IJMRRS

GENDER NORMS IN FRIENDSHIP: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS AMONG THE COLLEGE STUDENTS

Trishita Singharoy

Sociology Honours

singharoytrishita76@gmail.com

1. <u>INTRODUCTION</u>

In every individual's life, friends and friendships play an increasingly and one of the most important roles in the social functioning of a person from childhood till death. One of the essential components of development is friendship which provides areas where one can explore their identities, where they can feel accepted, feel safe to talk about very intimate personal dilemmas, offering emotional support to one another and one can develop a sense of belongingness.

Friendship is defined as a "voluntary interdependence between two persons over time, 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" (Hays, 1988, p. 395). Friendship conceptions reflects values, expectations, and beliefs that individuals have about what it means to be friends. Developmental changes in friendship conceptions have been documented by several independent research groups (e.g., Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975, 1980; Selman, 1981; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Gender differences in friendship conceptions have also been documented.

1.1. <u>SAME- SEX FRIENDSHIP AND CROSS- GENDER FRIENDSHIP</u>

Rose (1985) examined gender differences in relationship patterns and found that both men and women reported that same- sex friendships rather than cross-gender friendship most often fulfilled functions of acceptance, help, intimacy and companionship.

Despite the difficulties in forming, defining and maintaining cross-gender friendship, they appear to play an important role in many people's lives. It is important that all efforts be made to recognise and keep separate sexual identity and gender identity. To combine these two separate categories, a common error, serves to diminish an individual; it also proves a greater likelihood. Wright and Scanlon (1991) examined and described friendship in terms of relationship strength, interpersonal rewards, maintenance difficulty, social regulation general favourability, and differentiation among types of relationships.

Wright and Scanlon (1991) also examined the relationship between gender and gender- role orientation in the formation of friendships. They found only a modest relationship between gender-role orientation and gender differences in friendships and these almost exclusively applied to men's and women's descriptions of women friends. Women were more sensitive to the perceived gender

role orientation of their female friends than were men, and androgynous female friends provided the most rewarding friendships.

Some researchers have said that gender differences exist in level of trust in male and female friendships. Murray(1999) explained this difference, that when males reach adolescence they try to adopt neutral sex role and to become less feminine they replace trust with mistrust. Carroll, (2002) discussed that female same- sex friendships have more trust than male same- sex friendships.

1.2. WHY DO PEOPLE NEED FRIENDS ?

Friendships are integral to establishing large networks of social ties. These ever- widening networks are exactly what comprise the fabric of the society. Sociologist Georg Simmel (Wolff 1950) argued that dyadic relationships- those between two people- represent the building blocks of society, for it is within these dyads that social relations begin. Even larger group is comprised of numerous dyadic relationships organising into interlocking social webs. For Putnam (2000) , friendships represents an informal social connection, one that is of central importance given its function in connecting individuals into much larger social networks. In this way, patterns of friendships bring people together into ever- larger networks, weaving together the fabric of society.

Friendship has been defined and reviewed from various angles by different researchers. Connor, (1992) defined friendship as an internal need for all genders and tendency to rely on someone (as cited in Carroll, 2002). Carroll, (2002) stated that friendship is a basic need of human nature. Another narrative by Turner, (2002) is that a close friend is some one to trust, to enjoy another's company, and to share life's experiences.

Friendship and trust are closely related constructs. No relationship can survive if trust is missing. In friendship, the emotional ties that only grow due to, to have confidence on the ability of another is called trust. Lewis and Weigert, (1985) found that the key to positive interpersonal relationships in various settings is trust because it is central to how we interact with others.

Social support is the general support or supportive behaviours from others that enhance an individual's functioning or/and help someone to be more robust when exposed to difficulties. The social support systems of a person includes friends, someone who you can rely on during your bad times. Friends being a social support system can give and individual emotional comfort, help him/her/them cope with problems by providing guidance, give necessary feedback which helps to develop performance, contribute to personal development and protect individuals against the negative effects of stress. In contrast, poor social relations can lead to conflict, internalisation and behavioural problems that can also be impacted psychologically.

1.3. WHY IS THE STUDY IMPORTANT AND HOW IS IT RELEVANT ?

In essence, the study of behavioural patterns in gender based friendships provides critical insights that influence various aspects of individual development, societal norms , and institutional practices, recognising gender- specific needs and issues in friendships that can lead o better support systems and interventions for mental health, making it a crucial area of research for fostering healthier, more equitable, and more understanding societies.

1.4. COMMON TERMINOLOGY

Amongst the LGBTQIA+ community members, a word may mean one thing to one person and something completely different to another individual. For example, one person who identifies as non-binary (NB) may not identify as gender fluid (GF), though a person who behaves, believes, and portrays the same lifestyle characteristics identifies solidly as GF and rejects the label NB. The fact that those within the community often have varying labels by which to identify and define a particular gender identity makes it particularly difficult for those outside the community, such as researchers. (Coco, Nicole A, 2021)

The term "transgender" , a person whose sense of personal identity of gender does not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth; or does not conform to gender stereotypes, and sexual orientation varies and is not dependent on gender identity; the classification of gender expansive includes a diverse collection of identities that are neither strictly male nor female (i.e., NB, genderqueer (GQ), GF; Abramovich & Cleverly, 2018).

