INTIMATE INTERACTIONS IN PEER RELATIONSHIP OF YOUNG ADULTS

by

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Abstract

Friendship with peers is an important part of young adults’ lives. Literature has addressed the significance of intimacy in peer relationship, and has examined its relations with other aspects of young adults’ development and psychological well-being. But there is a lack of knowledge about how young adults express, act on, and experience intimacy in their day-to-day interactions with their friends. This study was a secondary analysis of data from a larger study using the action-project method to investigate transition-to-adulthood joint projects that young adults engage in with their peers. Two female-female dyads, two male-male dyads, and two female-male dyads (aged 19-27 years) were selected for in-depth qualitative analysis with their dyadic conversations and their reports of their internal processes during the conversations. The research question explored in this study was: What characterizes the intimate interactions in the conversations that young adults have with their friends? Content analysis using the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF) (Coan & Gottman, 2007) identified components of intimate interaction based on Prager’s theory of intimacy (Prager, 1995). The manifestation of intimacy within each dyad and the synthesis of all six cases are presented. The main characteristics revealed by the young adult peers’ intimate interactions include: (a) expression of attention and interest using both nonverbal behaviour and verbal cues; (b) self-disclosures either prioritizing recent life events or focusing on emotional events, and the tendency to share challenging experiences; (c) responses containing validation, comfort, understanding, and also information or suggestions; (d) positive internal experiences characterized by mutual support and understanding; and (e) reports of the emotional and instrumental value of the interactions. Findings are discussed in the context of the literature. Limitations of this study, as well as its implications for future research and counselling practice, are also discussed.
Preface

This is an original unpublished intellectual work of the author. The data used in this research was collected in research activities approved by the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board, and were covered by UBC Ethics Certificate Number H10-01476. Secondary use of data was also approved, and the certificate number of the Ethics Certificate was H16-01097.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

I became interested in the concept of intimacy while working on a qualitative research project examining peer relationship in transition to adulthood. In the interviews conducted in that study, we obtained data of young adults having a brief self-directed conversation with their friends, and their reports of their internal process experienced during that conversation. During the research team’s discussions for data analysis, the word “intimacy” was brought up from time to time. Intimacy seemed to be found suitable to describe certain characteristics of the young adult peers’ communications or interactions with each other, and to describe the dynamics in their relationships. As well, some participant dyads were perceived to be more intimate than others. Although there was a certain degree of common understanding of what constituted intimacy in those discussions, the research team never focused on this construct or explored what intimacy looked like in the conversations between young adult peers. Therefore, a new research question emerged in the broad context of transition to adulthood that focused on intimacy in peer relationship of young adults.

Intimacy originates from the Latin word “intimus,” which means inmost. McAdams (1989) defined intimacy as the capacity in terms of one’s basic human need for sharing one’s innermost self through closeness and connection. Considering that intimacy is often used to describe interpersonal processes in addition to individual experience, it is also helpful to understand it as “an affective connection between two persons as a result of mutual trust, acceptance, and validation” (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006, p. 417).

Friendship with peers is one of the most common intimate relationships and is an important part of young adults’ lives. The structure of an individual’s interpersonal network usually starts to shift in adolescence. Instead of parents, peers gradually become the centre of
youths’ interpersonal life and become one of their primary attachment figures (Allen & Land, 1999; Fraley & Davis, 1997). Compared to previous stages of development, the emphasis on intimacy increases (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006; Rice & Mulkeen, 1995), and young adult friendships develop to be more intimate, mutual, and reciprocal (Seiffge-Krenke, 2007). At the same time, many young adults experience changes in various aspects of life, including education or career, social circles, and location of residence. Intertwined with these markers of transition, the development of intimate relationships plays a significant role in shaping young adults’ lives (Shanahan, 2000).

In reviewing the literature on intimacy or intimate relationship, the quality of peer relationships seems to be an important factor during adolescence and early adulthood. At times, data collected from young adult populations were linked or compared to data collected from adolescents (e.g., Baril, Julien, Chartrand, & Dubé, 2009; Buhrmester, 1990; Meeus, Branje, van der Valk, & de Wied, 2007; Shulman, Laursen, Kalman, & Karpovsky, 1997). For the studies that focused on the young adult population, a number of them examined the relationships between intimacy and other important individual variables such as attachment style, academic performance, mental health status, and psychological adjustment (e.g., Finzi-Dottan, Har-Even, Chason, & Baumerger, 2008; King & Terrance, 2008, Selfout, Branje, & Meeus, 2009; Shulman, Elicker, & Sroufe, 1994). In the literature, the significance of intimacy has been acknowledged and the role of intimacy in young adult lives has been addressed, but there seemed to be a lack of knowledge about how young adults express, act on, and experience intimacy in their day-to-day interactions with their friends.

If we could better describe the process of intimacy by taking a closer look at the interactions between young adults and their friends, the results would provide extended
knowledge about intimacy in young adult peer relationship. Researchers, educators, counsellors, and social workers would be able to better understand, assess, and facilitate intimacy in peer relationships when they work with young adults. And young adults themselves might also benefit by gaining insights about new forms of intimacy at this stage of development, which is connected to their overall experiences during the transition to adulthood.

**Review of the Literature**

The literature review included literature selected in the early stage of the study to understand the phenomenon of intimacy in the given context and how intimacy has been investigated in research. This section starts with some empirical studies to situate intimacy among other important variables. After discussing the role and meaning of intimacy for young adults, a brief summary on measuring intimacy and intimate relationships is presented in an effort to explore how intimacy has been operationalized in self-report instruments and observation methodology. Lastly, different views on the conceptualization and definition of intimacy are compared. Based on this comparison, a definition that is suitable for the current study is identified.

**The role of intimacy in youths’ peer relationship.** Intimacy in youths’ peer relationships has been included in many empirical studies to investigate how it is connected to other important aspects of youths’ development and psychological well-being. The relations among intimacy and personality, coping, mental health, general adjustment, and career development have been discussed. Attachment style was found to be a strong predictor of intimacy or self-disclosure. And self-disclosure is commonly considered to be an indicator of intimacy (Finzi-Dottan et al., 2008; Jocelyn, Greg, & Chad, 2005; Scharf, Mayseless, & Kivenson-Baron, 2004; Welch & Houser, 2010). Research indicated that intimacy in adolescent
relationships predicted participants’ concurrent and future social self-image (Rice & Mulkeen, 1995) and was moderately correlated with their socioemotional adjustment and interpersonal competence (Buhrmester, 1990). More than one study underlined the importance of friendship quality in young adults’ psychological adjustment (Baiocco et al., 2014; Buote et al., 2007). Research also supports its association with resilience (Graber, Turner, & Madill, 2016). With different styles of perceived intimacy in their friendships (interdependent friendship or disengaged friendship), adolescents and young adults showed different levels of increase in constructive problem solving and different levels of depression (Selfout et al., 2009). Together with attachment and mutuality in peer relationship, intimacy with friends had a significant and unique contribution to environmental exploration and progress in committing to career choices for late adolescents (Felsman & Blustein, 1999).

Given the substantial impact that intimacy has on psychological well-being, Reis (2007) pointed out that many theorists had described intimate relationships “as a principle feature of successful personality development and maturity” (p. 498). A prominent example is Erikson’s (1964) theory of personality developmental stages. According to this theory, “intimacy vs. isolation” is the main risk in early adulthood and needs to be resolved by pursuing intimacy. At the same time, Erikson suggested a strong relationship between formulating identity and becoming involved in intimate relationships. On the one hand, the degree of committing to an identity influences the capacity of being in intimate relationships. On the other hand, intimate relationships can help self-clarification and facilitate youths’ identity exploration (Erikson, 1964). Some of the following studies obtained results that were in line with Erikson’s theory on the role of intimacy. The results of a meta analysis indicated a positive association between adolescents’ identity statuses and intimacy, which implied that high identity exploration and
identity commitment were related to high intimacy in relationships (Årseth, Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2009). Meanwhile, research showed that, when people are in intimate relationships, they tend to display signs of moving forward in Eriksonian developmental stages (Mackinnon, Nosko, Pratt, & Norris, 2011).

Intimacy in peer relationship has been furthered explored in the matrix of interpersonal relationships for young adults (including relationships with their family of origin and with romantic partners). A number of studies revealed the mediating role of close peer relationships between family function variables and a youth’s mental health or interpersonal capacity. High levels of friendship quality and peer group affiliation were found to attenuate the association between unilateral parental decision making and adolescents’ externalizing behaviour in school (Lansford, Criss, Pettit, Dodge, & Bates, 2003). Furthermore, when an adolescent’s relationship with their parents impacted their capacity for closeness and commitment, the impact was mediated through their relationships with a best friend (Scharf & Mayseless, 2001). A longitudinal research study by Larsen and colleagues (2007) assessed adolescent friendship as a moderator between their perceptions of inter-parental conflicts and their anxiety and aggression. Similarly, Brown and colleagues (2013) also found that close friendship competence served as a buffer between inter-parent aggression in early adolescence and disengagement coping in emerging adulthood. In addition, having a harmonious same-gender friendship was discovered to compensate for the effect on well-being from having a low-involved sibling relationship (Sherman, Lansford, & Volling, 2006).

One recent study indicated that young adults possess distinct patterns of attachment in each type of intimate relationship, and that the attachment patterns in friendships and romantic relationships tend to resemble each other to a greater degree than to those experienced in the
relationships with parents (Caron, Lafontaine, Bureau, Levesque, & Johnson, 2012). Although intimacy with friends might not be as meaningful psychologically in coping with emotional problems compared to intimacy with romantic partners (Meeus et al., 2007), it appears that young adults work out the scripts of their romantic relationships in their conversations with friends (Norona, Thorne, Kerrick, Farwood, & Korobov, 2013).

**Measurement of intimacy or intimate peer relationship.** The literature review above suggests the significance of intimacy in the peer relationships of young adults. Meanwhile, it raised the question: how did researchers measure intimacy in the studies on intimacy in peer relationships? A literature review is conducted to explore how intimacy was operationalized in both self-report and outsider observation. In other words, it explores what kind of elements or indicators of intimacy were identified in the research setting. The focus of this section was more conceptual rather than a direct examination of the instruments’ psychometric properties.

**Self-report instruments.** The review of self-report instruments begins with instruments that emphasize individual capacity or experience in forming intimate friendships. For instance, the friendship competence subscale of the Harter self-perception profile for adolescents (Harter, 1988) includes five items. Each item presents two contrasting descriptors and asks youths to self-rate their competence to form close friendships. Also, Orlofsky (1976) developed a classification method based on Erikson’s theory of personality (1964). Orlofsky’s method can be used to determine how much an individual’s relationship meets Erikson’s criteria using the intimacy status interview. The discriminating indicators in this method consist of partner perception, self-disclosure and communication, affect cognition, successful resolution of earlier Eriksonian stages, and childhood peer relationships. Likewise, the Intimacy subscale in the Erikson Psychosocial Inventory Scale (EPIS; Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981) uses 12 self-
descriptors that cover the capacity for intimate relationship, the tendency of self-disclosure, and friendliness towards others.

Many instruments that have been used to measure intimacy take into consideration the context of interpersonal interaction. They usually require the respondents to complete a survey with a specific target person in mind and answer questions based on their perception of that person. For instance, in the Psychosocial Intimacy Questionnaire (PIQ; Tesch, 1985) there are 60 statements about the interpersonal relationship, including the respondent’s behaviours, their partner’s behaviours, and the relationship between them. Also, Levy-Tossman, Kaplan, and Assor (2007) created an intimacy self-report scale. It uses eight items to assess both a respondent’s and their friend’s readiness to expose individual challenges, to listen, to seek or give help, and their willingness to work out difficulties in the relationship.

Several other unidimensional scales seem to measure intimacy through self-report interactions in peer relationships or a respondent’s attitudes towards these interactions. Each of them has a somewhat different focus. In the Miller Social Intimacy Scale (MSIS; Miller & Lefcourt, 1982), seventeen items inquire about the frequency and degree of certain experiences in a relationship, such as confiding and understanding, as well as perceived closeness and importance of the partner. The Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationship-Modified inventory (PAIR-M; Theriault, 1998) consists of five items that measure a respondent’s perceptions of positive intimacy behaviours in a relationship, such as self-disclosure of emotions. The six questions in Blyth and Foster-Clark’s (1987) intimacy scale deal with the general affective level of a relationship regarding acceptance, understanding, sharing feelings, and seeking advice. It excludes the aspects of modeling between friends, shared activities, and providing instrumental support.
Aside from unidimensional scales, several instruments identified several components of intimacy based on theories or collected data from the target population, and therefore comprise multiple dimensions. The Intimate Friendship Scale (Sharabany & Wiseman, 1993), which was developed for adolescents, contains four items for each of the eight dimensions: frankness and spontaneity with the friend, sensitivity and knowing in interacting with the friend, attachment to the friend, exclusiveness and uniqueness of the friendship, the degree of helping and sharing with the friend, the degree of being able to take from and impose on the friend, common activities, as well as trust and loyalty. Another example is a 40-item questionnaire that addresses five manifestations of intimacy among cross-sex friends (Monsour, Betty, & Kurzweil, 1993). It includes the amount of caring and affection, the feeling of closeness, the degree of emotional expressiveness, the frequency of discussing personal content, and the extent of sexual and romantic overtones in the relationship. In the McGill friendship questionnaires (Mendelson & Aboud, 1999), intimacy specifically refers to being sensitive to the other’s needs and states, and being open to honest expressions of thought, feelings, and personal information. In this instrument, intimacy is regarded as one of the six functions of friendship, along with simulating companionship, help, reliable alliance, self-validation, and emotional security.

It is worth noting that some of the instruments approached the concept of intimacy from a particular perspective. For instance, Shulman and colleagues (1997) adapted established instruments to create an intimacy scale based on the contrast between closeness and individuality. This scale identified two types of friendships: high closeness and balanced relatedness indicate interdependent friendship, otherwise it would be disengaged friendship. This instrument might be more suitable for adolescent populations rather than young adults, as control and conformity are important themes in adolescent friendships (Shulman et al., 1997).
Instead of developing a measurement of intimacy, some researchers revealed their understanding of intimacy indirectly through the scales they selected to measure intimacy. For example, a study by Grabill and Kerns (2000) used six out of eleven dimensions from the Network of Relationships Inventory (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) to measure intimacy in friendship: Companionship, Satisfaction, Intimacy, Affection, Admiration, and Reliable Alliance. To serve a similar purpose, Grabill and Kens (2000) employed three separate questionnaires to measure self-disclosure, responsiveness to a partner’s disclosure, as well as feeling understood, validated, and cared for by a partner during conversation. Moreover, Camarena, Sarigiani, and Petersen (1990) modified Blyth and Foster-Clark’s intimacy scale (1987) by eliminating behaviours or conditions that lead to the feeling of closeness because the researchers viewed intimacy as only the end state of feeling close.

Observational measurement. A fewer number of studies were identified in which researchers directly observed the interactions between peers to assess the quality of their relationship. Given the limited number of studies, I expanded my review to research studies that assessed friendship in general regardless of their use of the term “intimacy.”

There were two studies that invited participants to engage in self-directed interactions. In one of them, peer dyads recruited from university student populations were instructed to have a 10-minute conversation to catch up or talk about whatever came to mind (Nelson, Thorne, & Shapiro, 2011). For each dyad, the conversation was followed by a semi-structured interview on the history and behavioural patterns of their friendship as well as a discussion based on the audio playback of their conversation. The researchers coded the data in a number of domains to determine friendship roles, and the domain of intimacy pertained to whether participants shared personal and emotional concerns with each other. In the other study (Chasin & Radtke, 2013),
pairs of self-identified friends aged 18-32 years were invited to have a conversation about their friendship. They were provided with some optional topics to help them get started, such as the history of their friendship, the type of their friendship, and the meaning of being close friends. A researcher acted as a facilitator and the participants were asked to converse mainly with each other. Discourse analysis that focused on specific conversational exchanges was conducted to explore how friendship had been performed in the interview.

Three other research studies using observation to examine peer relationship provided a specific structure to the peer dyads’ interactions in the research setting. A study on children’s friendship jealousy and satisfaction (Deutz, Lansu, & Cillessen, 2015) conducted a 30-minute play session with 9-year old friend dyads where they completed games and tasks together. Observers watched the videotape and coded for individual and dyadic behaviours. The observers rated each child on their positive and negative behaviours in general. Additionally, they rated each child on their specific styles of behaviour including, for example, involvement, disruptive, dominant, and submissiveness. They also rated the dyad using the Child-Friend Interaction Rating Scales (C-FIRS) (Peters, Van den Bosch, & Riksen-Walraven, 2007), with subscales such as disclosure, connectedness, conflict and resolution, power balance, and overall friendship quality. Another study (Shulman et al., 1997) instructed adolescent friend dyads in the 9th grade to conduct a card sorting task individually, with and without communication. Their problem solving behaviour was coded to reflect the degree of cooperation between them and the impact of communication on their problem solving. The purpose of the coding was to place the dyads into two types of friendship before conducting any further data analysis. In a study that tracked females’ quality of relationships in adolescence and in adulthood, young adults around 20 years of age and their best friends completed two 20-minute videotaped conversations. They were
assigned to helper and helpee roles and took turns to talk about their most salient personal problems (Baril et al., 2009). Their communication behaviours were coded on a number of positive dimensions (e.g., engagement, attention, expressiveness, support and validation, problem-solving) and negative dimensions (e.g., conflict, dominance, withdrawal, denial). The researchers also evaluated their dyadic behaviours regarding the current situation and future stability of their friendships.

Overall, observational studies seemed to emphasize both individual behaviours and dyadic dynamics in measuring intimate peer relationship. Naturally, the observational studies focused on the behavioural aspects of peer dyads’ interactions and employed detailed coding system to analyze the behaviours.

**Definition and conceptualization of intimacy.** The section above showed that there were overlaps and differences among the instruments measuring intimacy in peer relationship, and generally they seemed to be measuring a mixture of an individual’s perception, emotional experience, and behaviours, as well as dyadic dynamics. This indicated the need to clarify what were some common ways to conceptualize intimacy, and whether there was one definition of intimacy that is widely accepted.

As we would usually understand it in daily life, intimacy is mainly defined by a feeling of openness to share thoughts and emotions (Finzi-Dottan et al., 2008). According to the *Encyclopaedia of Psychology*, scholars have not reached a single authoritative definition of intimacy (Archer, 2000). One possible reason for this is that the concept of intimacy covers a range of equally valid subjects, and the focus of research on intimacy ranges from individual development to social psychology. Overall, intimacy can be understood from three perspectives: the capacity of an individual, a characteristic of a relationship, or a property of relationship
interactions (Acitelli & Duck, 1987). Each of these perspectives is presented with examples below.

From the first perspective, intimacy is rooted in individual experience and is shaped by individual characteristics. Erikson (1964) suggested that an individual’s capacity to initiate and maintain intimacy includes the capacity to achieve commitment and depth in relationships as well as the capacity to maintain individualation. Tolstedt and Stokes (1983) defined intimacy as one’s “feelings of closeness and emotional bonding including intensity of liking, moral support, and ability to tolerate flaws in the significant other” (p. 574).

More often, intimacy is defined as a characteristic of relationship. This perspective acknowledges the interpersonal aspect of intimacy and the time span over which intimacy develops between individuals. The definition presented in the introduction section of this study was a good example of this: “an affective connection between two persons as a result of mutual trust, acceptance, and validation” (Radmacher & Azmitia, 2006, p. 417). As well, in a review of interpersonal attraction (Camarena et al., 1990), two elements were considered to reasonably encompass the construct of intimacy: a favorable attitude and joint belongingness (Huston & Levinger, 1978).

