></p>	5	27.78

**Theme 7: Commonality of Experience in Contrast to Societal Expectations**

Participants observed that the phenomenon of friendship dissolution was a shared experience, despite society not yet fully embracing or normalizing it. Some participants specifically mentioned their discussions with the researcher in relation to this concept. Please refer to Table 7 for a breakdown of this theme.

When reflecting on their discussions with the researcher about friendship dissolution, many shared mixed feelings about engaging in this conversation. The predominant sentiment among them was a sense of discomfort, stemming from the realization that discussing friendship dissolution is not a common or normalized topic in our society. Participant ten expressed surprise that even years after the dissolution, she still felt her eyes water as she spoke of the experience. Participant 16 reported that this was his first time ever speaking of his experience out loud, because in his culture these types of experiences are not spoken about. However, amidst this discomfort, three participants expressed their hopes that this research would play a part in normalizing and validating the phenomenon of friendship dissolution. They wished for a future where open and transparent conversations about these experiences would be more widely welcomed. Participant five described the experience of discussing friendship dissolution as "refreshing," suggesting that this kind of dialogue could be cathartic and beneficial.

Furthermore, it became apparent that the universality and commonality of friendship dissolutions resonated with participants. Participants noted feeling comforted when realizing that they are not alone in this experience, because they noticed that other people also go through dissolutions of friendships. One participant even named how she feels this experience is particularly common for those in her stage of life, young adulthood. Additionally, one third of the participants acknowledged having experienced multiple friendship dissolutions, not just the

one they discussed for the study. This further highlighted the significance and relevance of the research in exploring a widespread and relatable aspect of human relationships.

*Table 8: Commonality of Experience in Contrast to Societal Expectations*

<b>Theme:</b>	<b>Subtheme:</b>	<b>Description and Quotes:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% of Total N</b>
<b>(g) Commonality of Experience in Contrast to Societal Expectations</b>			14	77.78
	Discomfort during interview	<p>This refers to the discomfort that several participants felt when in the interview because the topic is not normalized to discuss in society.</p> <p><i>Participant 10: I guess I feel like the discomfort like a pinch more than I thought I would during this interview. I feel like maybe I'm at like a 4 out of 10 and I probably would have expected to be at like a 2.5."</i></p>	4	22.22
	Desire for more conversations	<p>This pertains to the notion that there should be increased dialogue surrounding the dissolution of friendships to offer solace to those who have undergone this experience.</p> <p><i>Participant 1: "I think that sort of overarching picture of like you grow apart from people as you get older and that is a weird process to navigate that we don't really talk about has definitely been something that friends have related to... It does feel like it's not really spoken about... I think it would be nice if it was spoken about a little bit more."</i></p>	6	33.33
	Hope that the research will normalize	<p>This concept pertains to the shared sentiment among several participants, which was their optimism that this research will contribute to the broader objective of making the recognition of this experience more commonplace.</p> <p><i>Participant 17: "I was so interested in your project because I know so many people who have gone through a dissolution of a friendship, but haven't spoken about it to anyone. Maybe in therapy. I don't</i></p>	3	16.67

		<i>hear it as a common topic. And I think that it's important to talk about in society because there are many different things that can cause like trust issues, or abandonment issues. It's not just romantic relationships. "</i>		
	Universality of friendship dissolution	This refers to the sentiment that friendship dissolution is a common and universal experience.  <i>Participant 2: "I have some friends who I can think of who've like had similar experiences, where like one person just kind of started pulling away. And from talking to other friends who've experienced that, like it's been like a really upsetting thing for all of them... But I think in society there's like no conversation about friendships ending."</i>	3	16.67
	Experienced multiple dissolutions	This refers to the disclosure of one third of the participants that the friendship dissolution they spoke about in the interview was not the only significant friendship dissolution they had been through.  <i>Participant 6: "I have another friendship dissolution that I went through, not only this one."</i>	6	33.33

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the experience of friendship dissolution among emerging adults (ages 18-25). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first qualitative phenomenological study to exclusively focus on emerging adult experiences of friendship dissolution. It recognized that high-quality friendships have a positive impact on well-being (Friedlander et al., 2007), and play a crucial role in the lives of emerging adults who are going through a unique developmental transition (Arnette, 2006; McNamara Barry et al., 2014). While friendships are known to be important during this period, research on the dissolution of these friendships is lacking. The study aimed to fill this gap by investigating the "what" and "how" of friendship dissolution experiences in this age group, including the

reasons for the dissolution, the processes involved, and the emotional and identity-related implications.

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to collect data through responses to interview questions about *close* and *best* friendship dissolutions during emerging adulthood. By shedding light on this underexplored aspect of development, the research sought to increase awareness of friendship dissolution during this crucial period, which has been largely overshadowed by the focus on romantic dissolution (Belu et al., 2016). The open-ended inquiry utilized encouraged participants to recount their entire journey from the inception of their close or best friendship to its eventual dissolution and their subjective experiences thereafter. This methodology facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, capturing its intricacies and subtleties. While many findings from the study corroborated existing literature on friendship and dissolution, several novel insights emerged, shedding light on aspects hitherto unexplored in the limited research available.

Seven themes were identified from semi-structured interviews with emerging adults: (a) definition of close/best friendship (b) underlying reasons for the dissolution (c) pathways to the dissolution (d) current state of the relationship (e) repercussions on self & other relationships (f) comparison of friendship and romantic dissolutions, and (g) commonality of the experience in contrast to societal expectations.

### **Findings Consistent with Previous Research**

The study results confirm prior research on some of the reasons for friendship dissolution, emphasizing practical factors like physical distance and infrequent interactions, alongside emotional aspects such as diverging interests (Flannery & Smith, 2021; Rose, 1984). Consistent with Arnette (2000), participants in this study commonly cited differences in values and priorities as overarching reasons, reflecting normative identity shifts in emerging adulthood.