The concept of emotional intelligence was first put forward by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and they explain emotional intelligence as follows: " Emotional Intelligence includes the ability to engage in sophisticated information processing about one's own and other's emotions and the ability to use this information as a guide to thinking and behaviour " . Ciarrochi et al (2000), in their study, found that emotional intelligence is related to satisfaction with life and the quality of interpersonal relationships as well as self- esteem, empathy and extraversion. In their study, Ciarrochi et al (2001) found that emotional intelligence is higher in women compared to men and emotional intelligence has a positive relationship with the satisfaction received from social supports, social support satisfaction amount and mood management.

Homophobia and transphobia are two terms that refer to negative attitudes toward homosexual and transsexual people, although these expressions may spark the idea of an irrational fear of homosexual and gender-nonconforming people. These terms are related to a wide range of

conditions of negative attitudes and behaviour toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, "ranging from casual use of pejorative language to aggressive personal attack" (Taylor & Peter, 2011, p. 277). This phenomenon thus involves different aspects: psychological, behavioural, cultural, social, and moral components (Rollè, Garbarini, Gerino, Marino, & Brustia, 2010).

1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

I)   To study the behavioural patterns in a cross- gender friendship and same- sex friendship.

II) To know the general problems of the socially constructed ideas of friendship.

III) To understand the social acceptance of transgender in friendship.

IV) To look in to the level of emotional intelligence among various gender based friendships.

1.6. HYPOTHESES

 The fundamental role of friendship reflects with more disapproval in an interaction of sexuality, particularly among men, in the developing behavioural patterns among college students according to their gender.

1.7. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I)   Is emotional intelligence present more in female friendships?

II) Does intimacy in male friendships lead to homophobia due to the socially constructed norms?

III) Are transgender's openly accepted in heterosexual friendships?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction:

A review of existing literature provides a researcher with the opportunity to study the quantum of work already done on the topic selected and also the methods and tools used in the prior studies, it also helps the researcher to look for untouched areas and dimensions related to the topic which could be covered in the behavioural patterns of gender based friendship among college students.

The existing literature dealing with social and psychological aspects of the gender norms of friendship among college students has been included in this study.

2.2 Earlier studies on Gender based Friendship

The study by Stephen Robert Myles (1994) "Undergraduate Student's Description of Same-Gender and Cross- Gender Friendships" examined gender differences in cross- gender and same-gender friendships among undergraduate students at a time when such friendships were just forming. In the conclusion the resulted showed the scores for the Ben Sex- Inventory Index (BSRI) which were computed and median scored for the masculine and feminine scales were calculated for participants and the male and female friends they described. The study is relevant as it shows that significant gender differences were found where men felt more exclusivity in friendship than women and men found their friendships more difficult to maintain and regulate.

The research by Roberto Baiocco, Federica Santamaria, Antonio Lonigro, Salvatore Ioverno, Emma Baumgartner, Fiorenzo Laghi (2014) "Beyond Similarities: Cross-Gender and Cross-Orientation Best Friendship in a Sample of Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Young Adults" investigates differences between heterosexual and lesbian and gay men young adults regarding best friendship patterns, well-being, and social anxiety. Overall, the majority of the respondents declared that they had best friends, in the total sample, significant differences were found between women and men, and between lesbian/gay men participants and heterosexual young adults. Lesbian and gay men participants reported more cross-gender friendships than heterosexual participants did, as well as more cross-orientation friendships. The difference found in the friendship pattern among the lesbians, gay men and heterosexuals make this paper relevant.

The study by Manish Kumar, Anwesha Mondal (2020) "Gender Differences in friendship pattern and relationship to self-esteem among college students" aimed to find out the gender differences and their relationship to the self-esteem in young adults studying in college. Females and males were found to differ in their friendship pattern. This study helped to understand the behavioural patterns among male and female friendship in the domain of trust, acceptance, emotional availability and understanding.

This article by Laurence Bachmann (2014) "Female Friendship and Gender Transformation" explores the ways in which friendships between women may promote gender transformation. Furthermore, this research shows the way in which women are shaped by their friendship (being supported or influenced by them), but also how they shape them actively to model their emerging critical dispositions (selecting them, making use of them or moving away from them). The emergence of a critical stance towards gender relations and to analyse the way in which such relationships may serve as a tool for gender transformation is relevant to my study.

The present study by Lara Barbir (2016) "Friendship, attitudes, and behavioural intentions of cisgender heterosexuals toward transgender individuals" examined the relationships between cisgender heterosexual college students' social contact with transgender individuals, operationalised as number of friendships, and self-reported attitudes and behavioural intentions toward transgender individuals. These findings suggest that having friend- ships with transgender individuals is associated with reduced prejudice and discrimination and, moreover, greater acceptance and support of transgender people. Implications for increasing acceptance of transgender individuals are discussed.

2.3. <u>Theories</u>

I) **Attachment theory:**

Gillath, Karantzas and Selcuk in their article " A Net of Friends: Investigating Friendship by Integrating Attachment Theory and Social Network Analysis" published in 2017, focused on various attachment style—an individual difference widely studied in the field of close relationships
— and its application to the study of social networks. Specifically, they investigated whether attachment style predicts perception and management of social networks.

According to attachment theory, there are three major attachment styles: secure, anxious, and avoidant. Attachment is a spectrum present in friendship which isn't also one of the root cause for the relationship between individuals The original theory and subsequent research emphasise the importance of working models formed with parents early in life, which influence attachment and relationships throughout the lifespan. The attachments in these relationships may be interdependent, that is, changes in attachment with parents may affect attachment with friends. These changes in attachment may also affect friendship quality, as these changes are associated with intimacy and support in friendships.