Lastly, some scholars recognized the behavioural indicators of intimacy and attempted to define intimacy as a property of relationship interactions. Earlier studies on intimacy in adolescent friendships mainly referred to intimacy as self-disclosure of thought and feelings, shared closeness between friends, and peers’ readiness to help each other (Berndt, 1982; Jones & Dembo, 1989). Certain definitions emphasized the reaction to self-disclosure and specified the characteristics of interactions, such as “responds warmly and sympathetically” (Reis & Shaver, 1988, p. 375). This perspective seems to be consistent with young adults’ own understanding of
intimacy. In two studies where researchers invited college students to define intimacy in friendship, the most common definitions were largely descriptions of interactions such as self-disclosure, emotional expressiveness, support, shared interest, or physical contact (Monsour, 1992; Parks and Floyd, 1996). The definition in the *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology* (Reis, 2007) combined the interactions and experience of intimacy by describing it as “a process of interaction in which social partners, as a result of sharing personal and private thoughts and feelings, come to feel understood, appreciated, and cared for by each other” (p. 498).

Prager (1995) addressed the challenges to define intimacy in a way that not only covers multiple layers within the concept but also sets a comparatively practical boundary to differentiate intimacy from other similar concepts. Prager proposed that intimacy would serve academic purposes better as a superordinate concept. It is comprised of two basic concepts: intimate interaction and intimate relationship. Intimate interaction refers to “dyadic behaviour that exists within a clearly designated space-and-time framework,” while intimate relationships “exist in a much broader, more abstract space-and-time framework” (Prager, 1995, p. 19). In intimate relationships, intimate interaction can be expected to happen with an acceptable frequency. Furthermore, there are two subordinate concepts that comprise intimate interaction: intimate behaviour (verbal or nonverbal) and intimate experience (generating positive feelings towards self or the other). This definition involved various aspects of intimacy and demonstrated how they relate to each other in a hierarchical structure (See Figure 1). The current study adopted Prager’s conceptualization of intimacy and decided to focus on intimate interaction only. The definition of intimate interaction is an interaction “in which partners share personal, private material; feel positively about each other and themselves; and perceive a mutual understanding between them” (Prager, 1995, p. 22).
The literature review provided information about what has been examined in research studies about intimacy in young adult’s peer relationship, and how intimacy was conceptualized and measured in these research studies. It also revealed that there are some gaps in the research on this topic.

First, many studies seemed to conceptualize intimacy as a property of relationships or interactions in relationship. However, these studies were predominantly gathering information from only one individual in the relationship and invited individuals to report based on their memories and perception of the interaction with their friends. Therefore, integration of perspectives from both sides in a friendship would be helpful in learning about intimacy. Secondly, the relationship between observable intimate behaviour and internal intimate experience was often blurred. To address both intimate behaviour and intimate experience, or to link the two concepts, was not considered in many of the studies. Related to the two points...
above, despite the attempt in several recent studies to use direct observation, it was prevalent in previous studies to use self-reports to obtain an individual’s experience or perspective in an intimate peer relationship. Even when intimate behaviours were included as a component of intimacy, researchers often relied on the participants to report the frequency or degree of certain behaviours. Further exploration is needed on the practice of intimacy instead of the discourse of intimacy in young adults’ peer relationship.

The current study intended to focus on intimate interaction, within the conceptualization of intimacy proposed by Prager (1995). It attempted to make a unique contribution to the literature by recruiting young adult peers to participate in research in pairs as well as deliberately addressing both intimate behaviour and intimate experience in the data collection. The study aimed at answering the following question: What characterizes the intimate interactions in the conversations that young adults have with their friends?
Chapter 2: Research Method

This study was a secondary analysis of the data collected from a previous research study on transition-to-adulthood joint projects that young adults engage in with their peers (Young et al., 2015). A collective case study was utilized in an effort to answer the research question: What characterizes the intimate interactions in the conversations that young adults have with their friends?

Secondary Analysis

The original research project was a qualitative longitudinal study using the action-project method (Young, Valach, & Domene, 2005) to describe the joint actions and joint projects that young adults constructed and engaged in with their peers in the context of transition to adulthood. As described in the introduction section of this study, intimacy was one of the emerging constructs in the data analysis of the original study, which illustrated the role of intimacy in young adults’ peer relationships. Heaton (2008) reviewed the development of secondary analysis of qualitative data, and summarized various types of secondary analysis and their functions. According to Heaton (2008), secondary analysis can be used for two main purposes: to investigate new or additional research questions or to verify the findings of previous research. Given that my interest in exploring further the characteristics of intimate interaction raised an additional research question to the original study, the definition of supplementary analysis best describes the current study, as it was an “in-depth analysis of an emergent issue or aspect of the data that was not addressed or was only partially addressed in the primary study” (Heaton, 2008, p. 39).

One of the questions that needs to be addressed by any secondary analysis is whether data collected for one purpose is suitable to be used for another purpose (Heaton, 2008). Specifically,
the question for the current study was, would data that were collected in the original study help us understand the intimate interactions between young adult peers? To answer this question, I would reiterate that my attention to intimate interaction developed when I was involved in the work of the original study, and was endorsed by other members of the research team. Thus, it was logical to use the data in which we identified evidence of intimacy. Also, the original study contained rich data about young adults’ interactions from various sources, including the observation of self-directed conversations and self-reported internal process from semi-structured interviews. The publications so far only reported the primary findings from those data. It was reasonable to make further use of the data before considering new data collection.

Moreover, there were two major factors that made the data collected in the original study suitable to be used in the current study. First, even though the original study was designed to address different research questions, it studied a broad concept (i.e., peer relationships in the transition to adulthood). The interviews were not structured with questions focusing on any pre-determined aspects of the peer relationship. Instead, the research study set up the space for young adult peers to have self-directed conversations that were situated in the context of the transition to adulthood but not limited to specific topics. Therefore, the data from the original study provided the possibility to investigate intimacy in natural occurring peer interactions. I consider it an advantage that intimacy was not directly addressed or asked about in the interviews because the young adult peers were not just talking about the intimate interaction between them, but they were actually engaging in the intimate interaction within the research setting. Secondly, the original study collected data in the framework of contextual action theory. The rationale of the data collection procedure and the structure of the data fit well with Prager’s theory of intimacy (1995), where intimate interaction was defined as an interpersonal process.
that consisted of observable behaviour as well as internal experience.

As for the limitations of using previously collected data, an issue came up regarding observing and recording participants’ nonverbal behaviours. In order to identify indicators of intimate interaction based on Prager’s (1995) theoretical framework, I needed to access participants’ verbal and nonverbal behaviours. The data collection procedure in the original study did not focus on nonverbal behaviour. There was only one videotape of the conversation within each young adult peer dyad, in which the camera filmed both participants from the same angle. In addition, the researchers arranged the chairs before conducting the interviews and the participants often remained the same positions during their conversations. Ideally, it would have been helpful if we had left more space for the participants to decide how they wanted to sit with each other, and if we had used one camera facing each of the participants to better capture their nonverbal behaviours during their conversations.

**Collective Case Study**

The secondary analysis in the current study took place in the form of selecting six peer dyads from the original study and conducting a qualitative collective case study. In Stake’s (1995) book on case study research, the difference between instrumental case study and intrinsic case study was discussed. Instrumental case study went beyond the intrinsic interest in an individual case, and is driven by a need to understand the entity, such as a phenomenon. It can be helpful to understand the phenomenon through describing what happened in a collection of individual cases. The current study was an instrumental inquiry with the object of understanding and describing intimate interactions in young adults’ peer relationships. The intrinsic findings in each case and the instrumental findings across cases were both appropriate and helpful in the attempt to answer the research question.
According to Stake (2006), a phenomenon may take on different forms or operate in different ways under particular conditions. Through collective case study, the researchers attempt to better understand the entity by studying it as it is situated within each case (Stake, 2006). Themes are defined based on research question(s) and indicate the primary information that the researchers are seeking. In the current study, these themes contained several major components of intimate interaction. During the data analysis I examine the prominence of each theme in each of the cases, and also determine how each case could be used in developing each of the themes. In the end, I take evidence from the case studies to make assertions about the characteristics of the targeted phenomenon in terms of both uniformity and disparity. The description of the entity is “less a coordinated system and more a loose confederation, or less a simple pattern and more a mosaic” (Stake, 2006, p. 40).

Participants

The primary study recruited 15 dyads of young adults aged 19-27 years (M = 21.3, SD = 2.35). They were all residents of a large metropolitan city in western Canada. They responded to either posters circulated throughout a university campus and at youth agencies or through online advertisements. All respondents went through a brief telephone screening. Young adults with serious cognitive impairment or mental health problems were provided with information about resources available to them but were advised not to participate in the research. Participants needed to be able to communicate in English.

There were 6 cross-gender dyads and 9 same-gender dyads (5 female-female dyads and 4 male-male dyads). Participants reported that they were not romantically involved with each other. The participants came from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Fourteen of 30 participants were born in Canada. Based on the languages that participants reported using at
home, at least half of the participants or their families came from Asian, Bulgarian, Arabic, and Northern European backgrounds. Approximately 2/3 of the participants were university students at the time they were recruited. The purpose and procedure of the research were explained to the participants before and during the first meeting. Each of the participants gave informed consent individually with the knowledge of their right to withdraw from the study. If either participant of the peer dyad stopped participating in the research, the dyad was considered to have withdrawn from the study. Each participant received an honorarium in amount of $20 after each of the three meetings. There was no honorarium for the telephone communication phase of the study.

Among the 15 dyads of young adult peers, six were selected for the collective case study, with each dyad considered a case. The first criterion for selecting cases was based on the joint project for each peer dyad identified in the primary study (Young et al., 2015). In that research study, the research team analyzed those actions that the young adult peers engaged in related to their transition to adulthood, and identified a distinct joint project for each dyad. The most important and prevalent category of projects across cases was friendship. Its two sub-categories were maintaining friendship and negotiating friendship. In negotiating friendship, the peers were more consciously working on their relationship, including building up a newly developed friendship, defining friendship in a new context, or deciding how their friendship would change given the changes they faced in their lives. Compared to these peer dyads, the dyads who had the joint project of maintaining friendship were continuing an established friendship. I expected regular intimate interactions to appear in the conversations of the peer dyad who were maintaining their friendships. Therefore, I regarded the data from these participants as more relevant to the focus of the current study. Based on this criterion, I screened the joint projects that had been identified in the original study after the first interview. Six young adult dyads were
excluded for not having an explicit friendship project or focusing on *negotiating friendship* in their project.

Selecting cases in a collective case study is not a sampling process (Stake, 1995). On the one hand, the representation of the participants is always limited given the number of the cases. On the other hand, Stake pointed out the importance of balance and variety in selecting cases for the purpose of maximizing what we are able to learn from the cases. I hoped to consider two demographic variables in selecting the cases. Gender difference has always been a topic of interest in studies of intimacy. For the current study, I planned to include two cases from each gender group (i.e., female-female, male-male, and female-male). The diversity of cultural background was crudely reflected by the number of years living in Canada and the language used in participants’ homes. I decided that the number of years living in Canada would be more relevant to cultural difference. The language used at home reflected the cultural background of participants’ families, but it is possible that the participants were born in Canada and/or grew up in the Canadian cultural environment. Participants who have lived in Canada for only several years were very likely to live in a different cultural environment previously. Therefore, within the two cases from each gender group, I took this factor into account by choosing one dyad with young adults born in Canada or living here for over 10 years and the other dyad with young adults being new to Canada and living here for less than 5 years.

**Data Collection**

The data that were used in this study had been collected in the framework of contextual action theory and using the qualitative action-project research method (Young et al., 2005; Wall et al., 2016). Contextual action theory is a theoretical approach in career development and counselling that was developed by Young and his colleagues (Valach & Young, 2002, 2004;
Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002). It views actions as goal-oriented and considers the context of actions in order to provide an integrative explanation of career. This theory reflects a social-constructionist epistemology and steers away from a common deterministic standpoint. It emphasizes how actions are jointly constructed in interactive settings rather than letting the individual be the center or initiator of experience construction. And it constantly acknowledges the influence of context. According to contextual action theory, the goal-oriented action that people take together can be referred to “joint action” and is composed of manifest behaviour, internal processes, and meaning. In this way it addresses different dimensions of a single phenomenon and acquires rich knowledge that can hardly be captured otherwise.

The research team of the primary study included two supervising researchers and six graduate student researchers. Following the data collection procedure of action-project method, participants were involved in the study over a nine-month period. There were three face-to-face meetings and a number of telephone communications. There were always two researchers working with each participant dyad.

In the first meeting, two researchers conducted a brief warm-up conversation with the peer dyad to gather information about their friendship (e.g., when and how did they become friends, what did they usually do with each other) as well as to identify important issues related to transition to adulthood that they experienced or discussed with each other (e.g., career plans, independent living, relationships with family members, peers, or romantic partners). After helping the participants identify a couple of topics they could talk about, the researchers invited the young adults to have a casual conversation of approximately 15 minutes in length without the researchers present. They were not limited to the topic with which they started. The conversation was videotaped and immediately used to conduct a self-confrontation interview. In
the self-confrontation interviews, the two participants were separated and invited to watch a
digital playback of their conversation individually together with one researcher. The researchers
would stop the video at 1-minute intervals and ask the participants what they could recall about
their thoughts and feelings in the conversation during that minute.

In the primary study, all parts of the first meeting were transcribed. The narratives
derived from the data collected in the first meeting described the young adults’ goal-directed
actions and joint project. These were reviewed by the participants and modified according to
their feedback in the second meeting. After that, participants were followed up by telephone
monitoring for six months. Researchers made phone calls with the participants individually once
every two weeks in order to track the updates and changes about the joint projects in which the
young adult peers were engaged.

At the end of the six months, each dyad returned for a third meeting with the researchers.
This final meeting followed a very similar procedure to the initial interview. The researchers and
the participants reviewed the previously identified project and discussed whether it had changed.
Then the participants had another 15-minute conversation, in which they might or might not
continue the same topics that they chose in the first meeting. A final analysis was completed
after analyzing the transcription of the third meeting. It is worth noting that all of the
information disclosed individually in the self-confrontation interview or telephone monitoring
was kept confidential.

For the six cases selected for the current study, I only used their data from the first
meeting with researchers, including the self-directed conversations between young adult peers
and self-confrontation interviews conducted individually (both videotape and transcription).
Although the longitudinal design of the original study allowed us to access additional
information about each dyad’s friendship and how it evolved during a 9-month period of time, I decided that the rest of the data from the original dataset would be more helpful in investigating intimate relationship rather than intimate interaction, and thus were not included. The information gathered in follow-up time period was separated from the data of the first meeting so that it did not interfere with case selection or data analysis in the current study.

As discussed in the literature review, this study is based on the structure of intimacy defined by Prager (1995). In this theoretical model, intimate interaction can be defined and studied independently from intimate relationship. In fact, given that intimate interaction and intimate relationship are two concepts within different time frameworks, it would be challenging and confusing to examine both concepts at the same time, especially considering the scope of the current study. Meanwhile, with the data we had obtained in the primary study, it would be difficult to evaluate each dyad’s friendship other than their own description of how intimate they were. To make things more complicated, some young adult dyads had drifted apart during the process of participating in the study or, in some cases, one of the participants had moved to either another city or another country. Four dyads were not able to return to have a third meeting. Even for the participants who completed the 9-month follow up, there was evidence that some dyads might not consider themselves as close as they used to be at the start of the study. In conclusion, the data from the first meeting would be more suitable to learn about the intimate interactions in peer relationship for young adults.

Data Analysis

A content analysis of the data was conducted. One definition of content analysis offered by Holsti (1969) was “any technique for making inference by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (p. 14). Based on this definition, Stemler
Hsieh and Shannon (2005) compared three approaches to qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed, and summative. Data used in the current study were analyzed using a directed content analysis. In this approach, a theory or theoretical framework helps “to determine the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes” (p. 1281), and researchers may use the codes to capture the occurrence of a phenomenon in the data.

What I systematically identified in the data were the indicators of intimate interaction. A brief definition of intimate interaction is an interaction “in which partners share personal, private material; feel positively about each other and themselves; and perceive a mutual understanding between them” (Prager, 1995, p. 22). A more detailed list of the components of intimate interaction is in Table 2.1.

Intimate behaviour is composed of nonverbal behaviour and verbal behaviour. Prager (1995) suggested that nonverbal behaviour might be as important as verbal behaviour in contributing to people’s intimate experience, and people are more involuntary and less conscious about their nonverbal behaviours. She identified three categories of nonverbal behaviour that can be labeled as intimacy, which are nonverbal “involvement behaviours,” touch, and bodily contact involved in sexual activity. Only the first category seemed to be relevant to the current study. Specifically, mutual gaze, closer sitting distance, forward body lean, and smiling are associated with liking, attentiveness, and enjoying the interaction. And people tend to interpretation the communication positively when their partner displays such nonverbal behaviours (Prager, 1995). The nonverbal “involvement behaviours” listed in Table 1 were analyzed and described in the participants’ conversations.
### Table 2.1. Components of intimate interaction (compiled from Prager, 1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonverbal behaviour</th>
<th>Involvement behaviours: Physical proximity, gaze, touch, body lean, facial expressiveness, postural openness, gesturing, head nods, and vocal cues (intonation, speech rate, and pauses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimate behaviour</td>
<td>Self-disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal behaviour</td>
<td>Topic &amp; content: Personal content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional content: Emotional communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immediacy: High immediacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conversational responsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content: Expressing interest and understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Style: Being enthusiastic and willing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timing: Being appropriate for the context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective aspect</td>
<td>Positive involvement in, interest in, or feelings about oneself, the interaction, and the partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive aspect</td>
<td>Perception that there is a mutual understanding between the partners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of verbal behaviour, revealing personal information about oneself has been considered a key component of verbal intimacy. According to Prager (1995), three dimensions of self-disclosure affect intimate experience: topic or content, emotional content, and immediacy. Topic or content of the self-disclosure implies how personal is the information that is being conveyed. We often consider the content personal when it is not observable and others have to rely on the individual’s self-report to access the knowledge. As well, self-disclosure that includes emotional content is considered more personal compared to simply describing facts. Prager distinguished between *emotional expression* and *emotional communication* and viewed the latter as a behaviour to elicit intimate experience. Emotional communication means
purposefully using words to describe and express emotions. It goes beyond the spontaneous expression of emotions (usually through nonverbal behaviour) and invites others to engage in interactions related to the emotions. Communicating positive emotions about the partner in the interaction is especially viewed as intimate verbal behaviour. As for immediacy of self-disclosure, Prager (1995) adopted the definition from Mehrabian (1971): “Immediacy in communication brings something into the present, while nonimmediacy puts it into the past” (Prager, 1995, p. 193). Immediacy can be conveyed in self-disclosure by some characteristics of the language used. The use of words such as “this,” “these,” and “here” instead of “that,” “those,” and “there,” as well as the present tense rather than past tense of verbs indicate higher immediacy. It increases immediacy of communication to use personal references, internal attribution, and active voice in the language of self-disclosure. The impact of immediacy on intimate experience also depends on other factors of the interaction.

Conversational responsiveness and self-disclosure are complementary in forming intimate interaction and evoking intimate experience. Prager (1995) expanded Berg’s (1987) discussion on the three facets of behaviour that are related to how responsiveness it is perceived: content, style, and timing. Responsive content addresses previous communication, and expresses interest as well as understanding. Responsive style is characterized by enthusiasm and willingness, which can be reflected in the phrasing and the tone of verbal behaviour. The timing of responses that is perceived as responsive seems to vary based on the context of the communication.