Detailed accounts revealed how friendships ceased to serve their original purposes, echoing findings on young adults' cost/benefit evaluations of friendships before termination (Apostolou & Keramari, 2022). Specific conflicts often coincided with communication breakdowns, such as a friend's absence at a mother's funeral, reflecting prior research on conflict scenarios and relationship dissolution (McDonald & Asher, 2012; Santucci et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the study findings resonate with existing literature on the psychological and emotional impacts of friendship dissolution on emerging adults (Bagwell et al., 2005; Cambron et al., 2009; Miething et al., 2016; Nezlek et al., 1994; Sakye et al., 2014; Sweson et al., 2008), highlighting correlations with symptoms such as self-doubt, depression, and anxiety. The current findings also echo established correlations (Bagwell et al., 2005) linking negative shifts in friendships to heightened interpersonal sensitivity symptoms, such as feelings of inferiority

Participants' reflections when comparing romantic and friendship dissolutions align with existing literature on relationship dissolution for emerging adults. This alignment is evident in both the emotional toll of these dissolutions (Davila et al., 2004; Kansky & Allen, 2017; McKieran, et al., 2018 Rhoades et al., 2011; Rollie & Duck, 2006; Sbarra & Emery, 2005; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003) and the various pathways that lead to their unraveling (Belu et al., 2016; Fox & Tokanuga, 2015; Hawkins & Booth, 2005).

### **New Findings**

Despite echoing established literature on friendship dynamics in emerging adulthood, the study results offers fresh perspectives on various aspects of friendship evolution and dissolution for emerging adults. In this study, participants engaged in face-to-face discussions about their experiences with friendship dissolution, an approach that allowed for in-depth discussion. This prompted them to reflect on the act of sharing such experiences, leading to a deeper understanding of their feelings. Many expressed discomfort discussing their friendship

dissolution with the researcher, with some admitting it was their first time doing so with anyone. This discomfort prompted further introspection into the societal norms surrounding friendship in emerging adulthood. Participants recognized that while friendship dissolution is a common experience during this life stage, it is often overlooked or dismissed by society, contributing to the discomfort in discussing it openly. Understanding this aspect of friendship dissolution can inform clinical practice.

The study results also provided a comprehensive exploration of factors contributing to the designation of friendships as close or best among emerging adults, a dimension not extensively covered in previous research. By delving into the practical and emotional elements shaping friendship closeness, the study enriches our understanding of the nuanced dynamics involved in friendship quality among this demographic. Specifically, the study adds complexity by revealing the simultaneous existence of practical and emotional elements in friendship closeness for emerging adults, a nuance not previously emphasized.

While some of the findings from this study echoed established literature on friendship dynamics in emerging adulthood, others offer fresh perspectives on how friendships evolve during this transitional phase and their profound influence on personal growth and identity shaping. Recognizing emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental stage marked by unique challenges such as identity development and self-focus (Arnett, 2006; Norona et al, 2016), the current study captured these realities concerning how emerging adults identified close and best friends. Participants' narratives of close friendships as integral to their identities and sources of personal growth contribute to the literature on friendship's role in identity formation and fulfillment of interdependence needs for emerging adults. This emphasizes the significance of close friendships in facilitating the transition to adulthood and adds nuance to existing theories

on the developmental functions of friendships. Such nuanced insights were made possible in the study because of the emphasis on allowing participants to openly respond without restriction, a methodological approach that distinguishes this study from traditional survey-based quantitative research, enabling a richer exploration of participants' experiences.

The study findings also revealed the multifaceted reasons for friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood, challenging prior research that often sought singular causes for friendship breakdowns (Apostolou & Keramari, 2022; Johnson et al., 2004; Rose, 1984). Instead, the findings highlight the simultaneous presence of multiple factors contributing to dissolution simultaneously and emphasize the need for a more nuanced understanding of the dissolution process among emerging adults. The research results specifically underscored the complex interplay of emotional and practical factors leading to the dissolution of friendships among emerging adults. Participants described a multitude of reasons, highlighting how various factors often coexist and contribute simultaneously to the breakdown of these relationships. Participants in this study revealed the intricate dynamics of conflict and communication struggles leading to friendship dissolution, a depth not captured in prior research lacking open-ended exploration. For example, they elucidated various factors such as communication mismatches and interpersonal dissonance, sometimes stemming from competitiveness, jealousy, judgment, and cultural disparities. They also described how these challenges were at times further exacerbated by lack of reciprocity, an awareness that became particularly evident for some during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study provided participants with an opportunity to narrate their experiences of friendship dissolutions from start to finish, revealing subtle transitions leading to dissolution that were previously overlooked. Unlike prior research, this study shed light on a new notion: a shift



in perception of friends emerged as a crucial factor in friendship breakdowns. For instance, Participant Six's metaphor of "removing her rose-colored glasses" poignantly captured her realization of her friend's behaviors not aligning with what she considered to be genuine friendship, a sentiment echoed by four others. This concept of discarding idealized views of friends seems to be a unique catalyst for friendship dissolution not captured in previous literature. Moreover, some participants noted a change in their attitude towards friendships upon realizing that their friends offered only one type of support, either consistently positive or negative. This finding extends previous research, as such a specific reason for friendship dissolution has not been identified before. The gradual shift in perception of friends, as illuminated by participants in the study through a detailed description of the timeline of the dissolution, may be understood through a developmental perspective. Just as emerging adults explore new ideas and reassess prior beliefs, it's reasonable to expect similar dynamics in their friendships.