II) Social Penetration Theory:

Amanda Carpenter and Kathryn Greene in their article "Social Penetration Theory" developed to explain how information exchange functions in the development and dissolution of interpersonal relationships. Social penetration describes the process of bonding that moves a relationship from superficial to more intimate (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Self- disclosure passes through a number of phases as an interpersonal relationship progresses (Taylor & Altman, 1987). Theses stages of social penetration theory include orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange. Social penetration theory describes several layers including superficial layers, middle layers, inner layers and core personality. Superficial layers include likes and dislikes. Middle layers include political views and social attitudes. Inner layer includes deep fears, hopes, goals, secrets. The core personality includes the most private information about a person. From the formation to the outcome this theory serves some purpose in the formation of friendships.

III)   Social Learning Theory:

Ronald L. Akers developed the *Social Learning Theory* which explains how people learn from their social environment through observation, imitation and modelling. According to social learning theory, therefore, friends are key agents of socialisation in a child's life. Through the process of modelling, the child begins to form attitudes and behaviour that imitate those of the friendship model (Woolfson,2001).

IV) Gender Schema Theory:

Gender schema theory emerged as a response to to the 1970s theory of androgyny, which described culturally favoured masculine and feminine characteristics in individuals. Gender schema theory, in response, moves away from gender being an independent essence and focuses instead on

how gender is constructed. That is, gender is better understood by comprehending an individual's cognitive schema (Davis and Wilson, 2016). Gender schema theory (Bem 1981), therefore, claims to describe how individuals process information related to gender. The appropriate gender behaviour that a child learns through observation is affected during their post- adolescent period which is important in socialisation of gender. Most of the individuals want to be identified and belong to a group for better understanding of how to behave accordingly. The sense of belongingness that an individual expects from their peer group by observing the role to be played and norms to be followed shapes the identity and behavioural patterns.

3. <u>METHODOLOGY</u>

3.1. <u>TYPE OF STUDY/RESEARCH:</u>

In this work of Gender Norms in Friendship: A Sociological Study on the Behavioural Patterns among the College Students, the type of study that has been done is mentioned below. This work has been done using Mixed Methods. A mixed methods research is a procedure for collecting, analysing "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study.

3.2. <u>RESEARCH DESIGN:</u>

The research design used is an Exploratory research design. An exploratory research design is a methodology approach that explores research questions that have not previously been studied in-depth.

A survey method is a process, tool, technique that can be used to gather information in research by asking questions to a predefined group. Typically, it facilitates the exchange of information between the research participants and the person or organisation carrying out the research. For this study the survey method is based on Qualitative and Quantitative data as it involves an online Google form (for everyone) and telephonic interview.

3.3. <u>SAMPLING:</u>

Sampling design is a mathematical function that gives you the probability of any given sample being named.

The sampling design used is Non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is defined as a sampling technique which the researcher selects samples based on the subjective judgment of the researcher rather than random selection.

The type of non-probability sampling used is Convenience sampling to identify the cross-gender and same-sex friendship respondents. Convenience sampling is a qualitative research sampling strategy that involves selecting participants based on their accessibility and availability to the researcher.

The other type that is used is Snow-ball sampling to identify the potential transgender respondents. Snow-ball sampling is a sampling technique in which research participants are asked to assist researchers in identifying other potential subjects.

3.4. SPECIFICATION OF THE SAMPLE:

The research was conducted on 50 respondents and the age group comprised of 18-24 year old college students.

3.5. DATA COLLECTION:

Data collection is the process of collecting and analysing information on relevant variables in a predetermined, methodological way so that one can respond to specific research questions. It can be either Qualitative or Quantitative.

The method of retrieving primary data collection is Survey with Questionnaire and Telephonic Interview.

A Questionnaire is a research instrument that consists of a set of questions for the purpose of gathering information from respondents through survey or statistical study. The Questionnaire conducted via Google form consisted both open-ended and close-ended questions.

The Telephonic Interview

The telephonic interview conducted on the transgender respondents was approx 15-20 minutes with open-ended questions, where they were able to specify their answers.

The interview method used was an Unstructured Interview. Interviewing, usually used in qualitatively in nature, and can be very helpful for social science research for focusing on personal experiences.

The telephonic interview method was particularly used for the transgender respondents. And the survey with questionnaire was used for all the respondents (of different gender

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis refers to the collection and analysis of data, whereby findings from the data are interpreted and summarised. It is the process of simplifying data to create a summary of its findings. When the researcher gets to the data analysis stage, they begin fieldwork. Fieldwork involves gathering raw data that will be used as evidence in the research.

Gathering and collecting data can be done using multiple methods. Researchers may choose from either primary research method or secondary research method, depending on the nature of their research aims. Primary data is the data that is collected first- hand. It is the 'original' research gathered by the researcher that can be collected using several methods. Secondary data is the data that has already been collected by someone else; it is pre-existing.

4.1. QUANTITATIVE DATA

Quantitative data is numerical (based on numbers) in nature. It is commonly presented through:

- Statistics

- Bar graphs

- Pie charts

Quantitative data that will be showcased below is collected using primary research methods- Questionnaire conducted via Google form consisted both open-ended and close-ended questions. In this way the study was able to visualise the data in numbers with graphical representation.

As the study focused on the college students, the participants were 50 college students of different genders within the age group 18-24 years.