I chose to use the updated version of the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF) (Coan & Gottman, 2007) to code participants’ behaviours in their conversations. SPAFF was developed to systematically observe affective behaviour in marital conflict (Gottman & Krokoff,
1989), and now has been applied to studying emotional communication in other contexts (Coan & Gottman, 2007). I viewed it as an advantage that this coding system allowed me to integrate indicators in verbal content and physical cues and code affect at the construct level. The 18 gestalt behaviour codes are latent psychological constructs: Neutral, Affection, Humour, Interest, Enthusiasm, Validation, Anger, Belligerence, Contempt, Criticism, Disgust, Fear/Tension, Domineering, Stonewalling, Defensiveness, Whining, Sadness, and Threats. Major indicators and their definitions were elaborated for each of the codes (Coan & Gottman, 2007). In the current study, I am equally interested in these underlying constructs and how they manifest in the observable indicators.

By coding the conversations, I was looking for evidence of intimate behaviour between the young adult peers. Nonverbal behaviour is available in the data but is limited due to the original research setting. In the first part of the meeting, the two participants were usually arranged to sit in two chairs approximately 2 feet apart and facing each other at an angle, where the two researchers would sit opposite to them and have a warm-up conversation with them. When the researchers left the room and the peers had a conversation with each other, they naturally stayed where they were. The camera was set with the intention to record the conversation with no emphasis on nonverbal behaviour. Thus, facial expressions were not fully captured, but their basic elements were distinguishable.

I was able to access the transcripts of the conversations from the primary study. However, the nonverbal behaviours in the videotaped conversations had not being thoroughly recorded or examined in any way. Thus, in the data analysis of the current study, I repeatedly watched the videotape while reading the transcripts. For each part where one participant was talking uninterrupted, I would assign at least one code from the SPAFF for each participant
based on what was said as well as the accompanied nonverbal behaviours, and it would be nonverbal behaviour only for the person who was not talking. When the other participant started to speak, again at least one code was assigned for each of them. At the same time, I tried to specify the indicators of the codes; in other words, what made me think that this code applied to what I observed at that point in the conversation? I used the indicators from the SPAFF and also took notes of elements of participants’ verbal or nonverbal behaviours using my own words. Please see Appendix A for a segment of coded conversation as an example.

Additionally, I read through the transcripts of all of the self-confrontation interviews, which were participants’ reports of their thoughts and feelings during the conversations. The information from the self-confrontation interviews helped verify my understanding of participants’ behaviours or affects in coding the conversation. If anything disclosed in the self-confrontation interviews deepened or corrected my perception, the codes were adjusted accordingly with an explanation. I also made notes about the content that reflected intimate experience, including interest in the interaction, positive involvement in the interaction, positive feelings about oneself, the partner, or the interaction, as well as perception of mutual understanding. Therefore, different from the conversation, not every part of the self-confrontation interviews was analyzed; only content that was related to intimate experience was used to inform the coding of the conversations.

**Presentation of Data**

In Stake’s (1995) book on case study, there are two analytic strategies that researchers use to reach new meanings: direct interpretation and categorical aggregation. Direct interpretation draws meanings from single instances, and the aggregation of the instances leads
to conclusions about a group of these instances. In a research report using collective case study, description of the main topic and case examples are usually both included.

Detailed descriptions of each case and the intrinsic findings in each of the cases were presented in the case studies. Stake (1995) pointed out the importance of direct interpretation. Even with instrumental case study, some significant features do not repeat. It is the researcher’s responsibility to decide the importance of, and derive meaning from, the observation. Based on the coded conversation and the information from the self-confrontation interviews for each case, I tried to describe the intimate interactions between this peer dyad using Prager’s framework (1995). I summarized the characteristics of their nonverbal behaviour, wrote about their self-disclosure as well as the responsiveness and attentiveness in their conversation, and addressed both affective and cognitive aspects of their intimate experience.

As an instrumental case study and collective case study, categorical aggregation in describing the intimate interactions in peer relationship of young adults was a critical part of the findings. The presentation of the instrumental findings also addressed nonverbal behaviour, verbal behaviour and internal experience successively across the six cases. Themes that emerged through the content analysis in each of these aspects depicted what kind of components of intimate interaction existed in the conversations and what these intimate interactions were about in the conversations.

**Researcher Bias**

It is critical to examine possible bias as a researcher in qualitative research. With no doubt, my understanding and experiences of intimacy in peer relationship had an impact on the process of coding and interpreting the intimate interactions in the data. In addition, the expression and experience of intimacy can be culture-bound. My perception was embedded in
my culture background, while our participants were from various cultural backgrounds. In dealing with this bias, the definition and coding system I used to identify intimate interactions helped increase the objectiveness of the coding process. In addition, a research assistant with postgraduate training in educational psychology reviewed 25% of the coded conversations immediately after the coding was completed. Given that the results in the current study were not derived from any quantitative methods such as calculating the frequency of certain codes, inter-rater reliability was not used in reviewing the coding. The purpose of reviewing the coding was to examine whether the use of the coding system made sense to another researcher. The research assistant was provided with the manual of the SPAFF and information about its application in this study. Then units of three consecutive pages were randomly selected from all the coded transcripts of the conversations until the number of pages selected added up to 25% of the total number of pages coded. The research assistant read through the selected segments while watching the video tape as long as needed to evaluate whether the coding had truthfully reflected the data. When she finished reviewing a segment of three pages, she immediately discussed with me about any questions, confusion, or issues raised in this segment until we reached consensus on all of the codes. She suggested minor revisions throughout the process, and her feedback was integrated into the coding. In the light of these revisions, I went through all the coding before conducting a further analysis to confirm consistency and improve accuracy.

Another source of bias was that I had interviewed some of the participants directly, and I had been involved in discussions about the final within-case analysis of each of them. I already had some knowledge about these young adult peers and their relationships beyond the conversations they had in the first meeting. Nevertheless, during the coding process, I found that the overall impressions I had about each dyad had limited impact on the sentence-by-sentence
analysis of the conversations. By identifying the indicators of intimacy in participants’
behaviours and internal processes and describing their interactions based on the detailed
evidence, the presentation of each case was rooted in what actually took place in that one
classroom without making much interpretation of their long-term relationship.

**Trustworthiness of Findings**

First of all, the data used in the current study were self-directed conversations that
occurred between young adult peers with no researcher present. Participants were given a few
prompts to come up with topics for the conversation and received limited guidance for the
classroom other than “just like how you would talk to each other in your daily life.” Also,
what each participant reported individually in the self-confrontation interview was confidential
so that their reported internal processes were not disclosed to their friends. I believe this
procedures helped the participants to be more spontaneous in their conversations, and to be more
open and genuine in their self-reports. When the participants were invited by the researchers to
comment on the entire conversation after watching the video tape, their reaction confirmed that
what we observed was close to young adults’ interactions in the natural environment.

Secondly, data consisted of information obtained from various sources. For an
approximately 15-minute conversation, the videotape captured participants’ observable
interactions including nonverbal behaviours, and the self-confrontation interviews revealed what
was happening for each participant in the inner world when they were talking to their friends.
All of these pieces helped put together a more complete picture in my attempt to describe
intimate interactions for young adult peers.
Moreover, there was a good balance of gender and heterogeneity of cultural background in our participants. Hopefully this has helped expand our knowledge and deepen our understanding of the phenomenon.

**Ethical Considerations**

As a secondary analysis, informed consent and confidentiality are usually major ethical considerations. It was discussed above that the current study is not asking a research question different from the primary research project but rather a sub-question under the original research subject. It is not out of the scope of the research purpose that was explained to participants in their first meetings, which was to study peer relationship in the transition to adulthood. Therefore, it should be acceptable to conduct secondary analysis without acquiring participants’ consent again. As with the primary study, the report of findings is not going to disclose any identified information of the participants.
Chapter 3: Intrinsic Findings

This study sought to explore the research question: What characterizes the intimate interactions in the conversations that young adults have with their friends? To answer this question, a case study was conducted for each of the six cases, and the instrumental findings were extracted based on the intrinsic findings within each case. In order to facilitate ease of access, the findings are presented in two chapters. Because the in-depth analysis of each case preceded the cross-case analysis, the intrinsic findings are presented first in Chapter 3. Findings in this chapter are based on the “intrinsic study of a valued particular” (Stake, 2005, p. 238), and are presented in rich detail to highlight the uniqueness and complexity of the cases. The instrumental findings are reported in Chapter 4, which are more condensed and ultimately emphasized in the conclusions.

Table 3.1 outlines the structure of the individual case presentations. Background information is provided at the beginning of the case reports, including the young adult peers’ demographic information and how their friendship started. An overview of the dyads’ interactions summarizes the major topics of the conversation they had and the main characteristics of their intimate interactions in the conversation. Following the overview, every peer dyad’s intimate interactions are described through their behaviours and experiences that were identified as intimate based on Prager’s framework of intimacy (1995). First, the characteristics of participants’ nonverbal “involvement behaviours” in their conversation are described, followed by descriptions of their verbal behaviours that reflected intimacy. Intimate verbal behaviours consist of two key components: self-disclosure and responsiveness. The participants’ self-disclosure is examined in terms of the topics, the emotional content, and immediacy of the self-disclosure. Their conversational responsiveness is depicted considering
the content, style, and timing of the responses. The intimate experience in the young adults’ conversations is expected to be associated with their intimate behaviours. Given that we are able to access participants’ reports of their thoughts and feelings through the data in the self-confrontation interviews, both the affective and cognitive aspects of their internal processes were addressed to demonstrate their intimate experience.

Table 3.1. Basic structure of intrinsic findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case X. Young Adult A and Young Adult B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the dyads’ interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal behaviour – self-disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal behaviour – conversational responsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case 1. Ailing and Bisera

**Background information.** Ailing\(^1\) and Bisera were two female undergraduate students who attended the same university. Ailing was 22 years old and was born in Canada. The language spoken in her home was Cantonese. Bisera was 21 years old and had been living in Canada for thirteen years. The language spoken in her home was Bulgarian. They became friends when they were both working in a restaurant during the last year of high school.

**Overview of the dyads’ interactions.** Ailing and Bisera had a conversation for 14’56”, where they both seemed relaxed and spontaneous in talking to each other. The content of their conversation was related to what happened recently in their lives. At the same time, these topics

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\(^1\) Pseudonyms are used in presenting the cases. The pseudonyms loosely represent the ethnic diversity and cultural background of the participants.
were apparently not new in their interaction with each other. Overall, this peer dyad seemed to have interactions characterized by a sense of closeness and reciprocity. Their conversation unfolded with self-disclosure and validating responses occurring alternatively. They found it natural to exchange stories from daily life and were able to open up about their thoughts and feelings. Ailing and Bisera seemed to be comfortable being themselves in their interactions, and expected that they would be understood. Similarities in their opinions and lifestyles constituted the foundation of the connection between them. They enjoyed their interactions, and the positive feelings towards the interactions also served as a confirmation of who they are as individuals.

**Nonverbal behaviour.** Ailing and Bisera seemed to sit comfortably with their legs crossed. They were having some snacks that were left in the room by researchers, and often gestured naturally while they were talking. Most of the time, they were slightly leaning on the back or the side of the chairs. As mentioned in the research method, the setting in the interview room had determined that the two participants’ chairs usually faced each other in an angle. In this dyad, soon after the conversation started, Ailing readjusted the chair to face Bisera more directly.

They were both highly engaged in the conversation, maintained eye contact, and often spoke with a tone that was enthusiastic or playful. They laughed from time to time because of humorous comments or private jokes. There were a couple of times where the conversation wound down and the two of them were quiet for a few seconds. Then they looked at each other and giggled together. According to their report, it was partially due to the awareness of the research setting and the “requirement” of having a conversation.

Both of them, especially Ailing, had expressive and even slightly exaggerated facial expressions. Bisera spoke more than Ailing did. Ailing often conveyed her attention using eye
contact, and responded through nodding, smiling, chuckling, shrugging, or other body movement. For example, when Bisera described one of their mutual friends showing an unexpected change of attitude about having children, Ailing leaned forward to show her interest, and then covered her mouth with one hand to express her surprise about the news. Another example would be when Bisera was sharing a male friend’s criticism of women who wear high-heeled shoes. Ailing narrowed her eyes and then responded with a dry laugh to express her disagreement with this friend.

In conclusion, a considerable amount of nonverbal “involvement behaviours” appeared in the conversation. Ailing and Bisera’s nonverbal behaviours demonstrated how comfortable they were in their interactions with each other and exhibited a high level of engagement. Their interest in the conversation and enjoyment of it were evident in the nonverbal behaviours.

**Verbal behaviour – self-disclosure.** Self-disclosure frequently took place in the conversation. Both Ailing and Bisera seemed open and sometimes eager to share with each other what they were thinking or feeling regarding their experience outside as well as inside the conversation.

They started their conversation by discussing a new bag Bisera had purchased, and then talked extensively about buying or repairing bags, shoes, and clothes. This seemed to be a topic they were both passionate about. They seemed quite interested, and willingly communicated emotions related to this topic. For instance, Bisera was visibly excited when they were talking about the vegan coats they had ordered. She had her shoulders up and a smile on her face, saying, “She (the designer) posted new pictures and I just almost died.” “I’m so excited.” Ailing echoed this excitement, and also shared that she felt “sad” when she found out her old shoes could not be repaired.
During the second half of the conversation, Ailing and Bisera’s discussion developed around people’s perspectives on having children. It started with describing a mutual friend’s comments on Bisera’s dislike of babies. This led to talking about another mutual friend’s change in his attitude about having children. Lastly, Bisera described an event that happened on campus to protest abortion. By sharing these stories and their personal reaction to them, Ailing and Bisera revealed their own perspectives and personal beliefs on this topic. This discussion elicited strong emotions for Ailing and Bisera. Both emotional expression and emotional communication took place in the conversation. Some of their nonverbal behaviours seemed to be part of the deliberate communication of emotions. It was apparent that Ailing and Bisera hold different views with some other people they were describing, and therefore they conveyed the feelings of discomfort, contempt, or even anger. At one time, Ailing responded to Bisera’s description of a friend’s opinion with eye-rolling and remarked, “just a silly, silly boy,” indicating that she found this friend’s comments unpleasant or unreasonable. When Bisera rephrased what a person said in the anti-abortion event, she speeded up her speech and talked in a critical tone, stating several times that the person was “crazy.” All of these expressed her dissatisfaction and almost disbelief.

There was a high level of immediacy in their self-disclosure. Ailing and Bisera’s language contained a lot of personal references (i.e., the use of “I”) and very little passive voice. This suggests their willingness to take ownership of their preferences, behaviours, and feelings. Also, when they described what happened recently in their lives, their reactions to these experiences and their feelings about them were present in their conversation. Moreover, their conversation seemed to be directed or shaped by what came to mind at a given moment. One example was when Bisera described one of the bags she purchased:
Bisera: …And I like that because it’s really good in the rain. The Japanese paper one I can’t take out in the rain.

Ailing: Hmm.

Bisera: Because it, it’s okay…

Ailing: (Interrupts) That’s the blue one, right?

Bisera: No, that’s the yellow one.

Ailing: Which one is the blue one?

Bisera: (Gestures, trying to explain) The blue one is, it’s more like the square one, it has a zipper on the top. The red one has no zipper, the blue one has a zipper and the yellow one has that papery material.

Ailing: (Slowly) I can’t picture that material.

Ailing seemed to follow Bisera’s description by picturing the bag in her mind. She asked clarifying questions to confirm or correct her understanding as Bisera continued. Another example was when Ailing finished her juice. She was playing with the juice box while talking to Bisera, and eventually she interrupted the on-going topic and said, “I can’t flatten it.” Bisera immediately stated that she had noticed it, and acknowledged the importance of flattening the juice box in a humorous way.

In conclusion, throughout the conversation Ailing and Bisera self-disclosed to each other over a range of topics. They shared emotional content and actively communicated both positive and negative emotions. The emotional content was directed at people and situations that were not related to their relationship with each other. They seemed to be quite present in their interactions, and were closely involved in the topics that they discussed.
Verbal behaviour – conversational responsiveness. In line with what I described above, both Ailing and Bisera were quite responsive to each other and showed interest in their interaction. They validated each other, agreed with each other, and occasionally finished the other person’s sentence. They regularly expressed an understanding towards each other. Even though at times they interrupted or talked over each other, overall they allowed each other room to express what they wanted to say.

Bags, shoes, and clothes were something they both enjoyed talking about. When Bisera told Ailing about a new purse she purchased, Ailing revealed her interest by asking “What colour, what colour, what colour?” When Bisera was comparing this new bag to other bags she owns, Ailing seemed to be recalling Bisera’s bags while listening to her, and asking clarifying questions. When Ailing shared her experience of trying to get her shoes repaired, Bisera also expressed curiosity and empathy.

When the topics switched to people’s attitudes towards having children, Ailing and Bisera agreed with each other in expressing their disagreement towards some other people. Their reactions towards each other’s self-disclosure also indicated that they were familiar with each other’s opinions on some important issues. By conveying their mutual understanding, Ailing and Bisera’s responses seemed to confirm the similarities between them and reinforced their own value system.

Ailing and Bisera’s knowledge of each other and their ability to relate to each other seemed to help create a non-judgemental environment. At one point in the conversation, Bisera dwelled on what they had just talked about, and muttered “Baby, so gross…” as if she was talking to herself. They both laughed, possibly because they were aware that it was an unusual statement. Bisera shook her head and said, “I’m sorry I can’t… I can’t…” Ailing gently raised
her hand and slightly waved it, saying “It’s understandable” with a smile on her face. She seemed to assure Bisera that it was fine to feel that way.

A deeper level of understanding was reflected in the way they identified with each other. When Ailing said, “Remember when we first met?” they both burst into laughter. Ailing continued, “We’ll have to keep reminding people that…” and then they uttered exactly the same words “We’re actually smart.” Later in the conversation, Ailing brought this up again, “See, that’s the thing… these fun extremes. You know, we have our silly girl ones, and then our intellectual elitist ones…” She talked about the two of them as “we” and elaborated on this “identity” they seemed to have agreed upon.

In conclusion, Ailing and Bisera were highly responsive to each other in their conversation. They participated in their interactions with enthusiasm and responded to each other’s self-disclosure with openness, accepting, and understanding. It seemed that most of their interactions in this conversation were based on a sense of mutual understanding.

**Internal experience.** In the self-confrontation interviews, Ailing and Bisera’s individual reports of their thoughts and feelings supported the observation that they enjoyed the conversation with each other and that they recognized the mutual understanding between them.

Bisera initiated most of the topics in their conversation through her self-disclosure. In the self-confrontation interview, she articulated her intention to share with Ailing things that were important and exciting for her, such as the bag she had purchased and the coats they had ordered. Besides, more than once Bisera explained that they had similar conversations before so she already had some idea about what Ailing might say or how Ailing might respond. This seemed to be an important reason why Bisera chose to disclose certain unpleasant experiences she had
with other people, because she knew that Ailing “would be on my side.” Furthermore, she talked about what she could expect from Ailing compared to other people:

And I knew that Ailing would like to know, Ailing would understand where, you know, if, if that were to happen with somebody else and I went to go talk about it, she would be like ‘I don’t know what you’re getting at,’ so…

In Ailing’s report, she confirmed that she shared Bisera’s excitement about the coats they had ordered and surprise about their friend’s change in attitude, as well as her agreement with Bisera around topics such as having children or abortion. She also described a thought she had in mind when there was a pause in the conversation and she worried about not having enough to talk about for fifteen minutes, “which is ridiculous because we always have things to talk about and we can talk for a long time,” she said. This thought reflected Ailing’s positive experience and perception of the interactions between the two of them.