The innovative focus on the experience of friendship dissolution in relation to romantic relationships in this study allowed for a novel finding related to reasons for friendship dissolution that expands upon the evolving significance of romantic relationships on friendship dissolution, as emphasized in Apostolou & Keramari's (2022) study. By prompting participants to reflect on the parallels between the termination of romantic relationships and friendships, and considering how their relationship status influenced their friendships, this research uncovered a nuanced interplay between romantic and platonic connections among emerging adults. The current study was able to implicate the importance of prioritization of romantic relationships for emerging adults in considering friendship stability. Specifically, the study results revealed that differing priorities regarding romantic relationships can significantly strain friendships, ultimately leading

to their dissolution. While some participants expressed the belief that strong friendships diminish the importance of romantic relationships, and vice versa, the prioritization of different relationship types emerged as a prominent factor in friendship breakdown. This finding aligns with the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, during which individuals begin to discern and articulate their own values (Arnett, 2006; Norona et al., 2016).

The openness to all experiences of friendship dissolution in this study allowed participants to share unknowns related to their dissolution. Notably, a number of participants highlighted instances in which their friendships dissolved inexplicably without apparent reasons. Two participants shared accounts of friends who suddenly withdrew from their entire social circles, leaving them bewildered by the lack of explanation. Notably, 38.89% of participants admitted to being unable to identify a clear cause for the dissolution of their friendships. This revelation, previously overlooked in more narrowly focused research, underscores the importance of embracing complexity in understanding the reasons for friendship dissolution for emerging adults, and also acknowledging that much of the experience may be unclear or unknown.

The complexity in the experience of pathways to dissolution among emerging adults was previously hypothesized by both Vieth et al. (2022) and Apostolou (2023), yet remained elusive in their respective studies. They investigated friendship dissolution strategies among emerging adults and identified the use of active or passive approaches. This study advances this existing research by uncovering that participants frequently described a mix of several pathways to dissolution simultaneously. This was made possible because participants were prompted to vividly recount the dissolution process, enabling a deeper comprehension of the experience that wasn't confined to a singular potential pathway. Compared to both Vieth et al. (2022) and

Apostolou (2023)'s findings, participants in this study reported employing a mixture of unspoken pathways (e.g., no explicit conversation marking the end) and a multitude of spoken pathways (e.g., involving direct communication) to navigate the dissolution process, rather than adhering strictly to either active or passive approaches.

The study explored the realm of unspoken communication pathways to dissolution, shedding light on the utilization of indirect methods, such as "ghosting," gradual decreases in communication, and shifts in engagement levels. Participants shared how these pathways, while subtle, often lead to confusion, potential denial, and a yearning for closure. The intricate descriptions provided by the participants not only validated previous research on these pathways (Apostolou, 2023; Kullar, Kirmayer & Dirks, 2021; Rose, 1984), but also introduced a nuanced understanding that prompts further inquiry into the emerging adult experience of unspoken pathways to dissolution. For instance, one might ponder whether the complete and direct termination of friendships for emerging adults poses similar challenges to the indirect or partial losses, as observed among adolescents by Bowker (2010).

This study also offered a fresh perspective on the breakdown of friendships through spoken means by capturing the various ways communication can fail during the dissolution process as a whole for emerging adults. It was found that unsuccessful communication attempts were prevalent, shedding light on a previously overlooked aspect of friendship dissolution. While prior studies have highlighted deliberate conversations as a common method for ending friendships among young adults (Apostolou, 2023; Vieth et al., 2022), none have yet been able to elucidate on the process of communication attempts outside of one deliberate conversation. For instance, participants described how confrontations frequently resulted in defensiveness, while some friends opted to avoid dialogue altogether. Additionally, instances were cited where

individuals resorted to blocking each other on social media to circumvent discussion—a tactic that was previously found to be particularly challenging for emerging adults given the generally positive impact of online communication on their relationships, fostering increased closeness, intimacy, and meaningful connections (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; McKinlay et al., 2022).

The findings offer a deeper comprehension of the emotional intricacies involved in friendship dissolution among emerging adults, highlighting the need for tailored therapeutic interventions to address these experiences. While previous research has addressed the psychological and emotional effects of friendship dissolutions on this demographic (Bagwell et al., 2005; Cambron et al., 2009; Miething et al., 2016; Nezlek et al., 1994; Sakye et al., 2014; Sweson et al., 2008), this study takes a step further by delving deeper into emotional experiences. The myriad of emotional experiences post-dissolution for emerging adults was unveiled, which were previously oversimplified in research as past studies did not fully capture the complex mix of emotions that occur for emerging adults during and post-dissolution. It uncovered enduring effects of the dissolution on emerging adults such as recurrent dreams and shifts in self-perception. It also captured the mix of both positive and negative emotions that follow friendship dissolution for emerging adults, an idea that has been studied extensively in regard to romantic relationship dissolution where post-dissolution growth has been a focus of research for some time now (McKieran, et al., 2018; Norona et al., 2016; Tashiro & Frazier, 2003).

Drawing from Bowlby's (1979) comparison of relationship terminations to experiences of grief, encompassing both romantic and platonic relationships, we can interpret what a number of participants articulated about their emotional aftermath as marked by feelings of loss, grief, and trauma. This nuanced understanding was facilitated by the study's unrestricted approach to

emotional exploration, which enabled participants to convey intricate descriptions of their emotional states. By intentionally excluding individuals experiencing clinical conditions in this study, including moderate-severe anxiety or depression, and those with suicidality, the results of this study can plausibly attribute the emotional implications directly to the experience of friendship dissolution rather than other mental health factors.