GENDER	PERCENTAGE
MALE	32%
FEMALE	54%
TRANSGENDER	2%
OTHER	12%

TABLE 1.1 SHOWING GENDER OF THE RESPONDENTS

The first question in the Questionnaire via Google form was asked to mention the primary characteristics in friendship where the respondents have said the major characteristics in a friendship are loyalty (16 responds), humorous (9 responds), compassionate (12 responds), understanding (9 responds), inclusivity(4 responds), reliability, trust, emotional connection and responsibility (19 responds).

Friendship is a fundamental aspect of human social interaction, providing support, companionship and sense of belonging. The data collected through the research work has identified the respondents claiming that loyalty, humour, compassion, understanding, inclusivity, reliability, trust, emotional connection and responsibility as the effective primary characteristics significant in friendships.

Loyalty refers to a steadfast allegiance and support for someone, especially during difficult times. In friendship, loyalty ensures that individuals can rely on each other, fostering a sense of security and trust. According to social learning theory, behaviour is learned through observation, imitation and reinforcement. Loyalty is often modelled by significant figures like parents and friends, and individuals learn to value and reciprocate loyalty in their relationships.

Humour involves the ability to provoke laughter and provide amusement. In friendship, humour creates a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere, making interactions more pleasant and reducing stress. Humour is often gendered, as per the gender schema theory, with societal expectations shaping how different men and women appreciate and express humour. According to social learning theory, humour is learned through social interactions where laughter and fun are observed exchanges.

Compassion involves empathy and desire to help alleviate the suffering of others. It is crucial for emotional support and understanding as it fosters a nurturing and caring environment where friends feel valued and understood. Understanding involves being aware of and sympathetically comprehending another's feelings, thoughts and experiences. It is vital for effective communication and appreciating different perspectives and strengthens the emotional bond. According to the study,

with the gender schema theory, it can be understood that women might be encouraged to develop stronger emotional literacy, facilitating better understand communication in friendship. Compassion and understanding is developed through observation and imitation, under social learning theory.

Inclusivity is the practice of embracing and valuing diverse backgrounds, perspectives and experiences. Inclusivity ensures that friendships are welcoming and non-judgmental, promoting a sense of belonging and respect. According to gender schema theory, the study examines that social norms might influence the extent to which men and women value and practice inclusivity, with women often being socialised to be more inclusive.

Emotional connection refers to the deep bond formed between friends through shared experiences, feelings and mutual understanding.

Reliability is the quality of being dependable and consistent in behaviour and actions.

Responsibility involves being accountable for one's actions and understanding the impact they have on the friendship.

Understanding the primary characteristics in friendship through the study provided a comprehensive view of how these traits are developed and valued. This understanding is essential for fostering meaningful and supportive friendships across different social contexts and gender norms.

In the study, 74% of the respondents indicated in a close-ended (YES/NO) question that their ideal standards are not influenced by gender.

And 80% of the respondents have indicated that gender does not matter in friendship. This suggests a shift towards more egalitarian perspectives, where qualities such as competence, kindness, and intelligence are valued uniformly across genders. The findings reflect a growing trend towards gender-neutral expectations and equality in various aspects of life.

Does your ideal standard in friendship vary according to the gender of your friend?
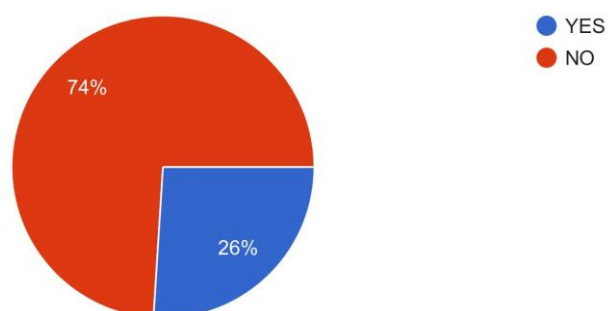50 responses

Chart 1.2 above puts forward the data collected through questionnaire via Google form.

Does gender really matter in friendship?
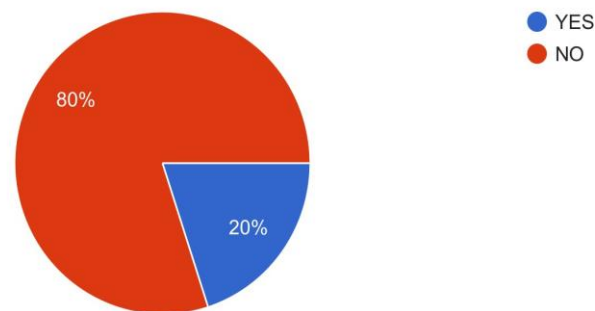50 responses

YES
NO

80%

20%

Chart 1.3 above puts forward the data collected through questionnaire via Google form.

52% of the respondents agreed that reliability and closeness are interchangeable in friendship aligns with social learning theory's principle of observational learning, suggesting that individuals shape their understanding of relationships by observing and internalising the behaviours and attitudes of those around them.

Is reliability and closeness same for you in friendship?
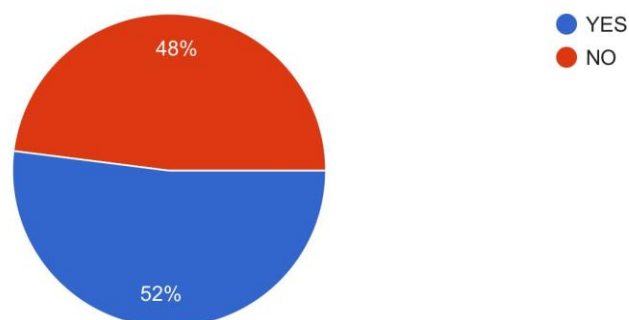50 responses

YES
NO

48%

52%

Chart 1.4 above puts forward the data collected through questionnaire via Google form.