We did not obtain much information about exactly what kind of behaviours contributed to Ailing and Bisera’s intimate experience. However, it can be inferred, based on their reports, that the characteristics of self-disclosure, responsiveness, and a sense of mutual understanding from their previous interactions had encouraged them to share what they shared in this conversation. And they seemed to know what to anticipate in this safe and supportive interpersonal environment.

In conclusion, both Ailing and Bisera clearly conveyed their perceptions of how they understood each other and empathized with each other. They had positive affective experiences about their interactions with each other. There was evidence of them trusting and liking each other as well as them being comfortable to be themselves when interacting with each other.
Case 2. An and Bai

**Background information.** An and Bai were two female undergraduate students attending the same university. They were both 19 years old and both had moved to Canada from Southeast Asia one year ago. Based on the information they provided, both English and Chinese were spoken in the home. They became friends when they were in high school. They both started their university studies in Canada at the same time and lived in the same dormitory during the first academic year.

**Overview of the dyads’ interactions.** An and Bai had a conversation for 14’05”, where they both seemed casual and candid in talking to each other. The content of their conversation was related to their plans for school and challenges in recent life. Overall, this peer dyad seemed to have interactions characterized by a sense of familiarity and companionship. They were comfortable in sharing about incidents in their lives and asking for information from each other, and they were accepting of each other’s communication style. They exchanged opinions and seemed to have individual emotional experience during their interaction. There was not much evidence of them being in tune with each other, and they did not seem to expect deeper connection.

**Nonverbal behaviour.** An and Bai sat comfortably with their legs crossed throughout most of the conversation. Their chairs were facing each other on an angle. Not long after the conversation started, An turned her body to face Bai more directly and rested her arm on the back of the chair. She barely changed her posture other than this movement. Bai sat almost directly facing the camera, and she turned her head towards An when they were talking. She gestured and fidgeted with her hair from time to time, and sometimes leaned on the back or the side of the chair.
An and Bai both kept engaging in the conversation and maintained eye contact. Their tone was often neutral and flat without much hint of emotion. They smiled or laughed several times in the conversation but it was not always a shared amusement. There was only one time towards the end of the conversation that they were obviously laughing together and seemed to have fun in the interaction.

Compared to An, Bai had rich facial expressions, more hand movements, and noticeable body language a couple of times during the conversation. When Bai heard An saying that she planned to take a Korean course because she wanted to understand the Korean TV drama that she had been watching, Bai laughed, leaned back, covered and rubbed her face with both hands, and then tilted her head to look at An. It seemed that she found An’s reason for her decision amusing or even a little hard to believe. Later, in expressing her dislike of feminist literature, Bai again covered her face. Then she pursed her lips while hitting her lap with one fist before she said, “They are so scary.” In the second half of the conversation, Bai described the situation where she failed her driving exam because of another driver not following the rules. She spoke in stiff tone and gestured dramatically to express her anger. As well, she wrote on her lap with her finger as she explained to An the policies around getting a driving license.

In conclusion, An and Bai had stable nonverbal “involvement behaviours” in their conversation, which confirmed their attention and engagement in the conversation. Their nonverbal behaviours did not show much emotional involvement in their interactions, and this was especially the case for An.

**Verbal behaviour – self-disclosure.** Self-disclosure took place frequently in the first half of An and Bai’s conversation. Their conversation became mostly about providing information after Bai brought up her experience taking the driving exam. Both An and Bai
seemed open to sharing their plans, opinions, things that concerned them recently in life, and they seemed comfortable speaking their mind when they disagreed with each other.

They started their conversation by discussing their course work, including how many credits they had earned, what courses to take next as well as what major to choose. In response to Bai’s questions, An disclosed her plan of taking courses, her decision on her major, and the rationale of her choices. Bai mentioned a little about what she had done in terms of course work, but most of her self-disclosure occurred when she tried to give An advice. For example, Bai suggested one literature course for An to take based on her own experience. She also expressed her aversion to feminism through her efforts to dissuade An from taking a related course. When she found that An was thinking about taking a Women’s Studies course, she said, “I really can’t stand the feminists…I think they’re scary.” She seemed to have some strong reactions even though it was An’s plans that they were focusing on.

Later in the conversation, they briefly talked about An’s plan of staying in Canada for the summer as well as her worries around finding new housing. When Bai expressed her surprise by saying “You are not going back?” An replied, “Why would I want to go home?” Although An said it in a joking tone, the rhetorical question seemed to discourage further discussion on this topic, and possibly avoided further self-disclosure. In the self-confrontation interview, An told the researcher that “I kind of miss home a bit but I don’t really wanna take a plane,” which did not clarify why she responded to Bai in a slightly defensive manner. In talking about her search for housing, An directly communicated her feelings to Bai, “I worry about housing right now.” When Bai suggested an option for An, An expressed doubt and specified her preferences about housing.
When An mentioned the location of a potential new housing, it reminded Bai of where she took her driving exam. Consequently, the topic of the second half of the conversation switched to getting a driving license. Bai seemed to be upset and angry about failing her driving exam for the second time. Although she did not name her emotions when she describing the situation to An, her tone and the words she used indicated strong emotions. Nevertheless, An and Bai’s conversation gradually became light-hearted and information driven when they started to discuss where should Bai try to take her driving exam next time and the policies of getting a driving license in Canada.

As for the level of immediacy in their self-disclosure, An and Bai did not seem to distant themselves from the content of their discussion. They actively and assertively expressed to each other their feelings or preferences. They also seemed to be quite spontaneous in their interaction, and the direction of the conversation was shaped by their reactions in real time. For instance, when An talked about a house that she went to see, and Bai suddenly realized “Oh that’s where I had my driving exam.” Then they switched the topic to what happened in Bai’s driving exam. Another example was when Bai explained to An the differences among different types of driving licenses. An was unfamiliar with the system in Canada, and was apparently confused about it. Bai provided information in response to each of An’s questions, and An kept asking more clarifying question based on Bai’s answers. Likewise, to help Bai decide where to take her driving exam next time, An provided some information and they engaged in a problem-solving discussion in their conversation.

In conclusion, An and Bai self-disclosed to each other over several topics that related to their recent life situation. In terms of the emotional content, they mostly shared about situations that caused them uncertainty, worry, or stress. They seemed to be quite present in their
interactions, and openly spoke their mind during the conversation. However, a large proportion of An and Bai’s conversation was spent providing each other with factual information, which made their interactions less personal.

**Verbal behaviour – conversational responsiveness.** Both An and Bai displayed interest in their interaction. They responded to each other promptly by describing situation, providing information, asking clarifying questions, and answering questions.

Their body language and vocal cues acknowledged each other and helped continue the conversation, but they did not validate or agree with each other as much. This segment from the conversation is an example to demonstrate how they responded to each other:

Bai: (laughs) I really can’t stand the feminists.

An: No, I can stand the feminist books but I can’t stand the um, like what they think about like…

Bai: I know.

An: Yeah, so, I can, I, I…

Bai: (interrupts) I think they’re scary, I think they’re scary, like what…

An: (Talking over each other) …I can relate to them but like, I relate to them but um I don’t… Wait, I relate to feminist books but I don’t agree with them.

Bai: Oh.

An: Yeah.

Bai: Yeah, but remember in high school we did like…

An: I like, what do you call that…‘Top Girls.’

Bai: We did books, like feminist books. I couldn’t stand them.

An: I loved Medea and Top Girls.
Bai: Yeah Medea was so scary.

An: I love it, and it was like one of my favourite books in that course.

Bai: Top Girls.

An: And Top Girls, and then what else?

An and Bai linked the discussion about current courses to their shared experience back in high school, which seemed to be a topic that they enjoyed bringing up. They were smiling and it looked like they were engaging in a pleasant back-and-forth discussion. They replied to each other readily with short sentences and occasionally tried to speak at the same time. However, considering what they said, the content rarely validated or built on what the other person had just said. They were almost taking turns to express their own opinions rather than responding to each other.

Related to this observation, An and Bai’s responses often implied that they did not listen carefully to each other and responded before they had fully grasped the meaning of what had been said. For instance, when An told Bai the location of the housing she went to see, or when Bai explained to An the different types of driving licences, the person who received the information was so eager to ask clarifying questions that they might not let their friend finish speaking. This caused some misunderstanding and required more effort to reach a mutual understanding.

Another pattern notable in An and Bai’s responsiveness was how they provided and responded to suggestions or advice. An and Bai both provided suggestions or advice to each other during the conversation. For example, when An talked about which course she planned to take to fulfill her literature requirement, Bai said, “You should take CENS 202” as well as “Don’t do feminist books.” When Bai talked about potentially going elsewhere to take her
driving exam, An said, “Why can’t you just do it in the Tri-cities area?” These suggestions came out in a slightly forceful tone and sometimes even sounded like they were challenging the choice their friend had considered. The only time that advising worked out well was when Bai acknowledged the alternatives An mentioned regarding locations to take her driving exam. She said, “Thanks for telling me that,” and “That’s good, that’s a really good idea. I didn’t know about that.” Conversely, even though An told the researcher in the self-confrontation interview that she wanted to know Bai’s opinions on the courses, Bai’s suggestions were not accepted in the conversation. An often asserted her own preference, and sometimes the two of them would get into the “yes-but” mode and appeared to be defensive of their own opinions. For example, when Bai questioned An’s choice of taking Korean course, their conversation seemed to become an argument:

Bai: But if, if taking Korean doesn’t help you get a Computer Science degree then why are you taking it?

An: Elective.

Bai: But you have your language requirement, right?

An: Yeah, but I wanna take, I just wanna be able to jump to third year. (Smiles)

Bai: Oh ok.

An: Yeah.

Bai: But, yeah but, you shouldn’t waste time doing it because if it doesn’t help you… (gestures, meaning “move on”)

An: No, but the extra knowledge won’t hurt.

Bai: Yeah but right, if you wanna be strategic like…

An: No, I wanna study a whole bunch of, of crap.
An was justifying her choice, and the expression she used by the end of this segment might imply negative emotions. Nevertheless, in line with what was described in the nonverbal behaviours, she appeared to be talking calmly without much change in her tone or facial expression. She did not report any explicit feelings in her self-confrontation interview either.

An and Bai did not explicitly express understanding or empathy to each other in their conversation. The only evidence of empathy was that Bai seemed patient when she repeatedly explained to An about the types of driving license. Furthermore, she expressed understanding of An’s confusion by saying “I know, it’s so complicated.” On the contrary, there were more interactions in their conversation indicated a lack of understanding. Bai apparently did not understand An’s choice of courses or her major. An did not express empathy either when Bai shared her upsetting experience in the driving exam. Instead, An kept asking about details of the incidence and seemed amused about the situation.

In conclusion, An and Bai seemed to be responding to each other in a way that expressed more of their own opinions rather than their understanding of each other. Their enthusiasm in discussion sometimes came out as a questioning or even patronizing attitude. The content, style and timing of their responsiveness all revealed that they were often times not on the same page with each other. Meanwhile, they both seemed to be familiar with the way they interacted with each other, and did not report negative emotions associated with it.

**Internal experience.** Based on the observation of An and Bai’s interactions, it was not obvious that they experienced positive feelings or perception of mutual understanding during their conversation. Their reports of their thoughts and feelings in the self-confrontation interviews partially supported this conclusion.
An commented positively on the fact that she and Bai continued their friendship after coming to Canada and shared a group of friends. She also expressed appreciation of Bai being humorous. An did not specify positive involvement or feelings in their interactions beyond this, neither did she mention any perception of mutual understanding. Actually, she barely reported any emotions.

Conversely, Bai reported that she felt positively about telling An about her driving exam and also enjoyed their light-hearted conversation as always. She elaborated that, brainstorming with An about the possible places to take driving exam helped her be more optimistic, and ranting about her experience as well as making jokes made her feel better emotionally. In addition, she expressed her concern about An’s searching for housing and her desire to help. On a less positive note, Bai shared how she found it difficult to understand An regarding her choice of courses and major. Nevertheless, she stated that she would eventually respect An’s decisions and explained how those choices fit in her previous knowledge of An. She also pointed out a lack of reciprocity in terms of having to explains things to An, as she did in the conversation about the driving license.

In conclusion, both An and Bai expressed positive feelings about their interactions in general and the humour in these interactions. They did not seem to experience much specific positive emotions or mutual understanding that were elicited by their interactions.

Case 3. Aidan and Brett

**Background information.** Aidan and Brett were two male undergraduate students attending the same university. Aidan was 22 years old and was born in Canada. Brett was 20 years old and had moved from the United States two years ago to study in Canada. The language spoken in the home was English for both of them. They got to know each other through Brett’s
brother, who was one of Aidan’s friends and roommates at university. Brett majored in the same area as Aidan, and became roommates with Aidan three months prior to the research interview.

**Overview of the dyad’s interactions.** Aidan and Brett had a conversation for 14’55”, where they both seemed comfortable and relaxed in talking to each other. The content of their conversation was related to their common experiences and interests both as roommates and as fellow students. Additionally, they discussed their plans for the near future. Overall, this peer dyad seems to have interactions characterized by companionship and complementary roles. Their conversation was around their shared living environment, area of study, and the upcoming winter break when they would separate temporarily. All of these implied a sense of togetherness. Within this context, they naturally exchanged information, shared their experience at school or at home, and sometimes revealed their opinions and emotions. Aidan somewhat took on an older brother’s role by being caring and knowledgeable. Brett was in the younger brother’s role in which he wanted to know more about Aidan and learn something from him. This difference in their roles seemed to be compatible with their personalities as well, as Aidan presented as being more serious and Brett appeared to be more playful. Having said that, Aidan and Brett were both attentive and thoughtful in their interactions, and both seemed to be used to connecting with each other through the use of humour.

**Nonverbal behaviour.** Aidan and Brett both sat comfortably and leaned back in their chairs. Brett sat in a more casual manner and seemed to be more relaxed overall. Soon after they started talking, Brett put his right ankle on his other leg, with his right knee to the side. Several minutes later, he moved another chair in front of him closer and put both feet on it throughout the conversation. Aidan and Brett were having some snacks that had been left by the researchers during the conversation.
Both Aidan and Brett often talked or listened with smiles on their faces. Aidan’s facial expression sometimes looked serious. There were a couple of moments where he looked slightly uneasy, and the reasons were unclear. Based on information obtained from the self-confrontation interview, when Brett noticed Aidan’s uneasiness during their conversation, he wondered whether Aidan felt nervous, but it occurred to him that Aidan could be serious and structured in daily-life conversations. At one point in time during the conversation, Aidan paused and said, “Hmm…” Brett looked at Aidan with a smile, and mimicked his voice saying, “Hmm, hmm…” Then, Aidan resumed the conversation. Brett’s facial expression was more expressive. He raised his eyebrows several times when he showed curiosity or surprise.

Aidan and Brett’s chairs were almost parallel to each other. They sat next to each other facing the same direction. They turned their heads to look at each other from time to time, or sometimes they only turned slightly towards the direction of the other person. For the rest of the time, they naturally looked forward or looked down. They often fidgeted with the juice box or the cell phone they each had in their hands.

Smiling and laughing together indicated shared humour between Aidan and Brett, and private jokes seemed to be an important part of it. There were a couple times when Brett started to giggle after Aidan said something with little change in his facial expression. As an observer, it was hard to tell that Aidan was joking, but apparently Brett found the content amusing because of their previous experience or shared knowledge. In the self-confrontation interview, Brett told the researcher that he was laughing about a couple of jokes that only Aidan, he, and two other mutual friends could understand. In his perspective, Aidan was making jokes as usual, but was also being more careful with the language he used because of the research setting. However,
Brett could imagine what else Aidan would have said if they were in private. These comments indicated that Brett was laughing about words that were said as well as unsaid.

In conclusion, the nonverbal “involvement behaviours” in Aidan and Brett’s conversation were not very frequent and often indirect, which seemed to reflect Aidan and Brett’s usual communication style. The shared humour indicated the bond between them and the exclusiveness of it.

**Verbal behaviour – self-disclosure.** Frequent and reciprocal self-disclosure was observed in the conversation. Aidan and Brett seemed to openly share their experiences, exchange their opinions, and communicate their emotions associated with their families and work. However, the emotional content only involved a small portion of their conversation.

Aidan and Brett started the conversation by discussing the sanitary condition of the place they lived in. They expressed somewhat different perceptions of it because of the length of time they had lived there. Brett expressed surprise about how messy or dirty their place could get, while Aidan conveyed satisfaction with the improvement compared to how it had been in the previous year. At one point, Aidan directly commented on Brett’s habits of cleaning in a complimentary way.

When Aidan asked Brett about the courses he was taking, Brett seemed to be willing to share about them. He soon engaged Aidan in the discussion by asking questions about Aidan’s experience taking courses with the same professor before. Aside from exchanging information, they revealed their opinions about professors in their department and the professors’ political beliefs. Then they started to describe the predominant political atmosphere and life styles of the cities that each of them came from.
In the last part of the conversation, Aidan and Brett talked about their plans for winter break. In doing so, each of them brought up their families and their work situations. They seemed to be open about their emotions, including expressing excitement for the family gathering, stress due to their parents’ expectations, as well as joy or frustration around their part-time jobs.

As for the level of immediacy in their self-disclosure, Aidan and Brett directly expressed their personal preferences and reactions when they were discussing about cleaning the house, taking courses with certain instructors, and planning for the winter break. Additionally, there were a couple of times in the conversation that Aidan and Brett spoke their mind in response to what happened in their interactions right at that moment. For instance, when Aidan praised Brett’s cleaning habit, Brett questioned the term Aidan used by laughingly speaking, “I don’t think I’m a neat freak.” In response, Aidan clarified what he meant by elaborating his observations of Brett cleaning the house. Another example was when Aidan tried to get the straw for the juice box out from the plastic wrap but was not successful. He stopped what he was talking to Brett, jokingly threw the straw on his lap and said, “This is stupid.” Brett already noticed what was happening for Aidan. He immediately offered to help in a humorous tone.

It was also noticeable that the conversation Aidan and Brett had included some content that was not directly related to themselves. For example, they commented on their roommates’ behaviours. When they described their hometowns, it was mostly about what kind of people live there in terms of age and life style. Later in the conversation, they also mentioned random funny stories that came to mind, such as celebrity news. For a conversation between Aidan and Brett, such content was all about “them” rather than about “me” or “us.”
Both Aidan and Brett shared with the researchers their own perceptions about the amount of their self-disclosure or how personal the conversation was, which were helpful to better understand their interactions. Aidan spoke of describing the city he came from in the conversation, “He (Brett) has never really asked me about my hometown that much before… It’s kind of cool to talk about I guess. I always like talking about [the] past with people.” Aidan seemed to equate talking about his hometown with talking about himself. He perceived it as a fond moment of sharing his own view and experience. Conversely, Brett had the intention to encourage further self-disclosure in their conversation because there was not enough of it. He told the researcher that he was trying to get to know more about Aidan including his views of things (e.g., political views and moral views) and his personal feelings.

In conclusion, Aidan and Brett’s self-disclosure included their opinions on academic-related issues as well as their experiences and emotions in personal life. Aside from self-disclosure, they also exchanged information and shared entertaining stories from time to time in their conversation. Even when the content of their discussion included some concerns or frustrations, there was a humorous and light-hearted atmosphere throughout the conversation.

