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**Young adults' friendships:
Over a network, over a drink**

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Abstract

Friendship is a crucial relationship for young adults, yet their own sense-making of friendship within their everyday social lives remains under-explored. As a social practice, friendship is constituted through people's shared meanings within everyday contexts. Two central social contexts for young adults are social networking sites (SNSs) and drinking. It was theorised that young adults bring shared friendship meanings to these contexts which, in turn, engage with their friendship practices, and these interactions are key to young adults' understandings of friendship. The aims of this research were firstly to explore young adults' friendships in relation to their uses of SNSs; secondly, to explore their friendships in relation to their drinking practices; and thirdly, to explore their uses of SNSs within the context of their drinking and friendships. Twelve same and mixed-gender friendship discussion groups were conducted with fifty-one New Zealand European young adults (18-25 years). Seven participants also showed the researcher their own Facebook pages in individual interviews. This method is a form of a 'go-along' walking tour of an informant's significant places, adapted to navigating through an online SNS space. Foucauldian discursive analyses identified that friendship was constructed through discourses of 'social pleasure', 'time and effort', 'protection' and 'self-authenticity'. These friendship discourses were enacted in particular ways within Facebook and within drinking practices, involving pleasures and tensions that threatened and challenged friendships. Friendship as 'social pleasure' was a primary shared meaning to appropriate Facebook, and to engage in drinking practices. Uses of Facebook, however, required friends to perform intensive friendship response, protection, privacy and identity work, and drinking also required friends' protection from drinking harms. Friendship tensions were demonstrated in the effort required to maintain a 'bad but good overall' drinking night and to always have positive drinking photo displays; effectively airbrushing drinking practices offline and online. This research provides new knowledge of the complexities and work involved for young adults to 'do' their friendships within a technologically mediated social world, and within an entrenched societal drinking culture. This research contributes key insights for health initiatives (particularly alcohol harm-reduction strategies) that seek to promote healthier lives for young adults.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
My journey to friendship research	1
A focus on friendship through social networking and drinking.....	3
Marsden project: Young adults, drinking cultures and SNSs	5
Thesis Outline	6
Chapter 2 Young adults' friendships through social networking and drinking	7
Socio-cultural views of 'friendship' and 'young adults'	7
Young adults' friendships	12
The psychology of young adults' friendships: Qualities and behavioural outcomes	12
The sociology of young adults' friendships: Social dimensions.....	15
Absences in young adults' friendship research.....	17
Young adults' friendships and social networking.....	19
Young adults' social networking in Aotearoa NZ	20
The online/offline debate	20
Rethinking young adults' friendships and social networking.....	23
Young adults' friendships and drinking.....	26
Young adults' drinking in Aotearoa NZ	26
The study of young adults' drinking practices.....	27
Rethinking young adults' drinking as friendship	32
Putting it together: Young adults' friendships, drinking and SNSs	33
A social learning view of young adults' SNS alcohol content	34
Rethinking young adults' drinking and uses of SNSs	37
Research Aims	38
Chapter 3 Methodology	41
Epistemology: Social constructionism.....	41
Theoretical orientation: Foucauldian discourse analysis	43
Research Design.....	45
Stage 1: Friendship group discussions	45

Stage 2: Facebook go-along interviews	50
Analytic Strategy – Foucauldian Discourse Analysis.....	54
Ethical considerations	57
Quality considerations.....	59
Reflections and reflexivity	60
Chapter 4 Young adults’ meanings of friendship and social networking	63
Introduction.....	63
Method	66
Findings.....	68
‘Friendship as social fun’	68
‘Friends invest time and effort’	70
‘Friends let me be myself’	72
‘Friends have your back’	73
Conclusions	75
Research reflections: Friendship and social networking.....	77
Chapter 5 Young adults’ meanings of drinking as a friendship practice	79
Introduction.....	79
Method	83
Findings.....	85
‘Drinking as friendship fun’	85
‘Friends with a buzz’	87
‘Bad but good overall’	89
‘Caring and protection’	91
Discussion and Implications	93
Research reflections: Friendship and drinking.....	96
Chapter 6 Young adults’ meanings of friendship, drinking and uses of.....	99
SNSs.....	99
Introduction.....	100
Method	102
Findings.....	105
‘Friendship group belonging’	106
‘Balanced self-display’	109
‘Absences in positive photos’	111
Discussion and Implications	113
Research reflections – Friendship, drinking and uses of SNSs.....	115

Chapter 7 Conclusions	117
Conceptual framework.....	117
Interactions: Friendship, SNSs and drinking cultures.....	118
Friendship as pleasure in context	118
Friendship as tensions (threats and challenges) in context	120
Tensions – friendship and ‘self’	123
Limitations and future research.....	125
Gender, class, ethnicity	125
Friendship discussion group method.....	127
Facebook go-along interview method.....	128
Looking ahead - future research.....	129
References	132
Appendices.....	157
Appendix A: Information sheet for stage 1 friendship group discussions	157
Appendix B: Friendship group discussion participant consent form	160
Appendix C: Friendship group discussion participant confidentiality agreement....	161
Appendix D: Friendship group discussion guides and prompts	162
Appendix E: Friendship group discussion support information	164
Appendix F: Transcription notation.....	165
Appendix G: Information sheet for stage 2 Facebook go-along interviews	166
Appendix H: Facebook go-along interview participant consent form.....	168
Appendix I: Facebook go-along interview question guides and prompts.....	169
Appendix J: Facebook go-along interview support information	171
Appendix K: Research Software.....	172
Appendix L: DRC 16 – Chapter 4	173
Appendix M: DRC 16 – Chapter 5	174
Appendix N: DRC 16 – Chapter 6.....	175

List of Tables

Table 1: Friendship groups and participants (N=51).....	48
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