Emotional connection is vital in friendships as it forms the foundation of trust, support, and understanding between friends. It allows for genuine communication, empathy, and the ability to be there for each other through both good times and challenging moments. As all the 50 respondents

have responded that emotional connection is important but with variations in the percentage of the chosen options, but nobody has claimed that it is not important, which proves that emotional connection is one the primary characteristic in building a friendship.

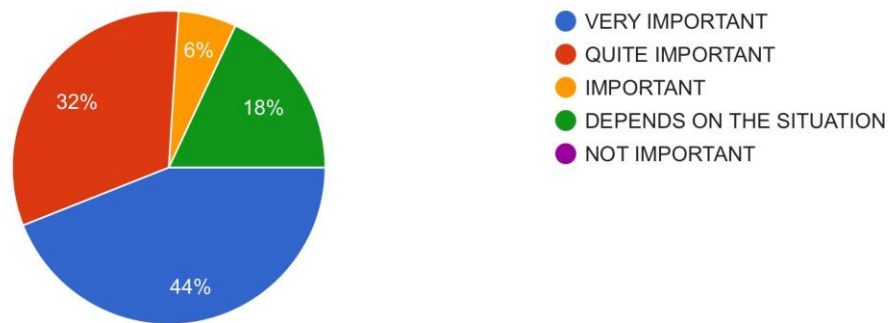How important is emotional connection for you with your friend?
50 responses

Chart 1.5 above puts forward the data collected through questionnaire via Google form.

The study shows mixed experiences in making friends: 48% of respondents find it moderately easy, while an equal split of 26% each report it as difficult or easy. This suggests a diverse range of social comfort levels, with nearly half finding some effort required and the rest polarised between ease and difficulty.

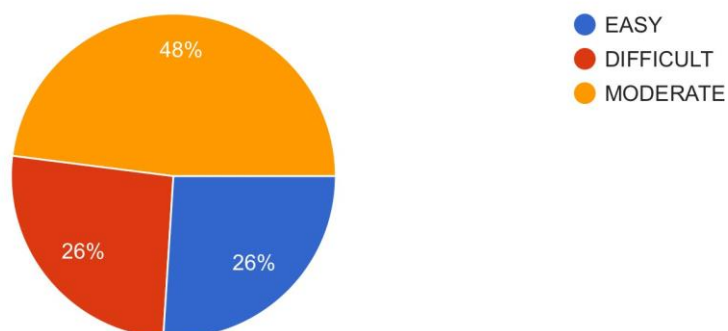How easy is it for you to make new friends?
50 responses

Chart 1.6 above puts forward the data collected through questionnaire via Google form.

With such diversity the study also finds that 52% of the respondents have transgender friends. And those 48% who don't have, they have given a common answer saying they never found many transgender persons around them.

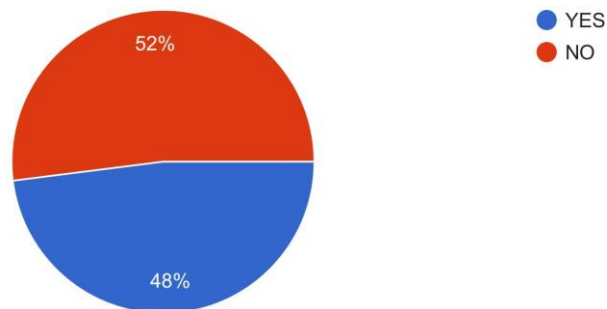Do you have a transgender friend?
50 responses

Chart 1.7 above puts forward the data collected through questionnaire via Google form.

4.2. QUALITATIVE DATA

Qualitative data is usually in verbal or visual form. It is non-numerical and can be presented through:

• Statements

• Descriptions

Qualitative data can also be collected using both primary and secondary research methods.

The collected data from the questionnaire reveal that gender discretion plays a crucial role in friendship dynamics, particularly concerning trust, emotional closeness, and vulnerability. According to gender schema theory, the appropriate gender behaviour a child learns through observation during post-adolescent period is a major factor regarding socialisation of gender. Firstly, trust forms the bedrock of any meaningful friendship. Respondents indicate that while they value trust in all friendships, they often find it easier to trust friends of the same gender due to