Verbal behaviour – conversational responsiveness. There was more evidence of responsiveness in Aidan and Brett’s verbal behaviours than in their nonverbal behaviours. Despite the lack of eye contact, they seemed to be attentive to what each other was saying, and often replied with “um-hmm,” “okay,” and a light laugh. They asked each other questions to invite self-disclosure and actively responded by acknowledging, agreeing, commenting, and asking follow-up questions. Sometimes, they confirmed what each other had just said before they continued, and this pattern was more obvious for Brett.
Aidan and Brett were both highly engaged in every topic that came up in their conversation. When Brett asked Aidan about a professor that Aidan had taken course with and the spectrum of political views in Aidan’s hometown, Aidan made efforts to provide informative answers and tried various ways to explain his points. Correspondingly, Brett seemed to be very interested and kept asking clarifying questions. When Aidan and Brett asked each other about plans for the near future, they both expressed great interest in each other’s stories and responded with empathy. Brett shared Aidan’s excitement about his family reunion, and Aidan attempted to make Brett feel less stressed about his parents’ expectations.

In line with what was previously discussed about the private jokes between Aidan and Brett, they were responsive to each other’s humour. One example was when Aidan talked about his sister wanting to go to universities in eastern Canada. They both seemed to disapprove of this idea. After Aidan rephrased what his sister said in a humorous manner, Aidan and Brett were laughing and speaking over each other for several seconds. Brett gestured with two hands balancing, and Aidan mirrored his gesture. It was hard to tell what they actually said, but they seemed to experience a moment of connection through the amusement.

Aidan and Brett’s responsiveness went beyond responding to what had just been said. They seemed to be aware of the direction of the conversation on a certain topic and what the other person’s potential reaction, and they adjusted their responses based on this awareness. The discussion around cleaning the house they lived in was a good demonstration of this. When Brett complained about how dirty the place was, Aidan started to talk about how bad it had been the year before. His intention seemed to be to make Brett feel better about the current situation. After a couple of minutes, Brett said, “I don’t think it’s bad though, it’s just surprising how dirty it can get like so quickly.” It seemed that he meant to soften his critical comments to avoid
embarrassment for Aidan. Brett further mentioned to the researcher that he was conscious that he had talked about his part-time job for a while and wanted to shift the focus of the conversation back to Aidan.

In conclusion, Aidan and Brett were highly responsive to each other in a cooperative and encouraging manner. Their responsiveness consistently demonstrated their engagement in the interactions and their sensitivity to each other’s reactions, which facilitated the conversation to flow smoothly.

**Internal experience.** In the self-confrontation, both Aidan and Brett spoke warmly about each other and their interactions.

Aidan conveyed care about Brett’s academic experience and expressed a desire to be helpful to Brett based on his own experience. He described to the researcher the following feelings about having similar opinions with Brett:

We seem to agree with a lot of our professors, which is good…if you don’t agree with your professors’ views it’s very tough to enjoy it and, kind of like take seriously what’s going on. But we seem to both really like the professors we’ve had, so that’s been good. So that’s a feeling of like mutual agreement I guess… I’m glad to see that he’s not like hating his courses or anything.

During the interview, Brett had asked Aidan at some point about taking a test with a professor. Aidan did not have the knowledge. Later on during the self-confrontation interview, Aidan told the researcher, “I wish I could have given him a bit of advice.”

Conversely, Brett also expressed highly positive perceptions regarding Aidan asking him about the courses he was taking:
He’s one of those people like they, he asks the question not so he can tell me what his classes are, you know? He’s actually legitimately interested usually, and he has good input, so he’s a good person to talk to actually, ‘cause you feel like, you know, responding is worth your time, or like that they’re actually gonna pay attention to what you’re saying.

It was not clear what kind of responses from Aidan had led to Brett’s such perceptions, but it seemed that Brett trusted Aidan as a listener and valued his input based on his previous experience interacting with Aidan.

Both Aidan and Brett described a sense of mutual understanding between them, which stemmed from their same field of major. In discussing the political spectrum of community in different cities, Aidan pointed out that they were both familiar with the vocabulary in such discussions and had similar views on such topics, therefore they were “on the same page.” He clarified:

I don’t mind talking with people who have different views than me, but when you’re both on the same page it does feel a bit more constructive conversation… It’s a lot easier and more enjoyable.

Brett gave similar comments on how they connected with each other:

I wanna talk to him and Jeez like I love having conversations with people who are like, we’re on the same wavelength… Who doesn’t love to hear that you know, like to have someone I can agree with? And so that’s just, I think that’s all I was really doing.

Likewise, watching the conversation they had about their families, Brett explained how he identified with Aidan because their families had almost identical religious backgrounds. Brett
stated that he sensed an unspoken mutual understanding between them because of their similar attitudes towards religious issues.

It is worth noting that Aidan acknowledged the importance of humour in their interactions. He expressed desire to share interesting news with Brett as well as hear about Brett’s funny stories about going back home. He stated that he enjoyed having a relaxing conversation about those stories.

In conclusion, Aidan and Brett expressed care and appreciation of each other, and reported that they perceived their interactions as enjoyable and valuable. They also elaborated on how their shared knowledge and opinions contributed to their positive experiences.

Case 4. Amrit and Bala

**Background information.** Amrit and Bala were two male graduate students attending the same university. They were both 27 years old and came to Canada one year ago to attend graduate school from the same country in South Asia. The language spoken in both of their homes was Punjabi. They became friends when they were taking courses together in the same graduate program.

**Overview of the dyad’s interactions.** In the research interview, Amrit and Bala had a conversation for 15’12”, where they both seemed comfortable and pleasant talking to each other. The content of their conversation was related to their past experience, mostly about working and travelling. They also exchanged their plans for the near future and after they graduate. Overall, this peer dyad seemed to have interactions characterized by good rapport and a sense of mutual support. Since they were both facing graduation from their programs, they asked each other about the progress of seeking employment, as well as plans for the future regarding residence, career, and marriage. They interacted with caring attitudes and readiness to provide possible
help without imposing their opinions on each other. Amrit and Bala were around the same age, studying in the same area, came from the same country, and planning to immigrate to North America. As such, all the similarities in their life situation seemed to contribute to the connections between them.

**Nonverbal behaviour.** Amrit and Bala sat comfortably and leaned back in their chairs. They faced each other at a 90-degree angle. Amrit put his left ankle on the other leg with his knee to the side. Bala folded his arms in front of his chest. They barely changed their postures during the conversation and had little variability in their body language, such as gestures or facial expressions.

Amrit and Bala were both actively engaged in the conversation and maintained frequent eye contact. The person who was speaking often looked at his friend and looked down alternatively, while the person who was listening usually looked at his friend attentively and slightly nodded from time to time. There was not much fluctuation in their tone. They had light laughs several times in their interactions.

In conclusion, the nonverbal “involvement behaviours” in Amrit and Bala’s interactions were simple and consistent. They seemed to be having a calm and amiable conversation.

**Verbal behaviour – self-disclosure.** Amrit and Bala’s conversation was composed of self-disclosure on various topics. They took turns to invite self-disclosure with questions, and they both elaborated in answering those questions.

Bala started the conversation by asking about Amrit’s progress in finding a job as they were going to graduate soon. They both shared their experience and plans in seeking employment as well as their preferences of work location. Later in the conversation, Amrit shared details about the job interviews he had already gone to and his perceptions of these
interviews. Bala also talked about his preparation for an upcoming job interview. Then they switched the topic to their past experience back in their home country. Amrit shared his experience working in a specific company and living in a new city because of that job. It seemed that he had enjoyed his time working and living there. Additionally, they exchanged information about their educational background. Up to this point, a large portion of the self-disclosure in Amrit and Bala’s interactions was providing factual information about themselves, such as the companies they applied to or universities they studied at. There did not seem to be much emotional content in the self-disclosure related to job searching. Even though some feelings could be inferred from Amrit’s description of the job interviews, such as feeling quite defeated in one job interview but felt more optimistic about others, there was no clear emotional communication in his self-disclosure.

Travelling was the main topic in the second half of their conversation. Bala shared about his trip to cities in eastern Canada, and Amrit was fairly excited in recounting his trip to an adjacent city. Since Amrit mentioned that some of his friends went swimming during that trip, he continued to talk more about his past experience in learning to swim and one incidence when he almost drowned in a pool. Similar to what was described previously, talking about swimming could be emotionally intense for Amrit based on the content, but his emotions were not obvious to an observer. By the end of the conversation, Bala changed the topic to marriage, and they exchanged their family’s expectations and their own attitudes towards marriage.

In Amrit and Bala’s self-disclosure, a considerable amount of the sharing was about factual information or past experience, which decreased the level of immediacy. Nevertheless, Amrit and Bala also expressed their current perceptions and preferences along with their experiences. In addition, there were a couple minutes in the conversation where they started to
make plans for the weekend together by suggesting places to go and things to do with some mutual friends, which was a brief problem-solving process that took place in real time.

As mentioned above, Amrit brought up some potentially emotional experience during the conversation. According to Amrit’s report in the self-confrontation interview, talking about the unsuccessful job interview made him feel uncomfortable and sad. He was remembering all that had happened in the interview and thought that he could have done better. Moreover, talking about swimming brought up sad memories and negative emotions, as it always did. These reports revealed that Amrit was re-experiencing the emotions “here and now” in the conversation, which was evidence for high immediacy of his self-disclosure. But it is still important to recognize that directed emotional communication was limited in this conversation.

In conclusion, Amrit and Bala disclosed to each other a range of topics about their career and personal life. They seemed to be present and spontaneous in their interactions. They shared emotional content and disclosed experience that indicated great vulnerability. Meanwhile, there was a lack of direct emotional expression or communication in their verbal behaviour.

**Verbal behaviour – conversational responsiveness.** Amrit and Bala were responsive to each other in an accepting and calm manner. They actively listened to each other and displayed constant interest in their interactions. They allowed space for each other to express themselves. Then, they developed the conversation by disclosing about themselves on the same topic or asking questions on a related topic.

Amrit and Bala rarely interrupted each other, therefore one person might continue talking about their experience for a couple of minutes. The person who was listening usually responded with vocal cues or brief acknowledgements such as “mhmm,” “yeah,” “right,” “oh okay,” or “That’s good.” Occasionally, they replied with more specific responses. For example, Amrit
expressed agreement with Bala’s opinions in comparing different cities in Canada. Likewise, when Amrit talked about his struggles in learning to swim, Bala expressed his understanding and empathy by finishing Amrit’s sentence and sharing that he could not swim either. After talking for a couple of minutes, the person who shared about himself often switched the focus of the conversation by asking his friend a question on the same or a different topic to invite self-disclosure.

There were several exceptions of this pattern described above. In those occasions, Amrit and Bala were engaged in more of a back-and-forth discussion, such as when Bala asked Amrit about the overall situation of his job seeking, or when they told each other which universities they attended back in their home country. At one point, Bala initiated the planning for shared activities and suggested that they do something in the weekend together with several mutual friends. To develop a plan, they built on each other’s ideas:

Bala: So, what else, uh, what are your plans for this weekend? Uh, are you planning to, uh, supposed, I think we should plan something for this weekend.
Amrit: Yeah, that’s what I was thinking, yeah. On Saturday we can go somewhere, we can stop at Cypress Mountain I think. Uh, R was telling us?
Bala: Yeah.
Amrit: Because he was asking, he was telling me about two places. I, I forgot what the other.
Bala: Grouse Mountain and, uh, yeah.
Amrit: Oh yeah.
Bala: Cypress Mountain.
Amrit: Cypress Mountain. I, I would, on Saturday I found out there was ice, ski kind of thing. You can rent the equipment for sixteen dollars for two hours and it’s a good, good, good place. And a good thing to do, but I’m not sure if we, let’s see how the plan, if they like this.

Bala: Yeah, I would suggest, like, uh, if we are a group of four to five people we can rent something, uh…

Amrit: Yeah.

Bala: …for uh, Saturday or Sunday.

Amrit: Saturday would be good I think, and then we can get time to rest on Sunday.

Bala: Yeah.

PrtA: And then we can come back all refreshed.

In conclusion, Amrit and Bala responded to each other in a manner that seemed to create a warm and supportive atmosphere. For most of the conversation, their acknowledgement and brief responses encouraged each other to share more about themselves. Moreover, they expressed their understanding of each other and actively cooperated in making plans together.

**Internal experience.** In the self-confrontation interviews, Amrit and Bala’s individual report of their thoughts and feelings supported the observation that they were interested to get to know more about each other. As well, their report provided insights about their positive involvement in the interactions, which was not fully reflected in the observable behaviours.

Amrit stated that he thought their conversation had only lasted for 5-10 minutes, and he still expected to continue on some of the topics they were talking about. For example, he was curious about the Bala’s experience visiting cities that he had not been to. Bala confirmed that
they were both interested in getting to know each other’s past experience studying and working back in their home country as well as travelling after coming to Canada.

Amrit expressed his intention to support Bala. He explained that the motivation for him to share about unsuccessful interviews with Bala was to help Bala be aware of what might come up in the job interviews and avoid the mistakes that he had made. He conveyed care about how much Bala was prepared for one of his interviews and said that he felt anxious for Bala. Bala also expressed a strong desire to help Amrit. He stated that he asked about the details of Amrit’s job search with the purpose of finding out what kind of challenges Amrit might be facing and whether there was something that he could do to help Amrit. Even questions about Amrit’s previous work experience were intended to help understand Amrit’s advantages and disadvantages in getting a job. He stated that he felt optimistic for Amrit about a company that Amrit was waiting to hear back from.

There were other indicators of Bala’s positive feeling towards Amrit and their interactions. Bala expressed excitement to join Amrit and other mutual friends in an up-coming trip. Regarding the topic of marriage, Bala described Amrit as a caring and responsible person. In terms of the sense of mutual understanding, Bala reported how he could relate to Amrit’s feelings about swimming because he also almost drowned when he was a child, and it had been difficult to overcome the fear of water.

In conclusion, both Amrit and Bala described their conversation as nice, and felt glad that they had learned something new about each other. They both articulated care towards each other and their goals to provide practical help for each other in the process of seeking employment. The sense of mutual understanding seemed to be stronger than what was directly expressed in the conversation.
Case 5. Amy and Brian

**Background information.** Amy and Brian were both 22 years old and were born in Canada. The language spoken in the home for them was English. Amy had just graduated from university and Brian was in the second year of his undergraduate program. They became friends through mutual friends when they were in the same high school.

**Overview of the dyad’s interactions.** Amy and Brian had a conversation for 15’37’’, where they both seemed comfortable and content in talking to each other. The topics of their conversation indicated that they were updating each other about what was happening in their lives. Overall, this peer dyad seemed to have interactions characterized by warmth and connection. They invited and engaged in self-disclosure about their recent life events, including more trivial daily events. The sense of familiarity and trust allowed them to be spontaneous. Furthermore, their care about each other made them attentive and thoughtful, which seemed to create a comfortable environment to communicate. Moreover, they relied on each other to process emotions or facilitate decision making in their interaction.

**Nonverbal behaviour.** Amy and Brian both sat comfortably in their chairs, facing each other at an angle. Amy crossed her legs and Brian leaned back in his chair. Throughout the conversation, Brian had a lot of arm movements, such as folding and unfolding his arms, holding or scratching one of his arms with the other hand. However, based on observation and his own report, this was more of his neutral status rather than indications of discomfort or nervousness. Other than this, both Amy and Brian rarely changed their postures during the conversation.

Amy and Brian maintained regular eye contact in their interaction, and they both seemed to be fully engaged in the conversation. They spoke in a casual tone, and gestured naturally with their hands. Their facial expressions remained relaxed for most of the conversation. When one
of them was talking, the other person usually looked at their friend attentively and nodded from
time to time. Occasionally, they responded with smiles or light laughs, which served as
acknowledgements or encouragement to say more. Brian’s report in his self-confrontation
interview explained some of his laughs when he was listening to Amy. He found it amusing that
Amy worried about details such as sunglasses or a hat when she was planning a big trip. “This is
typical Amy.” Brian said. His comment was a little ambiguous, but it seemed to be good-natured
and conveyed his understanding of Amy.

Amy and Brian had couple of short silences when conversation on one specific topic
came to an end. They nodded to each other several times and looked down before they opened a
new topic. According to their reports in the self-confrontation interviews, they did not
experience awkwardness when they stopped talking, aside from being conscious of the research
setting. They did not mind sitting with each other quietly for a moment.

In conclusion, the nonverbal “involvement behaviours” in Amy and Brian’s conversation
were gentle and stable, which seemed to be the default set up for their interaction. They seemed
to be quite at ease in their interaction. Meanwhile, their nonverbal behaviours demonstrated their
full attention to each other.

Verbal behaviour – self-disclosure. Self-disclosure was the major component of the
conversation that Amy and Brian had. They took turns to invite self-disclosure by asking
questions, and shared their own experiences along with their thoughts and feelings around these
experiences.

Amy started their conversation by asking about Brian’s plans for the summer. Brian
talked about a course he took and a film event that he was going to attend. There did not seem to
be much emotions associated with the course. On the other hand, Brian was quite excited about
the film event and stated that he hoped Amy could join him. He expressed disappointment when he found out that Amy would not be able to make it, but immediately suggested an alternative solution for Amy to see his work.

Soon they changed the topic to a big trip that was coming up for Amy in several days. Amy started to talk about what she had done and what she planned to do in preparing for the trip. She also shared her feelings such as her excitement for the trip, her nervousness about forgetting stuff when she was packing, her frustration about the time it took to book everything, and also feeling overwhelmed about dealing with the hassle during the last several days. Amy shared elaborative and detailed information. She seemed to be thinking aloud and spoke whatever came to her mind at the moment. Amy’s self-confrontation interview confirmed this observation. She told the researcher that the following:

When I talk to Brian I feel like my mind is pretty like not, I don’t really filter specifically…when I’m talking I’m pretty fluid, I guess that’s why I go on tangents sometimes, ‘cause I’m just saying whatever, like my mind is going here and then I just talk about that.

When Amy shifted the focus of the conversation back to Brian, Brian talked about his recent life including running into his ex-boyfriend in a store and playing video games with his sisters. He was open and thorough in sharing these experiences. He paraphrased his brief conversation with his ex-boyfriend and described that he was debating whether to send him an email after seeing him. Even though Brian did not name any of his emotions, he looked serious or even a little sad in talking about this. Following that, Brian vividly described his interaction with his sisters and seemed to enjoy telling the entertaining story.
As for the level of immediacy in their self-disclosure, both Amy and Brian seemed to be quite “in the moment” during the conversation. They talked about things that were either ongoing in their lives or had happened very recently, and their feelings were present in their narratives. There were a couple of times that Amy verbalized her internal process immediately in the conversation. For instance, when Brian asked her, “Were you packing this morning?” Amy asked why Brian asked the question. She then answered his question and further shared, “I was like, ‘did you call me and I didn’t answer?’” Another example was when they talked about several mutual friends who Amy might hang out with before she left. Amy began to express that actually she was not equally keen to see all these friends. She paused in the middle of her sentence and said, “I’m like ‘oh, she (one friend she was not keen to see) had better not see this tape!’” And they both laughed.

In conclusion, Amy and Brian’s conversation naturally flowed as they alternated with their self-disclosure. They spontaneously shared with each other about their daily life and expressed or communicated the positive and negative emotions that accompanied these experiences.

**Verbal behaviour – conversational responsiveness.** Amy and Brian seemed to provide an understanding and supportive atmosphere by their responsiveness in verbal behaviours in addition to nonverbal behaviours. Also, they explicitly communicated their care and support for each other.

Amy and Brian did not talk much when they were listening to each other. This was especially the case for Brian. They usually only said “okay” or “um-hmm” to acknowledge and let the other person continue. They also asked follow-up questions, expressed understanding, and finished each other’s sentence from time to time, but all these responses were mostly done in
one short sentence. Despite of the length, their responses seemed to clearly convey interest and empathy.