The inquiry inviting participants to describe the aftermath of the dissolution offered an opportunity for a detailed exploration of the range of post-dissolution interactions, a concept previously investigated by Flannery et al. (2022) in the context of adolescents but not in the context of emerging adults. Flannery et al. (2022) found that adolescents who maintained regular contact with former friends in school reported heightened positive emotions and shorter periods of negative feelings following the dissolution. However, given the distinct nature of emerging adult friendships, where social interactions extend beyond the school environment, this study delved into the dynamics of post-dissolution contact and its impact on emerging adults, an experience notably different from that of adolescents.

The study then sheds light on a fresh perspective regarding the dynamics of social media interactions post-friendship dissolution among emerging adults. It is plausible to suggest that social media interactions have assumed heightened significance for emerging adults, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. With face-to-face interactions constrained during the pandemic, many participants highlighted its substantial influence on their friendships and subsequent dissolutions.

Following friendship dissolution, social media interactions emerged as a significant part of participants' experiences, as noted by 50% of the participants, underscoring a notable trend. For some, social media served as the primary avenue for maintaining contact or awareness of

former friends, devoid of face-to-face interactions. Conversely, a fraction recounted distressing encounters with ex-friends on social media, leading them to take active measures like blocking or unfollowing to mitigate emotional distress. Intriguingly, these findings contrast with Pancani et al.'s (2022) findings, suggesting that emerging adults who sustain social media connections post-dissolution tend to experience diminished negative mental health impacts compared to those who sever contact completely. This divergence may be attributed to the fact that half of our participants did not provide any comprehensive accounts of their post-dissolution social media interactions, perhaps because they were not specifically asked to do so. This raises the crucial question of whether social media interactions post-dissolution represent a multifaceted experience for emerging adults, wherein some individuals derive value from online connections while others perceive them as detrimental to their well-being.

No prior studies have yet captured the experience post-dissolution for emerging adults in relation to how they form new friendships. Participants in this study indicated that their experience of friendship dissolution profoundly impacted their attitudes when entering new friendships. It also shed light on a potential common transition among emerging adults—a shift in how they initiate new friendships, a transition not typically acknowledged in research as part of this inherently transitory developmental phase. This resonates with the developmental phase of emerging adulthood, characterized by identity exploration (Arnette, 2000), and deepens our understanding of the interplay between friendship and identity development in this demographic, and opens many avenues of focus for therapists and researchers. It also prompts inquiries into the influence of friendships on attachment among emerging adults, extending upon Chow and Ruhl's (2014) observations on attachment. They suggested that just as early attachment experiences shape future interpersonal dynamics, friendships play a pivotal role in establishing

secure attachment representations in later life stages, seemingly also during emerging adulthood based on descriptions of participants in this study.

This study offered a unique contribution to the field by directly investigating the varying pain levels experienced by emerging adults when navigating the dissolution of both friendships and romantic relationships. While the findings revealed a mixed experience of pain when comparing the two types of dissolution, with some participants suggesting that friendship dissolutions were less painful due to their perceived lower level of exclusivity compared to romantic breakups, and others indicating more pain due to their stronger emotional ties to friends than to romantic partners during this phase of life, these diverse perspectives validate the notion that friendship dissolution can still evoke significant emotional distress, highlighting the need for validation of such losses in society and in the clinical space. This is especially crucial given participants' emphasis on the differing societal attitudes toward these two types of dissolutions: society tends to validate romantic dissolutions more and also provides scripts and expectations of communication for romantic dissolution, unlike friendship dissolution.

Lastly, prior to this study, there was a gap in the research concerning the specific type of support beneficial for emerging adults following the dissolution of a friendship. Supportive sources identified in this study included therapists, partners, family, and friends. At a minimum, practitioners can take from participant descriptions the importance of validating the experience in therapy.

### **Clinical Implications**

Emerging adults engaged eagerly in study interviews, displaying a blend of vulnerability and enthusiasm that was palpable. Their genuine openness allowed for a rich portrayal of their experiences, offering mental health professionals valuable insights with direct clinical relevance. While college counseling remains a prevalent focus for practitioners, it's crucial to acknowledge

that therapists, regardless of their primary specialization, will inevitably encounter young adults throughout their careers. Therefore, cultivating a deeper understanding of this demographic and the unique stressors they face during this developmental phase can significantly enhance therapeutic efficacy.

One key finding highlighted throughout the interviews is the crucial importance of broader societal recognition of this phenomenon in the mainstream discourse on relationship dissolution. Participants expressed a strong desire for validation and emphasized the significant benefits it brings. Interestingly, some noted that simply being part of the study felt therapeutic, as it validated their experiences and struggles, reassuring them that researchers were actively acknowledging the profound existence of and impact of friendship dissolution. Normalizing this phenomenon through psycho-education for both young adults and mental health practitioners, emphasizing its complexity and individual variability as evidenced by this research, could greatly benefit emerging adults struggling with confusion, shame, trust issues, self-doubt, identity crises, and sometimes improved mental health following such losses. This can convey to emerging adult clients that therapy offers a secure environment to openly explore the challenges surrounding the dissolution of friendships. Several participants expressed the notion that they felt compelled to conceal their experiences for various reasons, highlighting the importance of providing a safe and supportive space for discussing such matters.

Given the prevalence and significant impact of friendship dissolutions on the mental well-being of emerging adults, it is advisable for mental health professionals to incorporate inquiries about friendship stability and dissolution into their initial assessments with this demographic. Additionally, it may be beneficial to include this aspect in assessment tools commonly used with emerging adults. For example, integrating a relationship distress subscale



into assessment instruments tailored to college populations could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by emerging adults in their interpersonal relationships.