shared experiences and societal expectations. Secondly, emotional closeness is another significant factor. Participants express that they tend to develop deeper emotional bonds with same-gender friends because they feel more understood and supported in discussing personal issues. Lastly, vulnerability is essential for building strong friendships but is frequently practiced within gender boundaries. Many feel more comfortable showing vulnerability to same-gender friends, fearing judgment or misunderstanding from those of the opposite gender. These findings suggest that while trust, emotional closeness, and vulnerability are universal prerequisites for close friendships, they are often navigated within the confines of gender. This gender-restricted manner of practicing these aspects of friendship reflects broader societal norms and the comfort levels shaped by cultural and personal experiences. Such discretion underscores the nuanced ways in which gender influences social interactions and the formation of intimate bonds. The questionnaire data highlight that boundaries are essential in maintaining gender discretion in friendships for several reasons. Firstly, boundaries help prevent misunderstandings and potential conflicts. Respondents note that clearly defined boundaries in cross-gender friendships can mitigate misinterpretations of actions and intentions, fostering a sense of respect and clarity. Secondly, boundaries protect the emotional integrity of all parties involved. By setting limits, individuals can ensure that their personal space and emotional well-being are respected, which is crucial for maintaining a healthy and balanced friendship. Lastly, boundaries uphold social and cultural norms, which can vary significantly across different communities. Establishing boundaries, therefore, enables individuals to navigate their friendships within the accepted frameworks of their respective outcomes such as maintaining a platonic relationship in a friendship and creating a safe and trustful environment. Male-male friendship discretion exists largely due to societal expectations and norms that influence how men interact emotionally. This variation is deeply rooted in social penetration theory, which explains how relationships progress from superficial to intimate levels of communication. Social penetration theory posits that as relationships develop, they move through layers of increasingly intimate self-disclosure. For men, societal norms often dictate that emotional expression and vulnerability are less acceptable, particularly in same-sex friendships. This results in male-male friendships often being characterised by discretion and limited emotional openness. As per the data collected through the questionnaire it has also been found that the male respondents generally avoid physical contact and emotional talks, according to social learning theory that's what they have observed and learned. Men might avoid discussing deeper emotional topics or showing vulnerability to prevent appearing weak or overly intimate, which can be perceived as not masculine. Societal expectations play a crucial role in shaping male friendships. Traditional gender roles often emphasise stoicism,

independence, and emotional restraint for men. This creates an environment where men might feel pressured to conform to these roles to avoid being judged or stigmatised. The fear of being labeled as homosexual can further restrict emotional openness in male-male friendships. Physical affection and emotional intimacy are often misinterpreted due to entrenched stereotypes associating close male bonds with homosexuality. To avoid these labels, men may limit their expressions of closeness and vulnerability. Despite these societal pressures, many men do seek and value emotional connections in their friendships. Characteristics such as loyalty, shared activities, and mutual support are often more comfortably expressed through actions rather than words, which most of the male respondents have also agreed to. While emotional attachment and physical expressions of intimacy can exist, they are typically navigated within socially acceptable boundaries to avoid negative labelling, such as to maintain a platonic relationship between female- male friendship. As gender schema theory claims to describe how individuals process information related to gender, there are 2 respondents who have said that they do not trust male friends— as they may have faced situations which comprehend to their cognitive ability to describe distrust towards a particular gender that is male. And for some of the respondents gender does not matter in friendship as they have said that emotional connection and the mind- set of the individual is important.

Emotional connection is vital in friendships as it forms the foundation of trust, support, and understanding between friends. It allows for genuine communication, empathy, and the ability to be there for each other through both good times and challenging moments. As all the 50 respondents have responded that emotional connection is important but with variations in the percentage of the chosen options, but nobody has claimed that it is not important, which proves that emotional connection is one the primary characteristic in building a friendship, according to the quantitative data above. An emotional connection is a feeling of alignment and intimacy between two people that goes beyond physical attraction, surface- level conversation or having fun together, but share a deep connection in a safe space. The question on what do the respondents understand by emotional connections elicited responses highlighting key terms: empathy, understanding, support, sharing and vulnerability. Analysing this data through the lens of gender schema theory and social learning theory provides insights into gender-based friendships. Gender schema theory posits that individuals internalise societal gender norms and roles, influencing their behaviours and perceptions. Respondents often associate emotional connection with qualities traditionally deemed feminine, such as empathy and vulnerability. This suggests that individuals may feel more

comfortable expressing these traits in same-gender friendships, where there is a shared understanding of gender-specific emotional norms. Social learning theory further explains how these behaviours are reinforced through observation and imitation. From a young age, individuals observe how same-gender peers and role models navigate emotional connections. Boys might see male figures expressing support through actions rather than words, while girls might observe more verbal sharing and empathy among female figures. Consequently, these observed behaviours are replicated in their friendships, reinforcing gender-specific ways of forming emotional connections.The data indicates that both theories play a role in shaping how individuals approach emotional connections within gender-based friendships. Men and women may adopt different strategies for empathy, support, and vulnerability, influenced by their internalised gender schemas and reinforced by social learning. This results in distinct patterns of emotional connection based on gender, reflecting broader societal norms and learned behaviours. A safe space is an environment where individuals feel secure enough to express their true emotions without fear of judgment or rejection. This sense of security is crucial for fostering deep emotional connections. safe spaces in emotional connections are often gender-specific, shaped by societal norms and learned behaviours. These spaces are crucial for allowing individuals to express empathy, understanding, support, sharing, and vulnerability, ultimately deepening their emotional connections within the context of their gender-based friendships. Attachment theory, initially developed to explain parent-child bonds, also provides insight into emotional connections in gender-based friendships. This study investigates how attachment styles influence the dynamics of friendships between men and women. Secure attachment, characterised by trust and mutual support, often leads to deeper, more resilient friendships. Conversely, those with anxious or avoidant attachment styles might experience challenges such as dependency or emotional distance, respectively. Gender roles and societal expectations further shape these interactions, with men traditionally displaying less emotional expressiveness and women fostering more nurturing bonds. Understanding these dynamics can enhance relational satisfaction and mental well-being across gender-diverse friendships.