Throughout Amy’s description of her preparing for the trip, Brian seemed genuinely interested and responded to Amy’s humour with laughs. For example, when Amy stated a plan to “deal with some bank stuff,” she shook her head and smiled, indicating that she did not look forward to this task. Brian smiled too and said, “Oh no…”, expressing that he understood the trouble of banking. Another example was when Brian told Amy that there was another friend who wanted to hang out with her. Amy seemed frustrated with the limited time before her trip. She raised her voice and laughingly said, “Aww, it’s so soon!” Brian repeated, “I know” several times in a comforting tone, which possibly meant that he recognized how busy Amy was and/or it would be fine if she did not have time to see this friend. Moreover, when Amy listed all the things left to do before her trip and ended with “And that’s it,” Brian lightly clapped his hands to express happiness for Amy.

Conversely, when Brian expressed disappointment about Amy not being able to attend the film event with him, Amy apologized and emphasized that she would want to see his work after she came back. When Brian described how both his sisters had to quit when they were playing an online game, Amy inhaled and said, “So you won” in a joyful tone.

Some of Amy and Brian’s responses seemed to imply a sense of mutual understanding because of their previous experience interacting with each other. For instance, they both laughed when Brian asked Amy whether she answered a friend’s phone call. The shared amusement revealed that Amy was reluctant to contact this friend for some reason. Also, once Brian mentioned the name of his ex-boyfriend, Amy looked a little serious and asked, “How was that?”
In reviewing their conversation, Amy told the researcher that she was wondering whether anything upsetting had happened for Brian.

Lastly, Amy and Brian both provided suggestions to each other in the conversation. Brian made a suggestion to help Amy manage her busy schedule and meet one more friend. Since Amy was not sure whether it would work, Brian encouraged her to give it a try and contact that friend. When Brian told Amy about his dilemma in emailing his ex-boyfriend, Amy also encouraged him to take actions by acknowledging his motivation and dispelling his concerns:

Amy: …Like even if you emailed him he doesn’t have to respond, you know what I mean, let’s say he didn’t want to talk to you, it’s not like you’re forcing him.

Brian: Yeah I know.

Amy: Like I don’t know, I feel like if you’re meeting in person it’s more like you’ve been pressured to say something. Well I guess he could always be like, “No everything’s fine,” but…

Brian: Yeah that’s true.

Amy: Uh I feel like an email is pretty like not pressuring or that.

Brian: Yeah, yeah.

Amy: I think it’s nice to be concerned. (Shrugs)

Brian: Hmm.

Amy: So if it bothers you, I don’t think it would be like a poor decision. (Nods)

Brian: (Laughs)

Amy: I don’t know. I don’t wanna make you do things or like oh yeah you should totally do this or not do this.
Brian: But I was planning on doing it anyways but I was just having…not second thoughts but having some doubts about it.

Amy: (Nods)

Just like what Amy was doing here, it was noticeable that both of them seemed to focus on providing a different perspective that could be helpful without being pushy or patronizing. Amy directly addressed this in her self-confrontation interview. She talked about how she was careful about her expressions to let Brian make his own decisions.

In conclusion, Amy and Brian responded to each other with active listening, empathetic and supportive replies, and also tentative suggestions. Their responsiveness encouraged each other’s self-disclosure, and created space for each other to share as well as process their experiences.

**Internal experience.** Amy and Brian reported very similar internal experience during the conversation they had. These reports conveyed their positive perceptions about each other and about their interaction with each other.

First, they both expressed positive feelings about their interaction, stating that they were comfortable and enjoyed talking to each other. Amy explained what she intended by going through all her preparation for the trip with Brian as, “So kind of like ‘oh this is what happened,’ and it’s not like he’s gonna do anything, but just telling him and it makes me feel better.” She described it as “unloading.” Brian also described how he loved sharing with Amy his experience of playing video game with his sisters, saying, “It was quite a story so I was excited to tell her about that.”

Secondly, they both expressed trust in each other as a listener and that they expected to be understood by each other. Amy said, “When I’m talking with Brian I just, I know he won’t think
it’s weird for me to stop in a random place, like he knows my mind I can just say it… I feel like he would understand.” Brian mentioned that he was not censoring his language when he was with Amy, “She’s quite used to me saying all sorts of things.”

Thirdly, they both expressed appreciation for the other person’s suggestions and found it helpful to listen to a different perspective. Amy said, “I thought it was nice of him to suggest ‘cause I wouldn’t have thought about it myself.” Brian said, “I can always count on her for good advice. I feel like she can look at things in a fairly logical way.” Related to this, Brian also expressed his perception of their similarities and his feeling of being validated. Regarding Amy’s response to his plan of emailing his ex-boyfriend, his comments were as follows:

I like her rationality as well. I think she thinks very similar to me… I thought it was just confirmation of my own thought process and what I’m thinking and what I was planning to do… Thankful perhaps for her to say that.

Lastly, they both mentioned how they were conscious not to take up all the time talking about themselves. It went beyond politeness and indicated their interest in each other’s life. At the same time, they both addressed that Brian was more used to be in a listener’s role in their interactions.

In conclusion, Amy and Brian expressed the desire to listen to each other and also the feeling of been heard and understood. They described their positive experience during the conversation of being supported emotionally as well as receiving different perspectives. They seemed to be familiar with this kind of interaction between them. Furthermore, they were able to reflect on it and articulate the patterns.
Case 6. Arena and Beint

**Background information.** Arena was a female undergraduate student and she was 19 years old. Beint was a 21-year-old male undergraduate student attending the same university. They came to Canada 3 years and 2 years ago, respectively, from different countries in Europe. The languages spoken at home for Arena were Russian and Swedish. The language spoken at home for Beint was Norwegian. The two started studying at the university and became friends through a mutual friend who was also an international student.

**Overview of the dyads’ interactions.** Arena and Beint had a conversation for 14’44”, where they both seemed spontaneous and ardent in talking to each other. The content of their conversation was about an issue that had big impacts on their daily life: living with roommates, especially sharing the responsibilities of cleaning their place with roommates. This was not a new topic for them, but their discussion seemed to expand from previous conversations with more details and insights from their experiences. Overall, this peer dyad seemed to have interactions characterized by emotional support and a sense of being allies. They had a focused discussion about their living environment, and connected with each other over exchanging their experiences, actions, frustrations, and desires around this topic. They felt excited as well as reassured to find someone who was in a similar situation. Together, Arena and Beint tried to make sense of their experiences while being conscious about being in a different culture. The disagreements or conflicts they experienced with other young people around them made the two feel closer to each other and helped clarify what they knew about themselves.

**Nonverbal behaviour.** Arena and Beint sat comfortably next to each other. Arena sat mostly facing the camera, with her legs crossed. Beint turned his body left to face Arena. He put his right foot on his left knee, and rest his left arm on the back of the chair.
Both Arena and Beint were energetically engaged in the conversation. They spoke loudly and assertively, and also gestured frequently while they were talking. They both used rich body language and facial expressions. This was especially the case for Arena as she made many small movements around her head, neck, and shoulders while she spoke. Arena and Beint often switched their tones when they were telling the stories of their experience and re-enacting their interactions with their roommates.

Arena and Beint maintained regular eye contact overall. They both tended to initiate more eye contact when they were listening compared to when they were talking. Beint was facing Arena, so he was mostly looking at her when he listened. Arena alternated between looking down and looking at Beint when Beint was speaking, often times fidgeting with her hair or her hands. They both seemed quite attentive when the other was speaking and responded consistently by nodding or other facial expressions. For example, when Beint talked about cleaning his place after a BBQ event with over 25 people, Arena widened her eyes, pursed her lips and then quickly blinked her eyes several times. It seemed that she was trying to convey that she understood how messy it could be. When Beint mentioned how his roommates did not help with the cleaning, Arena frowned and narrowed her eyes, seemed to find the situation confusing or unpleasant. When they were listening with their heads slightly down, sometimes it was discernable that they were pondering upon what their friend was saying.

Even though Arena and Beint were talking about frustrating situations in this conversation, they laughed from time to time and were responsive to each other’s humour. When Beint described a conversation he had with his roommate, he stretched one arm out firmly and raised his voice to say what he wanted to say to his roommate. Arena laughed and tried to
add something because the scenario was familiar for her as well. They ended up laughing together for having almost identical reactions to their roommates.

In conclusion, there were considerable amounts of nonverbal “involvement behaviours” that appeared in the conversation. Arena and Beint’s nonverbal behaviours demonstrated a high level of engagement and eagerness to share with each other their experience and their thoughts or feelings. Their body language was quite expressive during their self-disclosures and both were enthusiastic in responding to each other.

**Verbal behaviour – self-disclosure.** The conversation Arena and Beint had focused on one topic: how to maintain a positive living environment based on their criteria when sharing space with roommates. Their experiences related to this topic and their opinions were alike. Therefore, self-disclosure seemed to serve as the foundation of their interaction and also kept the conversation going.

Beint started the conversation by asking Arena about her roommates. Apparently he already knew that the Arena’s roommates had been bothering her. Arena updated what happened with her roommates recently, which was generally a negative experience, and expressed her desire to live off campus. Beint immediately expressed a similar desire of finding a place to live by himself. Then, he shared how he had found it challenging to deal with his roommates as well.

Arena elaborated on the difficulties in keeping the place tidy and comfortable when living with roommates. She talked about the pressure she felt about cleaning up, the strategies she had tried to urge her roommates to take on responsibilities, and what’s important for her regarding living environment. She also described in detail some of her interactions with her roommates and her internal processes during those interactions:
So once D moved out M was like ‘Oh well maybe we need to clean the living room.’ I’m like, ‘Seriously? You just decided so or you’ve been thinking and now you have come to the conclusion that it’s probably about time?’… And he kind of, you know he preferred to stay quiet and not say anything, especially because my attitude is not so nice now. And I really go like ‘why would I be nice to them’, like ‘he really doesn’t deserve it.’

In return, Beint also described a recurring conversation he had with his roommates. Then, he generalized the situation and shared his feeling that he never had a place which felt like home in the past several years. Arena stated that this was her case as well since she moved to Canada.

This led Arena and Beint’s discussion to contrasting themselves with young people they had met in Canada. Arena described her observations that young people in North America were required to be financially independent quite early and had good work ethics, but they seemed to lack necessary life skills. Beint shared his perspective that leaving their parents’ homes and moving to other countries had made Arena and himself different from people who were new to independent living. The two of them agreed upon the opinion that they were more mature and independent in managing their lives compared to many people at the same age. They noted that they were not expected to start to work yet in the cultures they came from.

Arena and Beint expressed strong emotions in their conversation. When Arena told the stories about her roommates, her description was full of frustration and anger. She also commented in her self-confrontation that “It’s a very emotional issue for me, and since it’s happening right now uh I’m still going through that… I’m still experiencing it and I’m still quite angry.” In the second half of the conversation, she directly communicated her confusion and disappointment about some young adults who she met in Canada. For example, she concluded that these people could be good co-workers but might not be ideal as roommates or friends, and
“That’s disappointing. I had to really kind of come to this conclusion at some point and just like suck it up pretty much, accept it the way it is but it’s, uh it’s sad.” Beint did not name his emotions as much as Arena did, but he also seemed frustrated and annoyed talking about his roommates. He conveyed a sense of sadness when he described not being able to have a home.

The level of immediacy in Arena and Beint’s self-disclosure was high as they seemed very present in their discussion. They built on what each other had said by acknowledging and integrating each other’s perspectives, then initiated further self-disclosure based on that. They seemed to be reflecting on their own experience as the conversation unfolded, and they articulated their new realizations as they connected the dots in their mind.

In conclusion, Arena and Beint self-disclosed to each other the challenges in maintaining a desirable living environment when living with roommates. They shared specific experiences and their feelings and reflections elicited by those experiences. When they linked this topic to their overall experience as international students, they further exchanged their perceptions and emotions about cultural differences, as well as the lack of their sense of belonging. They seemed to be present in their interaction and actively communicated what came to mind as the conversation unfolded.

**Verbal behaviour – conversational responsiveness.** In line with what was described above, both Arena and Beint were quite responsive to each other by acknowledging and agreeing with each other, and expressing their understanding.

They took turns to lead the conversation with self-disclosure, meaning either of them would continue to share about their experience and thoughts for several minutes. During that time, the other person listened and acknowledged with vocal cues such as “yeah,” “right,” or making brief comments. When they switched their roles, the person who started to talk usually
acknowledged what was just said, and connect it to their own experience or thoughts. Taking the second half of the conversation as an example, Beint summarized that living with roommates or living in boarding schools had never meant “having your own home” to him. This reminded Arena of her experience going on exchange in high school and living with host families. She shared her observation that she was more mature than other residents and expressed that she had learned from her parents about what home is and how to maintain it. Beint agreed with Arena’s observation and provided a possible explanation about their differences with other residents. Arena expanded on Beint’s comments to point out the incongruence in young people’s independence in North America (i.e., high financial independence and low life skills independence). Beint supported this opinion by comparing the local youth’s amount of work experience to his work experience.

    Arena and Beint often expressed their agreement and understanding earnestly, using sentences such as “I know, I know,” “I totally understand,” or “Exactly. I so understand you.” From time to time, they finished each other’s sentences or talked over each other because they were keen to express their understanding. The only time they explicitly expressed disagreement was when Arena talked about how people in North America are responsible at work but may not be good friends, and Beint questioned whether that was too much of a generalization and polarizing. He seemed comfortable bringing this up. In response, Arena tried to clarify what she meant with an example.

    In conclusion, Arena and Beint were highly responsive to each other in the conversation. Their enthusiastic and empathetic responses facilitated self-disclosure, and further self-disclosure elicited more resonance in their responses. The content and style of their responsiveness all contributed to a heated discussion with a strong sense of mutual understanding.
**Internal experience.** In the self-confrontation interviews, Arena and Beint’s reports of their thoughts and feelings repeatedly confirmed the sense of mutual understanding between them based on their shared experience.

First, both Arena and Beint expressed positive expectations towards their interaction. Arena described Beint as a good listener, and Beint stated that he believed Arena was open and honest with her thoughts. Also, they both mentioned that they were glad and amused to find out how similar their experiences were. Knowing that their friend was in the same situation facilitated their positive feelings about their interactions. Arena said, “I guess it’s easier to elaborate the conversation um since you already have something in common and you share the same emotional experience.” Moreover, the shared attitude about what a home should be like made her feel that she did not have to explain herself, and Arena described, “I could be completely frank and just let the rest of my feelings out.” Likewise, Beint stated, “It’s easy to talk to her like in the sense that she definitely has had a lot of the same experiences.”

Secondly, they reported how talking to each other about this challenging situation was beneficial to their problem-solving. Arena expressed interest in Beint’s perspective and found it helpful for her own processing regarding her living situation. Beint moved out of campus two months prior to the research interview. Therefore, Arena thought that Beint’s current complaints prevented her from idealizing of an off campus living as the solution to everything. She was also curious to know what Beint would think about the cultural differences she observed. Conversely, Beint appreciated Arena’s suggestion about the way he could bring up the cleaning issue with his roommates and thought it was a good point.

Aside from these, Arena particularly talked about the emotional benefits she felt from their interaction. Feeling being understood not only facilitated her positive involvement in their
interaction, but it also seemed to validate her experience and decrease potential self-doubt about her struggles:

It’s nice to have someone who can understand you and really just on the same page for sure. Makes you feel a little bit better just because you are not alone… It makes me feel better about myself because it’s not really my fault, because there’s someone else who does the same thing and those people just react in the exact same way.

Furthermore, Arena talked about how she identified with Beint and placed herself and Beint together in contrast to their roommates or even other young people in North America. She observed that “He is more like me than people here.” as well as “I’m glad he sees it the same way. It’s probably a European thing.” Beint did not address this as much, but he also commented on their similar standpoint by saying, “It seems like she is come to realize some of the things that I also realize.”

In watching the play-back of their conversation, Arena pointed out how her mood changed during the 15 minutes and shared that talking to Beint made her feel “It’s all fine.” She described that “The weight that I have on my shoulders definitely gets lighter when I talk to people who have the same experience.” Likewise, Beint portrayed their conversation in a positive way. He said, “It was the first time I got to vent that so I got it out pretty nicely I think.” and stated, “We had a lot of fun together.”

In conclusion, both Arena and Beint fully conveyed their perception of how they understood and empathized with each other. They reported positive affective experience about their interaction. Their report indicated that this conversation was encouraging and supportive for them to cope with the difficult situation, both emotionally and also in actual problem solving.
Chapter 4: Instrumental findings

In this chapter, the results of cross-case analysis are reported in an effort to answer the research question: What characterizes the intimate interactions in the conversations that young adults have with their friends? The findings illustrate how the six cases as a whole help understand the intimate interactions in young adults’ peer relationships. They describe what kind of intimate interactions occurred in the young adult peers’ conversations and what kind of issues did they address when these intimate interactions occurred. The commonalities across cases are outlined and the diversity of the cases is considered as well.

Given that I used Prager’s framework (1995) to define intimate interaction and the indicators of it, the report of instrumental findings also follows this structure. First, young adult peer dyads’ non-verbal behaviours in interacting with each other are described. Following non-verbal behaviour, the description of young adults’ self-disclosure forms an important section in the instrumental findings. Themes that emerged in the data are used to organize this section, including the content of self-disclosure, two major types of self-disclosure (event-oriented and emotion-oriented), emotional expression and communication in self-disclosure, the use of humour, and the reciprocity of self-disclosure. The conversational responsiveness in the young adults’ interactions with peers is depicted next from three aspects: the content, style, and timing of the responses. Lastly, the intimate experience reported by the young adults is described through its cognitive and emotional features.

Nonverbal Behaviour

Nonverbal behaviour makes up a crucial part of people’s interactions, especially for the reason that such nonverbal behaviour is frequently not fully in awareness. All participants in the current study seemed to be spontaneous with their nonverbal behaviour for most of the time
during their conversations. Occasionally in the self-confrontation interviews, some of the participants would comment on their nonverbal behaviours that they had not noticed until watching the play-back of the conversation.

The young adult peer dyads in this study sat together in two chairs that were at different angles, which ranged from facing each other to side-by-side. This arrangement seemed to be determined by what their starting position happened to be in the research interview as well as their own preference. In both female-female dyads, one of the participants turned her chair to face her friend more directly during the conversation. All participants seemed to sit in a casual and relaxed manner, and often leaned backward or sideward in their chairs. Leaning forward was rarely observed, and touching was not involved in any of the conversations.

One important function of the nonverbal behaviour in these conversations was to express attention and to encourage each other to continue engaging in the interaction. Regular eye contact, nodding, and smiles were observed in all the cases, which conveyed interest, acknowledgement, or understanding, depending on the context of the interaction. The frequency and the extent of the nonverbal behaviours in expressing attention differed across cases, but it was difficult to decide what it implied about the young adult dyad’s intimate interaction. For example, for Aidan and Brett in Case 3, it was noticeable that the amount of eye contact they had was less than all the other dyads in this study. Nevertheless, they seemed comfortable sitting facing the same direction rather than facing each other. They were paying full attention even when they were talking or listening with their eyes looking down. They turned their heads to look at each other from time to time and responded with light laughs. The amount of Aidan and Brett’s eye contact seemed to be compatible with their communication style, and became the agreed upon default in their interaction with each other.
The overall styles of nonverbal behaviour in the young adults’ communication also varied. Some participants had rich facial expression and animated gestures, while others had little change in their facial expression and only small body or hand movements. The overall style was usually consistent for each individual during the conversation. Similar or matching styles within the peer dyads were observed in some cases. For Ailing and Bisera in Case 1 as well as Arena and Beint in Case 6, both participants in the dyad looked energetic and employed expressive nonverbal behaviours. For Amrit and Bala in Case 4 as well as Amy and Brian in Case 5, both participants in the dyad were mostly sitting calmly and speaking quietly.