Practitioners would benefit from employing a trauma and grief-informed perspective when working with emerging adults navigating friendship dissolutions. Each individual's lived experience of such events varies, necessitating practitioners to refrain from assuming that friendship dissolution invariably constitutes trauma while remaining open to this possibility. The current study highlights that some emerging adults do perceive friendship dissolution as a loss, trauma, or akin to grief. Participants revealed the profound impact of their loss, often experiencing recurring dreams involving their former friend, reminiscent of PTSD nightmares. Notably, one participant shared her transformative experience with EMDR therapy targeting the friendship dissolution, suggesting the potential effectiveness of trauma-based therapeutic protocols tailored for emerging adults coping with such relational losses.

Given the frequently unspoken nature of friendship dissolutions extensively discussed in this study, emerging adults could greatly benefit from acquiring specific communication skills to navigate such situations. Unlike in romantic relationships where direct communication is often expected to terminate the relationship, societal norms surrounding friendship strains lack clear communication expectations. Consequently, many young adults experiencing friendship dissolutions find themselves bewildered and longing for closure, as highlighted in the study. With this awareness, practitioners can offer more effective guidance to clients undergoing friendship dissolutions, empowering them to communicate about conflicts more adeptly and seek closure in a healthier manner.

Finally, considering the enduring repercussions of friendship dissolution outlined by participants, clinicians should not assume that past instances of friendship dissolution no longer

deeply affect their clients. Many recounted the lasting impact, with even study interviews stirring unexpected emotions years later. Contrary to assumptions, friendships serve as crucial attachment figures for emerging adults, shaping their future relationship dynamics (Chow & Ruhl, 2014), a sentiment echoed by participants who found their dissolution experiences profoundly influencing subsequent relationships. Thus, clinicians should inquire about their clients' experiences with friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood, even if they've progressed beyond that developmental stage.

### **Study Limitations, Strengths, and Directions for Future Research**

When interpreting the study results, it's important to acknowledge several limitations. Firstly, the findings may lack comprehensive consideration of cultural, gender, and sexuality differences, thus limiting their applicability. Future research should aim to discern and address these factors more explicitly. Notably, the phenomenon of emerging adulthood is predominantly observed in Western cultures, which implies that the findings may not fully extend to other cultural contexts. Moreover, since the participants primarily consisted of North Americans, there's a potential for the results to inadequately reflect the experiences of emerging adults from other backgrounds. Nevertheless, the inclusion of participants from Somalia, the Philippines, and Peru, whose narratives aligned entirely with others', hints at a slight potential for broader generalizability across cultures compared to studies solely focused on North American participants. However, it's crucial for further research to replicate this study with more specific considerations for cultural backgrounds, national origins, and variations in sexuality.

Additionally, while the study predominantly captured the experiences of friendship pairs both identifying as cis-gender women, it also included three friendship pairs with mixed gender compositions. This opens avenues for exploring the generalizability of the results to all gender identities among emerging adults. Nevertheless, more research is warranted to diversify the

gender representation within the participant pool, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics.

The study focused solely on the dissolution experiences of friendships deemed close or best, leaving out the experience of losing casual friendships. Additionally, the study utilized a non-clinical population, potentially overlooking the interplay between mental health and friendship dissolution. Moreover, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on friendships significantly influenced the study's findings. Many participants' narratives highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on their experiences. Moving forward, it would be beneficial for future research to explore the specific effects of COVID-19 on emerging adult friendships. Additionally, future research may want to explore how clinical symptomology specifically play a role in the experience of friendship dissolution for emerging adults. The importance of this realm of future exploration is highlighted by the fact that of those who engaged in phase A of the study, which included a series of mental health screening questionnaires, 21/50 participants who endorsed experiencing a friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood also endorsed mental health symptomology that disqualified them from participating in phase B of the study, the interview.

Another notable limitation of the study is its dependence on retrospective accounts collected within a six-year window post-dissolution, without considering the duration of friendships beyond a minimum of six months. This raises pertinent questions about how the phenomenon would have been described had the interviews been conducted either at the time of the friendship dissolutions or after a significantly longer period. It also raises questions about the impact of friendship duration on dissolution experiences. Future research endeavors should aim to investigate this experience through different temporal lenses, thereby offering a more nuanced

understanding of its dynamics over time since the dissolution occurred. Future research should also take into consideration the duration of the friendships being examined.

Although the study had its limitations, it also showcased numerous strengths in its methodology and execution. Due to the comprehensive phenomenological investigation into the dissolution of friendships during emerging adulthood employed in this study, numerous novel areas of inquiry have surfaced concerning friendship dissolution. We have uncovered various avenues for inquiry, including the nuanced definitions of close and best friendships, the underlying causes of dissolution, the pathways leading to friendship breakdown, the status of relationships post-dissolution, the impact on individuals' sense of self and their other relationships, a comparative analysis between friendship and romantic relationship dissolution, and the dissonance between personal experiences and societal expectations. The discoveries made in this study regarding these newly identified domains warrant replication for emerging adults and further exploration by examining them in conjunction with other developmental stages. Thus far, research on friendship dissolution has predominantly focused on childhood and adolescence, with emerging adulthood receiving gradually increasing attention, akin to the focus of this study. However, the phenomenon of friendship dissolution in older developmental stages demands exploration, as each period presents distinct challenges and experiences.