The study's finding that many respondents view close friends and reliable friends as the same can be interpreted through the theoretical lenses- gender schema theory, attachment theory and social penetration theory. Gender norms might influence the perception of friendship qualities, secure attachment styles could lead to the natural overlap of emotional closeness and reliability, and successful self-disclosure processes might result in friends being seen as both close and reliable. Each theory provides a different angle to understand the respondents' perceptions and offers a richer

analysis of the dynamics at play in close and reliable friendships. Gender schema theory posits that individuals internalise societal expectations and norms about gender, which influence their behaviour and perceptions. When respondents say they see no difference between a close friend and a reliable friend, this may reflect gendered expectations about friendship. From the data collected it is understood that women are often socialised to value emotional intimacy and support in friendships, thus combining closeness and reliability naturally. Men, on the other hand, might be socialised to value loyalty and dependability, potentially viewing reliability as a core component of closeness. The overlap in the definitions of close and reliable friends could be indicative of how gender norms shape the understanding of friendship qualities, where emotional support and dependability are intertwined. Attachment theory focuses on the bonds we form with others, starting from infancy, and how these influence our relationships throughout life. Secure attachments typically lead to healthy relationships characterised by both emotional closeness and reliability. Respondents who view close and reliable friends as the same may have secure attachment styles, where trust and emotional intimacy naturally coexist. Conversely, those with insecure attachment styles might differentiate more between emotional closeness and reliability, seeing them as distinct qualities due to past experiences of inconsistent support. The tendency to see no difference between close and reliable friends may suggest that respondents have experienced secure attachments, where a friend who is emotionally close is also seen as dependable and vice versa. Social penetration theory explains how relationships develop through gradual self-disclosure, leading to deeper intimacy and trust over time. As relationships deepen, individuals reveal more personal information, leading to greater emotional closeness and perceived reliability. Respondents who see close and reliable friends as synonymous might reflect the outcome of successful social penetration, where increased self-disclosure results in both emotional closeness and reliability. The convergence of close and reliable friendships can be seen as a result of successful social penetration, where deeper layers of personal information and trust have been reached, making the friends both emotionally close and dependable.

This qualitative analysis is based on a telephonic interview conducted with two transgender respondents who used he/they and she/they pronouns respectively. Both respondents shared their experiences of navigating social relationships during their adolescence, particularly the difficulties they faced due to their gender identity and the homophobic comments they encountered.

Respondent A's, whose pronouns are he/they, journey began with coming out as bisexual before they eventually came out as a trans man in 2021. This process was described as a gradual evolution of self-awareness and acceptance. In contrast, Respondent B, whose pronouns are she/

they came out as a trans girl during their tenth grade. This early declaration of their identity marked a significant point in their life, despite the challenges it brought. Both the respondents have said that forming friendships outside the transgender community has also been problematic for both respondents. They faced barriers in being accepted and understood by cisgender individuals. The consistent exposure to homophobic comments led both respondents to feel insecure and discouraged. This environment fostered a sense of under-confidence that carried over into their social interactions. The added complexity of navigating gender-based friendships further highlights the nuanced social dynamics that transgender individuals must navigate, underscoring the pervasive impact of societal attitudes on their well-being and social integration.

5. **CONCLUSION**

The study on gender-based friendship norms provides a comprehensive analysis of how societal expectations shape interpersonal relationships across different gender identities. It highlights the significant exclusion of transgender individuals from traditional friendship dynamics, emphasising the urgent need for greater inclusivity and understanding in social contexts. This exclusion reflects broader societal marginalisation and underscores the importance of integrating transgender experiences into discussions about friendship to foster a more inclusive social fabric.

The study also confirms that male-male friendships tend to be less emotionally connected compared to female-female friendships. This difference is rooted in longstanding societal norms that encourage emotional expressiveness and intimacy among women while promoting stoicism and emotional restraint among men. These gendered expectations are deeply ingrained, influencing how individuals approach and maintain their friendships. Men often face societal pressure to conform to ideals of masculinity that discourage vulnerability, leading to friendships that may lack the emotional depth commonly found in female friendships.

Furthermore, the study illuminates the broader problems associated with socially constructed ideas of friendship. These constructs impose restrictive norms that can hinder the formation and maintenance of meaningful connections. For instance, men might struggle with achieving emotional intimacy due to societal pressures, while women might feel compelled to prioritise emotional supportiveness, sometimes at the expense of their own well-being. These norms not only limit personal expression but also perpetuate stereotypes that constrain both men and women in their friendships.

Interestingly, the study finds that most respondents believe gender-specific behavioural patterns are not important as long as there are clear boundaries. This suggests a shift towards valuing personal boundaries and mutual respect over adherence to traditional gender roles, indicating a move towards more egalitarian and individualised friendship dynamics.

The exclusion of transgender individuals from conventional friendship narratives further underscores the rigidity and exclusivity of these norms. Transgender people often face additional barriers in forming friendships due to societal prejudice and lack of understanding. This highlights

the need to reevaluate and expand our understanding of friendship to be more inclusive of diverse gender identities and experiences.

Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort to challenge and dismantle restrictive friendship ideals. Promoting a more inclusive and flexible understanding of friendship can accommodate diverse experiences and foster genuine emotional connections across all genders. This approach will not only enhance individual well-being but also contribute to a more equitable and empathetic society.

5.1 <u>LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY</u>

Limitations are true assets to the research process. They highlight opportunities for future research. No study is completely flawless or inclusive of all possible aspects. Therefore, listing the limitations of your study reflects honesty and transparency and also shows a complete understanding of the topic. One limitation of this study is the small sample size of transgender respondents, as they were not ready to give a telephonic interview due to their past experiences that they have faced, which may affect the made predictions based on past observations, of the findings to the transgender population. Face-to-face interview was not within an option as there was a constraint of time which was also another limitation towards collecting data from the transgender population.