In sum, the young adult peers’ nonverbal behaviours in their conversations seemed to be characterized by ease and spontaneity. The nonverbal “including behaviours” that conveyed attention and interest in the interaction were prevalent for these young adult peers. And the uniqueness of using these behaviours in each dyad seemed to reflect the young adults’ communication style and personal preference, both individually and shared by the peer dyad.

**Verbal Behaviour – Self-disclosure**

**Content.** The content of self-disclosure in the peer dyads’ interactions usually consisted of the young adults’ recent life events. Most of the participants were university students, thus, their self-disclosure covered some common aspects of the daily life for this population, including course work in school, part-time jobs, seeking employment after graduation, hobbies, interactions with mutual friends, visiting families, travelling, as well as their living environment, which is often shared with roommates. Additionally, some peer dyads brought up past experience in an effort to get to know each other better or connect with each other over shared memories. Along with their life events, the young adults also shared with their friends their personal preferences, opinions, and values.
**Event oriented and emotion oriented.** Across the six cases, two major categories emerged regarding how the young adults initiated their self-disclosure with their peers. They are event-oriented self-disclosure and emotional-oriented self-disclosure.

Event-oriented self-disclosure means that young adults shared certain experiences with their friends based on the time frame; that is, they talked about what was fresh in their memories or what was approaching according to their schedule. In some cases, the young adult peers seemed to routinely update each other about what was new in their recent life. In other cases, the young adult peers were exchanging their plans for the summer or winter break. Particularly in Case 4, Amrit and Bala shared experience about job interviews because of the forthcoming graduation.

Emotional-oriented self-disclosure means that the young adult shared certain experiences with their friend based on the emotional content. Although the shared experience was also often close in time, it stood out among other incidences because of the emotions that accompanied it. For example, Bisera in Case 1 shared about what others had said about having children or abortion because it was surprising or irritating for her. Also, Bai in Case 2 shared about her driving exam because she was upset and angry about the result. Moreover, the entire conversation between Arena and Beint in Case 6 was around living with roommates as it was an emotionally loaded topic for them.

**Emotional expression and communication.** Overall, the young adults in this study were observed to reveal their emotions or explicitly communicate their emotions in the conversations with their peers. The majority of the emotional content in these conversations was negative emotions, such as frustration, worry, anger, and even sadness and fear. In terms of positive emotions, excitement appeared most frequently in the young adults’ self-disclosures.
For instance, Ailing and Bisera in Case 1 shared excitement about the coats they had ordered, and Amy and Brian in Case 5 exchanged excitement about their upcoming plans for the summer.

The peer dyads rarely addressed the relationship between themselves during the conversation. Correspondingly, none of the emotional content disclosed was directly related to what was happening between the two young adult peers. Once the emotions were disclosed, the dynamic within the dyads might have an impact on how the emotions were experienced. But to start with, these mostly negative emotions had been elicited by the young adults’ individual life experiences or their interactions with other people outside the conversations. Then the interaction with their friends provided a space for them to express, process, and even reconstruct these emotional experiences. Occasionally, the young adult intentionally shared the emotional content with this specific peer because of their shared hobbies or shared opinions, which was prominent in Case 1 and Case 6.

The young adults expressed or communicated their emotions out of a desire to share them with their friends. Some participants reported to the researchers the hope that their friends could understand their feelings, while other participants articulated that talking about the emotional experience helped them to process their feelings or simply “letting it out.” These comments provided insights into the reasons why negative emotions were shared more in the conversations, as they were something that needed to be worked on and coped with. Negative feelings could be quite personal, because negative feelings were revealing about an individual’s value and belief, and they are sometimes associated with failure and weakness. To share them seemed to indicate the young adult peers’ willingness to be vulnerable in front of each other.

**Humour.** Humour was observed in all six cases. Most commonly, the young adults shared an apt comment or funny observation with their friends. It could also be that they
described situations or people in an exaggerated and playful manner. Private jokes appeared in half of the conversations, where the two young adults experienced amusement because of the shared knowledge of other people or their previous experience, including funny comments that they had made before. Good-natured teasing also occurred occasionally in three cases and were received well. There was only one incidence of giggles for no apparent reason, where Ailing and Bisera in Case 1 chuckled together after a moment of silence. The silence and giggles seemed to serve for them as a transition to the next topic.

Most of the time, humour was shared between the two young adult peers, but it was not always the case. There were times when young adults acknowledged their friends’ humour but did not respond with the same level of amusement. Also, Bai in Case 2 and Brett in Case 3 both used a humorous tone to soften a disagreeing statement, and their friends simply responded with clarification. In more extreme scenarios, one person might experience humour when his/her friend shared something that was not intended to be humorous. These scenarios were most obvious in Case 2. Bai seemed to find it amusing that An decided to take a Korean course because of her love of Korean TV drama, while An was amused by the fact that Bai failed her driving exam twice for minor uncontrollable factors. In both scenarios, An and Bai did not join each other in the expression of humour. In fact, they were likely experiencing some emotions quite different from humour.

In the self-confrontation interviews, most of the young adults expressed some perceptions of these humorous interactions. They reported that they wanted to share funny stories with their friends, and they enjoyed relaxed and light-hearted conversation with each other. Aidan in Case 3 told the researcher, “You can only have a serious conversation for so long.” The young adults also seemed to use humour to handle unpleasant topics. For instance, in Case 1, Ailing and
Bisera laughed about other people’s remarks that they strongly disagreed with. Likewise, Arena and Beint in Case 6 used comical tones every now and then in talking about their frustrations with living with roommates. Bai in Case 2 was one of the participants who described a mood change during the conversation. These participants indicated that talking to their friend had made them feel better about the situation they were venting about, and Bai particularly pointed out how joking helped in this process.

**Reciprocity.** In all six cases, both young adult peers engaged in self-disclosure during the conversation, and some of them took turns in leading the conversation with their own stories. Nevertheless, in half of the cases, the interaction was more complementary rather than reciprocal. In these conversations, one of the young adults self-disclosed considerably more than the other, and the other person spent more time listening and responding. In Case 1, Ailing noticed this pattern in her self-confrontation interview, and she told the researcher that it was a coincidence, which implied either of them might take the lead in a random conversation they had. The other two cases where this pattern was observed were both female-male dyads, and the females were the ones who talked more. Arena and Beint in Case 6 did not comment on this pattern when they watched the play back of the conversation, while Amy and Brian in Case 5 both did. Brian stated that he was more comfortable in the listener’s role when he was with friends. Amy also described that the division of speaker’s role and listener’s role was a common scenario between the two of them. Yet Amy still paid attention to the reciprocity in the conversation, and made sure that Brian took some time to talk about himself.

In sum, as a key component of intimate interaction, self-disclosure was indeed found to be a major part of the young adult peers’ conversations. All the peer dyads engaged in reciprocal or complementary style of exchanging self-disclosure about either recent experiences in their
lives or incidents that elicited strong emotions for them. They tended to share with each other about experiences or situations that were challenging for them or that they were excited about. For challenging experiences, it seemed that the young adults were talking to their friends in order to process the negative feelings and better cope with the situation. A sense of humour was naturally woven in all the conversations, which made the interaction more enjoyable and strengthened the bonding when it was shared between peers.

**Verbal Behaviour – Conversational Responsiveness**

**Content.** In responding to each other, the young adults expressed their attention and interest in what was shared by their friends. They expressed understanding and empathy in response to each other’s self-disclosure. They also provided information as well as suggestions in an attempt to facilitate problem solving.

**Attention and interest.** All the young adults conveyed their interest in engaging in the conversation with their peers. They remained attentive and signified their attention to their friends with little exception. In addition to the non-verbal markers of attentiveness identified above, vocal cues such as “um-hmm” or “okay” were used to acknowledge what had been said. Furthermore, the young adults asked questions to invite self-disclosure and seek elaboration or clarification. These questions were also signs of the young adults’ curiosity and interest in the topics.

**Understanding and empathy.** Aside from mere attention or acknowledgement, the young adults often responded to their friends using phrases such as “exactly,” “I know,” “of course,” “I see what you mean,” “I totally understand,” or sometimes a sentence that echoed their friends’ perception or opinion. Facial expression and humour might appear alone or along with these words to form understanding or empathetic responses. For instance, Ailing in Case 1
responded to Bisera’s stories with surprised facial expressions and laughs, which resonated with Bisera’s feelings in sharing these stories.

In responding to their peers’ exciting experiences, the young adults expressed their understanding by sharing the excitement. When their peers disclosed experiences that provoked negative emotions or issues that they were dealing with, the young adults often tried to convey empathy and support. There seemed to be several ways to express empathy. The young adults might respond in a caring and comforting manner, or they might give agreeing and confirming responses. Aside from these, they might also share a piece of similar experience to emphasize the bonding and togetherness.

An illustration of a comforting response was in Case 3. By the end of the conversation, Brett stated that he did not even know whether he would come back to continue school next year. Aidan understood that Brett was referring to the expectations that his parents set for him and the consequences of not meeting the expectations. He attempted to appease Brett’s worries and cheer him up:

If you don't get the eighty-five?... You know your parents. You know that’s just like they want you to try so putting up some unreachable threat.

In contrast, two examples from Case 1 demonstrated that Ailing was responding to Bisera’s frustration by confirming or justifying her feelings. When Bisera described that a friend asked her, “How can you be a scientist and not like babies?”, Ailing laughed together with Bisera and said, “Wow, I don’t quite understand the logic between being a scientist and liking babies.” When Bisera complained about how unconvincing a person’s speech was in the anti-abortion event, she concluded, “When educated people say things like that it blows my mind.” Ailing replied, “Well some of them are just crazies so…” Rather than helping Bisera dispel her
negative emotions, Ailing joined Bisera in her disagreement or disapproval of other people, and supported Bisera by standing on the same side with her.

In regard to sharing one’s own experience that was similar to what his/her friend had just shared, there were examples in Case 4 and Case 6. In response to Amrit’s sharing about how he had struggled to learn swimming, Bala stated that he could not swim either. After Beint talked about how he had been living in boarding school or studying abroad so he did not have a place that felt like home, Arena said:

It’s not. No, I know. I totally, I hear you, I totally get this. Since I moved to Canada I have always had roommates, like I’ve never had an entire place for myself. Like at first I lived in host family, and later I tried about four different host families, and then I went on exchange so many times during high school...

She responded to Beint by listing her own experience after moving to Canada, which seemed to support her statement, “I totally get this.”

**Information and suggestions.** Another type of content commonly observed in the young adults’ responses to their peers was providing information or providing suggestions and advice. In some cases, young adults provided information upon their friends’ request because of their knowledge or experience on a certain topic. For example, in Case 2, Bai was telling An about the different types of driving licences given that she had already taken the exam. And in Case 3, Aidan was explaining to Brett about the political atmosphere and lifestyle in an adjacent city because he grew up there. In other cases, young adults volunteered to provide information that they thought would be helpful in response to their friends’ concerns. For instance, in Case 4, Amrit provided information about interviews for certain companies so that Bala could be more
prepared for his own interview. And in Case 5, Brian reminded Amy of a friend’s work schedule so that Amy might be able to meet this friend before she left for her trip.

Furthermore, the young adults might respond with suggestions or advice to help their peers solve a problem or improve the situation. The specific way that it was accomplished differed from case to case though. It was described in Case 2 that An and Bai brought up suggestions in a straightforward manner, usually starting with “you can,” “you should,” or “why don’t you.” Arena in Case 6 seemed more tactful in giving suggestions. She asked Beint questions such as “Have you tried saying this to your roommates?” and also described what she had done or said with her own roommates. What she said implied that Beint could potentially do these in attempt to handle the challenges. Brian, in Case 5, was even more gentle in giving suggestions. He did it by providing information and reminding Amy of other possibilities in the situation. When Amy seemed frustrated with the limited time to see a friend before her trip, Brian told her, “She (the friend Amy wanted to see) is working on campus so she said that you can, I guess you could call her or text her, and then she could pop up for lunch and see you for a bit.” Amy considered this plan but she was wondering whether this would work:

Amy: Hmm is she working today?
Brian: Um.
Amy: Interesting. But I guess she would be done lunch by the time we’re done here.
Brian: She said she can take her lunch whenever.
Amy: I know, but I assume she’s like eating lunch now, you know what I mean?
Brian: (Shrugs and smiles) She might be, she might not. I don’t know.
Amy: (Smiles) I’m pretty sure she’s already had lunch by now.
Brian: (Shrugs and smiles) Mmm…
Amy: (Shrugs) We can text her after…

(Both nod)

In this scenario, Brian encouraged Amy to take actions. His replies reminded Amy that the situation Amy was worried about might not be true until she actually contacted this friend and found out. Eventually Amy accepted Brian’s suggestion.

**Style.** Prager’s theory (1995) on intimacy described the style of responsiveness as enthusiastic and willing. The young adults in the current study all responded to their peers willingly, and there was no obvious evidence where any participant was distracted, impatient, or actively expressing lack of interest in the topics. Meanwhile, in line with the variety of styles in nonverbal behaviours, some participants’ responses were more keen or playful, while others’ responses were more composed or thoughtful. It seemed that it was not enough to form any assertion on the characteristics of young adults’ responsiveness simply based on the criteria of enthusiasm.

It is worth noting that, the peer dyad in Case 2 showed a distinctive style in terms of responsiveness, as there seemed to be a sense of mismatch in the way the two young adult peers responded to each other. For example, when Bai gave an angry account about how she failed the driving exam due to another driver who shared the road, An started to ask follow-up questions about the details of this incident. An’s response indicated curiosity about Bai’s experience, but somewhat avoided addressing Bai’s emotions. Focusing on the factual information not only neglected Bai’s strong feelings about what happened, but also implied that An could be doubtful about Bai’s perspective and was trying to verify it. Another segment of their conversation is included here. They were discussing An’s worries in finding new housing:

An: I worry about housing right now, just like looking for a house.
Bai: Housing, there’s um, there’s you know where N stays, there’s like…

An: (Interrupts) That’s really expensive, right?

Bai: Yeah but there’s a two bedroom and one living room and one kitchen.

An: How much is that?

Bai: Um two thousand one hundred.

An: That’s still expensive.

Bai: Yeah but you can find like, if you can find like two other girls to live with you and…

An: I don’t wanna live with so many people and I don’t want someone to live in the living room, I want the living room to just be space where we can just hang out.

Bai: But his house is really nice though.

An: Yeah, and I saw this place yesterday, no the day before…

It was observed that Bai was providing helpful information to An. However, she was not very aware of An’s preference, whereas An seemed to be skeptical about Bai’s suggestion from the very beginning. Soon, they both appeared a little defensive and responded to each other using “yes…but…” sentences. Case 2 was the only case in this study where the young adult peers’ responses demonstrated a lack of cooperation.

**Timing.** In the theoretical framework of intimate interactions, Prager (1995) stated that the appropriate timing of responses depended on the content. Based on the young adults’ conversations with their peers in the current study, the observed timing of the responses seemed to have more to do with personal preference rather than the content. This is similar to what was described in the previous section on the style of responsiveness. Overall, there were two major types of patterns in terms of the responses’ timing.
Some peer dyads were accustomed to interrupting each other by finishing each other’s sentences, talking over each other, or asking follow-up questions. The young adults who showed this pattern in their conversations all seemed comfortable with this pattern of interaction, and had no negative feelings associated with it. In fact, it often indicated that the young adult peers were spontaneous and able to say whatever came to mind at the moment, or they were eager to respond to certain content. The potential downside of doing this was only observed in Case 2. It seemed that An and Bai tended to respond to each other very promptly with follow-up questions. At times they started to ask questions before the other person could fully express herself. This prolonged their process of clarifying the information and understanding each other.

In contrast, some peer dyads rarely interrupted each other. They always waited for the other person to finish speaking or pause naturally, or even until the other person invited them to speak. This pattern was noticeable for Amrit and Bala in Case 4 as well as Amy and Brian in Case 5. Both dyads seemed to prioritize listening and be more laid back in the pace of carrying on the conversation. It is worth mentioning that, while these participants were not giving as much verbal response, their nonverbal attention and signs of acknowledgement were regular and consistent.

In sum, the young adults’ responses conveyed their attention and interest in engaging in the conversations. They commonly expressed understanding to each other and were especially responsive towards their friends’ negative emotions. Their empathy was reflected in comforting replies, acknowledgment, and validating, and also sharing similar experiences. Providing information and providing suggestions in their responses revealed the young adults’ readiness in helping or supporting each other.
**Internal Experience**

In the confidential self-confrontation interviews, the young adults watched the play-back of the conversation they had just engaged in with their peers individually, and reported to the researchers their thoughts and feelings during the conversation. Almost all the participants explicitly reported positive feelings about their interactions with peers. They stated that they felt comfortable and relaxed talking to each other.

Although the young adults commonly shared negative emotions in their conversations, and sometimes engaged in problem solving with their friends, most participants did not seem to enter the conversation with the intention of getting any practical results. Four participants mentioned how they were sharing their experience without expecting any specific responses or solutions, and it was nice for them to “unload” their feelings or “let it out.” By sharing with their peers, laughing about it, and discussing potential ways to deal with the issues, two participants who shared stressful or frustrating experiences noticed a shift of their mood during the conversations. At the end of the conversations, they felt that the challenges were not as overwhelming and they became more optimistic in handling them.

Aside from the interaction process, the young adults also specified positive feelings about their peers and themselves, which enabled them to be involved further in the interaction. Some participants described their friends as good listeners, and more participants expressed interest in listening to their friends’ stories or opinions. More than one participant reported that they spoke whatever was on their mind with no censorship because they felt they were heard and accepted. Moreover, Arena in Case 6 stated that her feelings were validated so that she knew that she was not alone and it was not her fault to feel that way. In half of the cases, the young adults expressed their desire to help their peers in their interaction. And in the majority of the cases, the
Many of the young adults emphasized the positive feelings manifested by the sense of mutual understanding. They perceived the conversation as easy, enjoyable, and constructive, for the reason that they could understand each other well. Some participants described how they and their friends were “on the same page” because of shared experience, shared knowledge, or shared values. In Case 1 and Case 6, the mutual understanding was depicted as “being on my side.” In this scenario, the young adults were often talking about their disagreement or conflictual interaction with some other people and feeling frustrated about it. They perceived that their friends agreed with them in criticizing or complaining about those people, and the two of them bonded over the common beliefs. In two such cases in this study, the young adult peers’ bond went beyond common opinions. The participants described how they and their friends identified with each other in certain aspects. They seemed to adopt this shared identity, and differentiated “us” from “them” when discussing their experience in these aspects.

In sum, the young adult peers reported interest in getting to know more about each other as well as trust and appreciation of each other. The open and supportive atmosphere in their conversations allowed them to let out their emotions and possibly obtain helpful information. The young adult peers were motivated to support each other, and some of them felt increasing acceptance towards themselves. They enjoyed the interaction, and the perception of mutual understanding, if any, seemed to deepen the positive experience and even create a sense of belonging.
Conclusion

The young adult peers seemed to be relaxed and spontaneous during the conversations they had with each other. They conveyed their attention and interest using both nonverbal behaviours and verbal cues. They shared with each other recent life events or plans for the near future, as well as experiences that elicited strong emotions for them. They were inclined to share content that related to negative emotions. In response to such self-disclosure, the young adult peers acknowledged each other’s experience and validated each other’s feelings, and sometimes expressed care and empathy. They also responded by relating to their own experience, or providing information and suggestions. The young adult peers reported positive mood as well as a sense of mutual understanding in having conversations with each other. Based on their reports, these interactions made them feel emotionally supported and also facilitated individual problem solving. The use of humour and distinct communication styles for each peer dyad were also observed in the young adults’ conversations.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary of the Inquiry

This study conducted an in-depth analysis of six dyadic conversations between young adult peers with the purpose of exploring and describing the characteristics of the intimate interaction in the young adult peer relationships. These data were part of a larger dataset from a previous research study. In the original study, each young adult peer dyad engaged in a self-directed 15-minute conversation without researchers present. Following the conversation, the participants reviewed the video-tape of the conversation individually and reported to researchers their thoughts and feelings during the conversation. For the six cases selected from the original study, the conversations were coded based on participants’ verbal and nonverbal behaviours, as well as their reported internal processes. The manifestation of intimacy within each dyad was presented in the intrinsic findings, and the synthesis of all six cases were presented in the instrumental findings. The main characteristics identified in the young adult peers’ intimate interactions included: (a) expression of attention and interest using both nonverbal behaviour and verbal cues; (b) self-disclosures either prioritizing recent life events or focusing on emotional events, and the tendency to share challenging experiences; (c) responses containing validation, comfort, understanding, and also information or suggestions; (d) positive internal experiences characterized by mutual support and understanding; and (e) reports of the emotional and instrumental value of the interactions.