### **Conclusion**

This qualitative phenomenological study delved into the intricate landscape of friendship dissolution among emerging adults, providing nuanced insights into the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon. Through in-depth interviews, participants articulated the profound role friendships play in identity formation for emerging adults, emphasizing the emotional complexities and enduring repercussions of this type of dissolution. The study unveiled the diverse pathways leading to dissolution, encompassing both spoken and unspoken

communication, while highlighting the disparity in societal validation and support mechanisms compared to romantic relationship dissolution. From a clinical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for mental health practitioners, emphasizing the importance of validating and supporting emerging adults navigating the normative developmental experience of friendship dissolution during this pivotal life stage. Overall, this study contributes significantly to the growing body of research on friendship dissolution, urging for greater recognition and support for emerging adults navigating the complexities of relational transitions in today's society.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer



IRB Protocol #: 23/02-013  
Approval: March 05, 2023  
LIU Sponsored Projects

## SEEKING YOUNG ADULTS FOR PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH STUDY ON FRIENDSHIP DISSOLUTION!

**PURPOSE:**

- This research is being conducted to provide insight into the experience of friendship dissolution during the developmental period of Emerging Adulthood.

**ELIGIBILITY:**

- Ages 18-29
- Experienced an ending of a close or best platonic friendship between the ages of 18 and 25

**Compensation:**

- An opportunity to enter in a raffle for 2 participants to win a \$25 Amazon gift card each

**Procedure and Time Commitment:**

- Responding to a 15-minute [online survey](#). Some participants will then be invited to a 30-60 minute audio-recorded interview in-person or via-Zoom

**Contact:**

- If you are interested in participating, click on the following url <https://baseline.campuslabs.com/liu/fdausldea23>, or reach out to the primary investigator, Alyssa Shapiro, at [alyssa.shapiro@my.liu.edu](mailto:alyssa.shapiro@my.liu.edu)

**Appendix B: Consent Form**

Date:  
Faculty Investigator:

IRB Protocol #: 23/02-013  
Approval: March 05, 2023  
LIU Sponsored Projects

**LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)**

**RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

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**Study Title:** Friendship Dissolution: An Unspoken Loss During Emerging Adulthood

**Faculty Investigator:** Orly Calderon, Psy.D.  
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516-400-3578

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You are being asked to join a research study. Participation in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to join now, you can change your mind later.

**1. Why is this research being done?**

This research is being done to provide insight into the experience of friendship dissolution during the emerging adult developmental period, ages 18-25. The study will explore the “what” and “how” of the experience of friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood. It will extend the awareness of the developmental experience of breakup/dissolution during emerging adulthood from romantic to also including friendship. The findings will have implications for clinical practice by guiding potential future designs of evidence-based treatments for individuals who have been through this loss, and guiding the potential development of prevention or psycho-education efforts for emerging adults surrounding this phenomenon.

Those eligible to be in the study will include 18-29 year old individuals with no current or history of mental health issues and who have experienced the dissolution of a platonic close or best friend between the ages of 18 and 25. The dissolution had to have happened at least 6 months prior, but not more than 5 years ago. Additionally, the friendship had to have lasted for at least 6 months.

**2. What will happen if you join this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- You will spend 15-20 minutes filling out an online questionnaire that will tap into your experience with friendship dissolution and your mental health.
- You may be invited via email as part of a random sampling of participants to take part in a one-time 30-60 minute in-person or virtual interview based on your preferences. Being invited to participate in the interview does not indicate anything about your mental health.

**Photographs/Video recordings:**

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As part of this research, we are requesting your permission to create and use audio recordings. Any recordings will not be used for advertising or non-study related purposes.

You should know that:

- You may request that the recording be stopped at any time.
- If you agree to allow the recording and then change your mind, you may ask us to destroy that imaging/recording. If the imaging/recording has had all identifiers removed, we may not be able to do this.
- We will only use these recordings for the purposes of this research.
- The audio recording will be transcribed by the primary investigator who will keep all data confidential. Once the recordings are transcribed, the audio recordings will be destroyed.

Please indicate your decision below by checking the appropriate statement:

\_\_\_\_\_ I **agree** to allow the study to make and use photographs/video recordings/audio recordings of me (or the participant I represent) for the purpose of this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I **do not agree** to allow the study team to make and use photographs/video recordings/audio recordings of me (or the participant I represent) for the purpose of this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature (or Legally Authorized Representative Signature, if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**How long will you be in the study?**

The first phase of the study will take approximately 15-20 minutes. Those who are randomly selected for the second phase of the study, an interview, will then spend 30-60 minutes with the primary investigator for the interview on another day.

**4. What are the risks or discomforts of the study?**

Due to the sensitive nature surrounding the topic of friendship dissolution participants may experience discomfort during the interview. The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life

You may get tired or bored when we are asking you questions, or you are completing questionnaires. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer.

Even if identifiers are removed, the information will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

**5. Are there benefits to being in the study?**

This study may benefit society if the results lead to a better understanding of the experience of friendship dissolution during emerging adulthood. The findings can help bring awareness to the matter and help provide better care to patients.

**6. What are your options if you do not want to be in the study?**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You choose whether to participate. If you decide not to participate, there are no penalties, and you will not lose any benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. If you do not join, your employment/education at Long Island University will not be affected.

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**7. Will it cost you anything to be in this study?**

No

**8. Will you be paid if you join this study?**

In compensation for your time, you will be eligible to participate in a raffle for a 25-dollar Amazon gift card. All participants will be entered into a raffle. You understand that you may stop participation at any time. However, you also understand that you will only receive the research compensation if you complete the research protocol for phase one of the study. Those who are selected to participate in the second phase of the study will be offered the opportunity to be entered into the raffle a second time upon completion of the interview. There will be two winners overall.

**9. Can you leave the study early?**

- You can agree to be in the study now and change your mind later. The only penalty for opting out during a phase of the study would be an ineligibility to gain an entry into the raffle for an Amazon gift card.
- If you wish to stop, please tell us right away.
- If you want to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher at any point.
- This study will not affect your employment/education.