Additionally, the study encountered several invalid responses that had to be excluded from the analysis, potentially introducing selection bias.

The scarcity of existing literature on friendships between transgender individuals and heterosexual individuals further constrained the theoretical framework and comparative analysis.

Moreover, a significant limitation was the lack of research papers specifically examining behavioural patterns in friendships among college students in India; most existing studies are based on populations overseas. This gap limits the applicability of findings to the Indian context.

5.2 <u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>

- Future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample of transgender individuals to improve the generalisation of the findings.

- Researchers should focus on building a more developed body of literature on friendships between transgender individuals and heterosexual individuals, particularly within the Indian context.

6. <u>REFERENCES</u>

<u>ARTICLES</u>

1. Laurence Bachmann. (2014). Female Friendship and Gender Transformation. Sage Journals.

2. McDougall, P. (2007). Same-Gender Versus Cross-Gender Friendship Conceptions.

<u>THESES</u>

1. Myles, R.S. (1994) Undergraduate Student's Description of Same - Gender and Cross Gender Friendships [Master's Theses and Dissertation, University of Rhode lsland]. 1710

2. Smith, J. A. (2020) The Impact of Mindfulness on Emotional Regulation. International Journal of Indian Psychology, 18(1), 155-168

3. Baiocco, R., Santamaria, F., Lonigro, A., Loverno, S., Baumgartner, E., & Laghi, F. (2014). Beyond Similarities: Cross- Gender and Cross-Orientation Friendship in a Sample of Sexual Minority and Heterosexual Young Adults, Sex Roles, 70(3-4), 110-121

4. Barbir, L. A., Vandevender, A. W., &Cohn, T. J. (2017). Friendship Attitudes, and Behavioural Intentions of Cisgender Heterosexuals Toward Transgender Individuals. Journal of Gay and Lesbian Mental Health, 21(2). 154-170

5. Stevenson, T. Interviews with Transgender Students: Academic and Environmental Factors [Graduation Theses and Dissertation, University of Maine- Main]. LS4

7. __APPENDIX__

7.1. __QUESTIONNAIRE VIA GOOGLE FORM__

1.A) NAME-

B) AGE-

C) GENDER- MALE/ FEMALE/ TRANSGENDER

1. IF TRANSGENDER MENTION YOUR PRONOUN

D) INSTITUTION NAME-

2. WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY CHARACTERISTICS YOU SEARCH IN YOUR FRIENDS?

3. DOES YOUR IDEAL STANDARD IN FRIENDSHIP VARY ACCORDING TO THE GENDER OF YOUR FRIEND? (YES/NO)

4. IS RELIABILITY AND CLOSENESS SAME FOR YOU IN FRIENDSHIP? (YES/NO)

5. HOW WOULD YOU DIFFERENTIATE YOUR CLOSE FRIEND FROM YOUR RELIABLE FRIEND?

6. DOES GENDER REALLY MATTER IN FRIENDSHIP? (YES/NO)

7. REFLECT ON THREE POINTS WHERE YOU FIND GENDER DISCRETION IS IMPORTANT IN THE LEVEL OF FRIENDSHIP.

8. DO YOU FOLLOW THE GENDER PRECONCEIVED BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS IN FRIENDSHIP IN ACCORDANCE TO THE GENDER OF YOUR FRIEND?

9. HOW DO YOU GREET YOUR FRIENDS WHEN YOU MEET THEM? DOES IT VARY ACCORDING TO THEIR GENDER?

10. WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY EMOTIONAL CONNECTION IN A FRIENDSHIP?

11. HOW IMPORTANT IS EMOTIONAL CONNECTION FOR YOU WITH YOUR FRIEND? (VERY IMPORTANT/ QUITE IMPORTANT/ IMPORTANT/ DEPENDS ON THE SITUATION/ NOT IMPORTANT)

12. HOW EASY IS IT FOR YOU TO MAKE NEW FRIENDS? (EASY/ DIFFICULT/ MODERATE)

13. HOW SIMILAR IS YOUR PERSONALITY TO YOUR FRIENDS? (VERY SIMILAR/ SIMILAR/ NOT SIMILAR/ VERY DIFFERENT)

14. HOW EASY DO YOU FIND DISCUSSING YOUR FEELING WITH YOUR FRIEND?

 15. HAVE YOUR FRIENDS EVER REFLECTED HOMOPHOBIC OR TRANSPHOBIC COMMENTS OR GESTURES?

16. DO YOU HAVE A TRANSGENDER FRIEND? (YES/NO)

17. IF NO, WHY?

18. DO YOU THINK GENDER SPECIFIC BEHAVIOURAL PATTERNS ARE IMPORTANT TO BE PRACTISED IN FRIENDSHIP?

7.2. <u>INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW</u>

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Pronoun:

1) Do you have both transgender as well as cross-gender friends?

2) Who are you more comfortable with?

3) Do all your friends make you comfortable?

4) Do you find any difference in reciprocation of your friends (mainly cross- gender) for your identity?

5) How have you seen your friends introducing you to their familiar people? Do they use the pronouns that you prefer to identify for yourself or do they use the pronouns that is practiced on the basis of your social orientation by the societal norms?

6) Would you mind sharing a situation where your friends (do specify their gender identity) have been transphobia towards you?

7) How would you differentiate you being accepted in different environments? For example your friends behavioural pattern towards you in school and now.