This study extended the research on young adults’ intimate interactions in friendships in several aspects. In contrast to many of the previous studies that used self-report instruments or collected data from only one individual in the peer relationship, this study collected data regarding observational behaviour as well as internal processes accompanying the behaviour.
from both participants in the peer dyads. The qualitative content analysis did not evaluate the degree of intimacy in each of the cases but aimed at describing what constitutes intimate interactions and what issues the young adult peers address through these intimate interactions.

**The Context of the Findings**

Before further discussion, here is a brief review of the previous study’s methodology and the criteria for selecting cases for the current study. The data were collected using the action-project method (Young, Valach, & Domene, 2005). From the perspective of this method, the original study understood and studied the transition to adulthood through the jointly-constructed projects and joint actions between peers. The current study only selected cases that had *maintaining friendship* identified as the peer dyad’s joint project, because I expected intimate interactions to occur in these conversations. Consequently, the data I used to answer my research question in this study were not completely random conversations between young adult peers. These were conversations from which researchers discovered that the young adult peers had a joint goal of maintaining their established friendship. The young adults also confirmed the researchers’ description in their feedback sessions. It is important to highlight that these specific conversations were appropriate to explore the characteristics of intimate interaction, and therefore provided extra support to the findings from these data.

**Contributions to the Literature**

**Strategies of responses to peers’ self-disclosure.** One salient feature of the young adults’ conversations was that they were inclined to share concerns, challenges, and incidents that elicited negative emotions for them. There were also commonalities in the young adults’ responses to these disclosures, which echoed the findings of a previous study on young adults’ discussions of dating relationship problems (Morgan & Korobov, 2012). In that study college
students were interviewed about their conversations with their friends about romantic relationship problems, and five common responses were identified: relating the issue to one’s own experience, providing validation and encouragement, joking about the problem, offering advice, and providing concrete instrumental support. In the six cases of the current study, romantic relationships were only indirectly mentioned, and the young adults did not engage in discussions about romantic relationship problems. However, the young adults used similar strategies in response to the problems their friends disclosed in other aspects of their lives. All five themes found in the previous study were observed in their conversations.

**The two aspects of the intimate experience.** Regarding the internal process during the conversation, a sense of mutual understanding seemed to be a common theme in the young adults’ reports. Based on Prager’s (1995) theoretical framework of intimacy, the sense of mutual understanding belongs to the cognitive aspect of intimate experience, while the affective aspect refers to positive involvement in, interest in, or feelings about oneself, the interaction, and the partner. Nevertheless, I observed how these two aspects were intertwined with each other in the data, and how often the sense of understanding was related to affective experience. Notably, in a longitudinal study on adolescent peer relationship, McNelles and Connolly (1999) defined the affective dimension of intimacy as shared affective experience. In the current study, the young adults not only acknowledged the emotions conveyed by their peers, but also engaged in a similar emotional process at times. They shared their friends’ surprise about updates from their mutual friends’, shared their friends’ frustration because they had similar experiences, and in some scenarios, felt excited or anxious for their friends. Humour was also an area where the cognitive and affective aspects overlapped. When the humour was shared between the two
friends, being able to laugh together produced positive feelings and created moments of connection.

**Intimacy expectations.** In regard to the link between intimate behaviour and intimate experience, the intimate interactions observed between young adult peers fit well with the description of intimacy as an interpersonal process (Reis, 2007; Reis & Shaver, 1988). In all six cases in the current study, the young adult peers initiated self-disclosure with personal and emotional content, and responded with attention and understanding, which encouraged more self-disclosure. The alternation of self-disclosures and responses contributed to the shape and flow of the conversations. According to Reis and Shaver, the self-discloser and the listener/responder usually switch roles back and forth in a conversation. Their experience in one role is likely to affect their willingness to disclose or respond in the other role. The self-disclosure indicates trust, and the responsiveness generates feelings of validation. The person who was previously in the listener’s role may open up at a similar level to what he/she heard, and the person who was previously in the discloser’s role would probably provide a similar level of receptiveness and support when he/she listens. The young adults’ conversations in the current study confirmed this reciprocity in the dynamic of intimate behaviours. Additionally, they illustrated the interdependency between the individual’s behaviours and feelings in intimate interactions.

Furthermore, I noticed that the participants’ reports on intimate experience were oftentimes not elicited by the intimate behaviour that had just occurred in the videotaped conversation. Instead, these reports were based on their knowledge of previous interactions with this peer. The participants in this study often reported their internal process as: “I knew she would understand me,” “I knew he would listen,” or “I knew she would be on my side.”
Knowing that they could rely on their friends seemed to be a major source of intimate experience for the young adults. These beliefs motivated their self-disclosure, and their peers’ reactions confirmed their expectations. Research in the area of intimacy expectations has shown that, the expectation of intimacy was found to be created when people experience patterns of relating with their peers. Patterns regarding self-disclosure, emotional support, and loyalty were considered to be central to intimacy expectations, while patterns related to advice, borrowing things, and empathy were considered peripheral (Elkins & Peterson, 1993; Fehr, 2004; Wiseman, 1986).

In line with the concept of intimacy expectations discussed above, another study concluded that individuals trust their friends to the degree that their friends are committed to the friendship, based on their own perceptions (Wieselquist, 2007). Highlighting the subjective perceptions of participants, however, raises the question of how accurate individuals’ perceptions actually are. In a study on young adults’ cross-sex friendship (Monsour, Betty, & Kurzweil, 1993), the perceived agreement and understanding about intimacy in the relationship and the importance of friendship were significantly greater than the actual agreement and understanding. Understandably, individuals used their own attitudes as a basis for predicting their friends’ attitudes. In the current study, data collected in the individual self-confrontation interviews provided helpful information about the agreement between the two young adult peers in perceiving their interaction or their friendship. For the six peer dyads included in the current study, I did not observe any obvious mismatch or disagreement between the two peers’ perceptions of their interactions or their commitment to their relationship.

**Individual differences in intimate interaction.** Despite of all the commonalities discussed above, the process and experience of intimacy in peer relationship did not seem to be homogeneous and it would be helpful to expand the discussion on individual differences.
Gender difference in experiencing and expressing intimacy has been frequently addressed in the literature. Research on young adult peer relationships indicates the significance of sharing activities in contributing to male youth’s feelings of closeness (Camarena et al., 1990; McNelles & Connolly, 1999), the high willingness to disclose unflattering content about oneself to female friends (Dolgin & Minowa, 1997), and greater friendship competition in male-male friend dyads (McGuire & Leaper, 2016; Singleton Jr. & Vacca, 2007). Nevertheless, I was not able to make any inferences about gender difference based on the case studies. For the three gender groups (female-female, male-male, female-male), the cross-group differences did not differ substantially from within group differences, and characteristics of intimate interactions were highly related to the uniqueness of each case.

The possible role of cultural factors was more evident in the current study compared to gender differences. A previous study compared friendships of Indonesian and American youth and found similarities across many dimensions. However, one of the differences was that the friendships of Indonesian youth seemed to be more centred on providing instrumental aid for one another (French, Pidada, & Victor, 2012). In line with this research, the current study showed that providing help and advice was prominent in the behaviours and internal processes of dyads who were from South or Southeast Asia.

**Dyadic dynamics in intimate interaction.** Aside from individual variables, each friend dyad in this study seemed to reveal their own style. The most discernible dyadic characteristic was the matching in their communication style, such as the frequency and the range of non-verbal behaviours, the volume of their voice and laugh, and the tendency to interrupt each other or finish each other’s sentences. It seemed that some dyads were quiet and thoughtful, while others were active and playful. When I reflected on the coding process, it occurred to me that, if
we were to assess the intimacy in peer relationships, it would be more meaningful to observe how much the peers’ verbal or non-verbal behaviours conform to each other rather than assessing the amount of certain behaviours or the degree of enthusiasm based on universal criteria.

There can be a range of factors contributing to the differences in communication styles and the matching of communication styles within peer dyads. For example, previous studies showed that not everyone desires the same level of intimate interaction. People who have stronger motivation in pursuing intimacy goals engage in intimate interaction more frequently, and exchange higher levels of social support and self-disclosure (Sanderson, Rahm, Beigbeder, 2005). Another study explored the individual’s role in college-age same-sex friend dyads where each dyad was either very similar or very different in regard to extraversion-introversion. Friends who were similar on this spectrum seemed to reinforce each other’s similar dispositions (Nelson, Thorne, & Shapiro, 2011). Aside from personality factors, university students were found to be attracted to peers who had similar social skills in expressing and managing emotional states (Burleson & Samter, 1996). Therefore, for different peer dyads, different interactions may engender similar intimate experience or similar level of satisfaction of the peer relationship.

It is worth noting that peers do not always have to be similar to be compatible. In Nelson, Thorne, and Shapiro’s (2011) study, friends with different personalities showed patterns of accommodation and complementary reinforcement, and individuals who were extroverted were found to be in the role of moving the conversation along. Similar patterns were observed in a couple of the conversations in the current study. One participant seemed to be taking on more responsibility for coming up with new topics or deciding the timing of changing topics.

In relation to these patterns in young adult peers’ observable behaviours, some of the young adults expressed perceptions of their self-concept by assimilating with their friends or
contrasting with their friends. In two cases in the current study, the young adults had a strong inclination to ally with their friends. They expressed “this is who I am” through “this is who we are.” The participants’ comments in two other cases were more gentle and neutral. They addressed the similarities they perceived between themselves and their friends, and also mentioned some individual characteristics for each of them. The way it was stated expressed a sense of friendliness and knowing, such as “this is who I know he/she is.” In only one case, one participant described the difference between her and her friend in a slightly complaining tone, which seemed to imply her dissatisfaction with their interaction.

**Implications for Further Research**

This study was based on Prager’s (1995) conceptualization of intimacy, and the findings provided evidence to support Prager’s theoretical framework. Through examining intimacy in action, this study’s most important implication for future research is the complexity of the concept of intimacy. Intimate interaction is an interpersonal process that takes place in a specific interpersonal context, which includes both partners in the interaction. Intimacy interaction contains intimate behaviour and intimate experience, and it is necessary to include both in studying intimacy.

A key contribution this study has made is that it clearly defined intimate behaviour and intimate experience, and identified them separately in the data. As stated in the Introduction, many previous studies had not included both components or had not differentiated them from each other. Given the individual differences discussed in this section, both components are essential in exploring intimate interaction between young adult peers. On the one hand, the researchers as outside observers are not always able to decide or compare the degree of intimacy based on observable indicators only. We would not fully understand the intimacy in a particular
friendship without accessing the perceptions of the young adults who are involved in it. On the other hand, if researchers only gathered information about the subjective perceptions of intimacy in peer relationship, we would not be able to recognize the range and variety of behaviours that generate similar intimate experiences. The information from both sources is complementary to each other in creating a complete picture of the peers’ intimate interactions.

Related to the topic of individual differences, it was also notable that the intimate interactions across cases shared common factors yet showed different emphases, which were related to individual understanding and beliefs about what it means to be an intimate friend. Some of the young adults naturally prioritized emotional support, and some of them were trying their best to provide concrete advice or help. Therefore, if one person in the friend dyad valued listening and understanding, while the other focused on helping his/her friend with problem solving, they might end up having an unequal intimate experience. As mentioned in the procedure of selecting cases from the primary study, the peer dyads in the current study were all the ones whose joint friendship project was described as maintaining friendship, and the ones having negotiating friendship as their joint friendship project were not selected. This might be part of the reason why there was no obvious unequal intimate experience identified in this study. This line of research can be extended with peer dyads who are negotiating their friendship to better understand the reciprocity of intimate experience.

In terms of methodology, the current study used data collected with the action-project method, and coded the data with the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF) (Coan & Gottman, 2007). The experiment of combining the two has provided new possibilities in the area of studying intimacy as well as the young adult population. Based on the data analysis in the current study, it would be informative and appropriate to use similar procedures in the effort to
understand intimate interactions in other types of relationships or to study other aspects of young adults’ peer relationship. Meanwhile, I encountered several challenges in the use of SPAFF. For example, the number of codes for positive emotions seemed to be limited to code the conversations between young adult peers. Additionally, I found it difficult to capture the negative emotions experienced in the conversation but not directed to the partner in communication, such as participants’ anger or disgust towards other people in their stories. I adapted the SPAFF by using the 18 codes that code the latent psychological constructs and also took detailed notes about the indicators for each of the codes. The indicators of each of the emotions were proved helpful or even necessary in describing the intimate interactions. Further exploration is needed to examine and improve the coding system in order to code intimate interactions in future research.

In addition, the current study demonstrated the role of intimate friends in offering emotional support. At the same time, it raised questions regarding what other sources of emotional support might be for young adults apart from their relationship with peers. Also, when the young adults provided background information about their friendships, they often reported the tendency to stay connected using social network services such as Facebook. It might be a future research direction to explore the difference, if any, between the face-to-face interactions and interactions using text messages or audio messages.

**Implications for Practice**

The conversations that young adult peers had in this study revealed the significance of friendship in supporting young adults to problem solve as well as cope with negative emotions. Intimate friendship seemed to consist of a trusting relationship where the young adults could unload their negative emotions and obtain the feeling of being validated and understood.
Alternatively, sharing positive experiences with each other could potentially expand positive emotions and create a sense of connection. In all six cases, the young adults reported enjoyment, gratification, and even shifts away from negative emotions during the conversations which lasted for only 15 minutes. Therefore, the implication for counsellors or youth workers was how important and meaningful it is to encourage young adults to build stable peer relationships and exchange emotional support.

Several peer dyads in this study seemed to experience mutual understanding and support because of their shared experience or similar situation. For example, Aidan and Brett in Case 3 had the same major but Aidan was two years ahead of Brett. Amrit and Bala in Case 4 were both international graduate students who faced the school-to-work transition in Canada. Also, Arena and Beint in Case 6 were international students who struggled with living with roommates and experienced a certain degree of cultural shock in their respective situations. The way these peer dyads connected with each other implied the value of providing support networks for individuals who are experiencing similar circumstances. Particularly for post-secondary institutions, support groups or social events for freshmen, international students, or students from different cohorts of the same department may foster peer communication that normalizes challenges and assists with adjustment.

**Limitations of the Study**

The design of this research study also has its limitations. The intention of this study was not to generalize the findings to the general population. In addition, I would not be able to make any conclusions about the gender or cultural compositions of the dyads based on six cases. The descriptive nature of the study did not allow me to assess young adult peers’ level of intimacy or examine the relations between intimate peer relationship and the young adults’ well-being.
The majority of the young adults in this study were university students, which in some way limited the diversity of their life environment and possibly the characteristics of their intimate interaction in friendship. The peer relationships observed were mostly established in the context of secondary or post-secondary education, and so were the topics in the participants’ conversations. We did not obtain much knowledge about the intimate interaction for other young adults who are in very different life contexts.

There were additional important issues for young adults that came up in the peers’ conversations in the original study. Nevertheless, those conversations were not included in the current study due to the limit of the scope and the criteria of selecting cases. While the current study has covered many relevant issues experienced by young adults in the context of peer relationships, it has not covered all of the critical issues that emerge during the transition to adulthood, such as career exploration, becoming independent from their families of origin, and relationships with romantic partners.
References


Seiffge-Krenke, I. (2007). Changes in close relationships during the transition to adulthood and


## Appendix A: Sample Coding

PrtA: Participant A; PrtB: Participant B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Indicators - A</th>
<th>Affect - A</th>
<th>Indicators - B</th>
<th>Affect - B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PrtB: I got a new bag...</td>
<td>Bends over to put her juice box on the floor</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Raises her chin and looks at PrtA; Self-disclosure</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtA: Yeah, me too.</td>
<td>See above</td>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>See above</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtB: …for the first time since I quit my old job...</td>
<td>Turns her head to look at PrtB while bending over to put her juice box on the floor</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Looks at PrtA then looks down and nods; Continues her own statement; Referencing time and event indicates knowledge of each other</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtA: Oh... Wow, it’s been that long?</td>
<td>Sits up, looks at PrtB and gasps; then looks down at the snack in her hand and looks at PrtB alternatively; Expresses surprise</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Looks at PrtA</td>
<td>Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtB: That was the first purse since...</td>
<td>Looks at PrtB and tilts her head</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Looks up (seems to be recalling the time)</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtA: No... No!</td>
<td>See above; Expresses disbelief</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>See above</td>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtB: (Talking over each other) …since…actually, actually Georgia number four. (laughs)</td>
<td>Looks at PrtB and stops her hand movements</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Slightly gestures (seems to acknowledge PrtA’s doubt); then looks at PrtA; gestures (“No. 4”) and smiles; Continues her own statement; “Wit and silliness” (humour about the number of bags she has from this brand)</td>
<td>Enthusiasm – Humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtA: Of course. You bought that one after you quit.</td>
<td>Slightly smiles; points to PrtB’s bag on the floor and then looks at PrtB; Expresses understanding; Indicates knowledge of PrtB</td>
<td>Validation – Interest</td>
<td>Is about to say something but gets interrupted; Slightly turns right to looks at the bag PrtA points at</td>
<td>Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtB: I know, but it’s like a school bag, it's not a purse.</td>
<td>Looks down as she was opening a snack</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Looks at PrtA; then looks at the bag and points at the bag; Clarifies; Expresses perception</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>Indicators - A</td>
<td>Affect - A</td>
<td>Indicators - B</td>
<td>Affect - B</td>
</tr>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>PrtA: Oh okay.</td>
<td>Slightly nods; Expresses realization</td>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>Still looks at the bag and mumbles</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtB: You can’t pull it off as a purse, I mean it’s huge...</td>
<td>Looks down as she was opening a snack</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Looks down at the bag while talking; Elaborates</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtA: It’s huge, and it’s like...</td>
<td>See above; Slightly smiles; Repeats; Agrees</td>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>Looks down at the bag</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtB: (Talking over each other) Um which is why I bought Georgia number four...</td>
<td>Looks at PrtB and smiles</td>
<td>Validation</td>
<td>Turns back and looks at PrtA then looks up; Continues her own statement; Elaborates; Seems interested/eager to talk about her new bag</td>
<td>Interest/Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtA: (Interrupts) What colour, what colour, what colour?</td>
<td>Looks down as she was opening a snack; Conveys interest in the topic by repeating her question</td>
<td>Interest/Enthusiasm</td>
<td>Looks at PrtA; Stops what she was saying because of PrtA’s question</td>
<td>Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PrtB: It’s black.</td>
<td>Adjusts her chair and turns to directly face PrtB; Expresses interest</td>
<td>Interest</td>
<td>Tilts her head; Answers question; Provides information</td>
<td>Interest/Enthusiasm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>