**10. Why might we take you out of the study early?**

You may be taken out of the study if:

- Staying in the study would be harmful.
- The study is cancelled.
- There may be other reasons to take you out of the study that we do not know at this time.

If you are taken out of the study early, LIU may use or give out your information that it has already collected if the information is needed for this study or any follow-up activities.

**11. How will the confidentiality of your biospecimens and/or data be protected?**

Any study records that identify you will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. Records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

All audio recordings will be transcribed by the primary investigator and deleted after transcription. Transcriptions will be de-identified and assigned a number for purpose of identification. Files will be disseminated to research coders through password protected means.

**12. What other things should you know about this research study?**

**What is the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and how does it protect you?**

This study has been reviewed by an Institutional Review Board (IRB), a group of people that reviews human research studies. The IRB can help you if you have questions about your rights as a research participant or if you have other questions, concerns or complaints about this research study. You may contact the IRB at [osp@liu.edu](mailto:osp@liu.edu).

**What should you do if you have questions about the study?**

Contact the student investigator Alyssa Shapiro at [Alyssa.Shapiro@my.liu.edu](mailto:Alyssa.Shapiro@my.liu.edu)/516-400-3578 or the faculty investigator Orly Calderon at [Orly.Calderon@liu.edu](mailto:Orly.Calderon@liu.edu). If you wish, you may contact the principal investigator by letter. The address is on page one of this consent form. You can also contact the program

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director, Eva Feindler at Eva.Feindler@liu.edu. If you cannot reach the investigators or wish to talk to someone else, contact the IRB office at osp@liu.edu.

You can ask questions about this research study now or at any time during the study.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or feel that you have not been treated fairly, please call the Institutional Review Board at Long Island University at osp@liu.edu.

**13. What does your agreement on this consent form mean?**

By marking the “Agree to Participate” box below, you are indicating that you have carefully read the above text and have had the opportunity to print the consent form (or ask for a printed copy) and ask questions about the purposes and procedures of this study. If you choose not to participate, please choose the “Decline to Participate” box below.

I agree to participate

I decline to participate

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

**Appendix C: Template for Interview Invitation Email**

Subject: Friendship Dissolution Research Interview Invitation

Hello!

Thank you for participating in my study on friendship dissolution. You are being invited for a 30-60 minute interview that will be conducted either in-person at LIU-Post, or virtually via Zoom. I have placed a link below to my calendly, where you can sign up for a time slot within the next few weeks. Please put your email in the slot where it asks for your name. If you want to meet in person at LIU-Post, please sign up for a Thursday slot and write in the comments that you plan to meet in-person. I look forward to connecting. Feel free to reach out with any questions.

<https://calendly.com/alyssa-shapiro/friendship-dissolution-interview>

Best,

Alyssa Shapiro

## Appendix D: Eligibility Questionnaire and Mental Health Screening Profiles

### For Researcher's Use Only

*If you are eligible for the study and choose to participate, you will be offered either a \$25 dollar stipend or extra credit in a psychology course at LIU-Post (if applicable) as compensation. Please note that if you plan to receive extra credit in a psychology course at LIU-Post, your professor will be informed that you have partaken in a study with a doctoral student, but will not be informed of which study. All of the data you provide will remain confidential.*

*Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability:*

1. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you experienced a dissolution of a close or best platonic best friend within the last 6 years but not less than 6 months ago (yes or no)? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Did this breakup occur between the ages of 18 and 25 (yes or no)? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Did this friendship last at least 6 months (yes or no)? \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Disclaimer:*

The following questions will ask about your current mental health. Responding to these questions may highlight some uncomfortable or negative feelings for you. Here are some resources you may wish to reach out to. If you are in imminent danger, please call 9-1-1.

- a) Local mental health centers that you can find through your health insurance website
- b) The LIU-Post Psychological Services Center (516-299-3211)
- c) The Center for Healthy Living at LIU-Post available to LIU students (516-299-1221 or 516-299-3468)
- d) The National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988)

*Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability:*

1. Over the past 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered with the thought that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way'. 0=not at all 1=several days, 2=more than half the days and 3=nearly every day. \_\_\_\_\_



## BDI - II

Instructions: This questionnaire consists of 21 groups of statements. Please read each group of statements carefully. And then pick out the one statement in each group that best describes the way you have been feeling during the past two weeks, including today. Circle the number beside the statement you have picked. If several statements in the group seem to apply equally well, circle the highest number for that group. Be sure that you do not choose more than one statement for any group, including Item 16 (Changes in Sleeping Pattern) or Item 18 (Changes in Appetite).

1. Sadness
  0. I do not feel sad.
  1. I feel sad much of the time.
  2. I am sad all the time.
  3. I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it.
2. Pessimism
  0. I am not discouraged about my future.
  1. I feel more discouraged about my future than I used to.
  2. I do not expect things to work out for me.
  3. I feel my future is hopeless and will only get worse.
3. Past Failure
  0. I do not feel like a failure.
  1. I have failed more than I should have.
  2. As I look back, I see a lot of failures.
  3. I feel I am a total failure as a person.
4. Loss of Pleasure
  0. I get as much pleasure as I ever did from the things I enjoy.
  1. I don't enjoy things as much as I used to.
  2. I get very little pleasure from the things I used to enjoy.
  3. I can't get any pleasure from the things I used to enjoy.
5. Guilty Feelings
  0. I don't feel particularly guilty.
  1. I feel guilty over many things I have done or should have done.
  2. I feel quite guilty most of the time.
  3. I feel guilty all of the time.
6. Punishment Feelings
  0. I don't feel I am being punished.
  1. I feel I may be punished.
  2. I expect to be punished.
  3. I feel I am being punished.
7. Self-Dislike
  0. I feel the same about myself as ever.
  1. I have lost confidence in myself.
  2. I am disappointed in myself.
  3. I dislike myself.

## 8. Self-Criticalness

0. I don't criticize or blame myself more than usual.
1. I am more critical of myself than I used to be.
2. I criticize myself for all of my faults.
3. I blame myself for everything bad that happens.

## 9. Suicidal Thoughts or Wishes

0. I don't have any thoughts of killing myself.
1. I have thoughts of killing myself, but I would not carry them out.
2. I would like to kill myself.
3. I would kill myself if I had the chance.

## 10. Crying

0. I don't cry anymore than I used to.
1. I cry more than I used to.
2. I cry over every little thing.
3. I feel like crying, but I can't.

## 11. Agitation

0. I am no more restless or wound up than usual.
1. I feel more restless or wound up than usual.
2. I am so restless or agitated, it's hard to stay still.
3. I am so restless or agitated that I have to keep moving or doing something.

## 12. Loss of Interest

0. I have not lost interest in other people or activities.
1. I am less interested in other people or things than before.
2. I have lost most of my interest in other people or things.
3. It's hard to get interested in anything.

## 13. Indecisiveness

0. I make decisions about as well as ever.
1. I find it more difficult to make decisions than usual.
2. I have much greater difficulty in making decisions than I used to.
3. I have trouble making any decisions.

## 14. Worthlessness

0. I do not feel I am worthless.
1. I don't consider myself as worthwhile and useful as I used to.
2. I feel more worthless as compared to others.
3. I feel utterly worthless.

## 15. Loss of Energy

0. I have as much energy as ever.
1. I have less energy than I used to have.
2. I don't have enough energy to do very much.
3. I don't have enough energy to do anything.

## 16. Changes in Sleeping Pattern

- o. I have not experienced any change in my sleeping.
- 1a I sleep somewhat more than usual.
- 1b I sleep somewhat less than usual.
- 2a I sleep a lot more than usual.
- 2b I sleep a lot less than usual.
- 3a I sleep most of the day.
- 3b I wake up 1-2 hours early and can't get back to sleep.

## 17. Irritability

- o. I am not more irritable than usual.
- 1. I am more irritable than usual.
- 2. I am much more irritable than usual.
- 3. I am irritable all the time.

## 18. Changes in Appetite

- o. I have not experienced any change in my appetite.
- 1a My appetite is somewhat less than usual.
- 1b My appetite is somewhat greater than usual.
- 2a My appetite is much less than before.
- 2b My appetite is much greater than usual.
- 3a I have no appetite at all.
- 3b I crave food all the time.

## 19. Concentration Difficulty

- o. I can concentrate as well as ever.
- 1. I can't concentrate as well as usual.
- 2. It's hard to keep my mind on anything for very long.
- 3. I find I can't concentrate on anything.

## 20. Tiredness or Fatigue

- o. I am no more tired or fatigued than usual.
- 1. I get more tired or fatigued more easily than usual.
- 2. I am too tired or fatigued to do a lot of the things I used to do.
- 3. I am too tired or fatigued to do most of the things I used to do.

## 21. Loss of Interest in Sex

- o. I have not noticed any recent change in my interest in sex.
- 1. I am less interested in sex than I used to be.
- 2. I am much less interested in sex now.
- 3. I have lost interest in sex completely.

Total Score: \_\_\_\_\_

### Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)

Below is a list of common symptoms of anxiety. Please carefully read each item in the list. Indicate how much you have been bothered by that symptom during the past month, including today, by circling the number in the corresponding space in the column next to each symptom.

	Not at all	Mildly, but it didn't bother me much	Moderately – it wasn't pleasant at times	Severely – it bothered me a lot
Numbness or tingling	0	1	2	3
Feeling hot	0	1	2	3
Wobbliness in legs	0	1	2	3
Unable to relax	0	1	2	3
Fear of worst happening	0	1	2	3
Dizzy or lightheaded	0	1	2	3
Heart pounding / racing	0	1	2	3
Unsteady	0	1	2	3
Terrified or afraid	0	1	2	3
Nervous	0	1	2	3
Feeling of choking	0	1	2	3
Hands trembling	0	1	2	3
Shaky / unsteady	0	1	2	3
Fear of losing control	0	1	2	3
Difficulty in breathing	0	1	2	3
Fear of dying	0	1	2	3
Scared	0	1	2	3
Indigestion	0	1	2	3
Faint / lightheaded	0	1	2	3
Face flushed	0	1	2	3
Hot / cold sweats	0	1	2	3

**Appendix E: Semi-structured Interview Prompt**

*“Today I am going to be asking you questions about your experience of a friendship dissolution with a close or best friend. Thank you for your willingness to share your experience. The prompts I will be providing you will encourage you to describe your experience in full. The purpose of the study is to capture the essence of the “how” and “what” of the phenomenon “friendship dissolution.” You do not need to answer any question that you do not desire to answer, and you are welcome to ask me for clarification at any time. If you need a break, please let me know. Any questions?”*

**Prompts:**

- 1) What gender do you identify with, and what gender does the friend you are thinking of identify with?
- 2) Tell me about the friendship you are thinking about. What made this person a close or best friend? How long you were close with them?
- 3) Describe what led to the dissolution?
- 4) Please provide a picture of what the dissolution looked like and how you knew the relationship was coming to an end?
- 5) Were you in a romantic relationship during your friendship dissolution (yes, no)? How did this relationship status play a role in your experience?
- 6) How would you describe the repercussions of the dissolution for you? Be as descriptive as possible.
- 7) What support did you have or wish that you could have had to help manage this experience?
- 8) How similar or dissimilar do you feel this friendship breakup was compared to a romantic relationship breakup?